

Six Hours, 1

Matthew 27:33-44; Mark 15:22-32;
 Luke 23:33-43; John 19:17-27

“When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left” (Luke 23:33).

Six hours! Salvation . . . life . . . hope . . . heaven! Jesus was on the cross for six hours (Mark 15:25-37). The third hour until the ninth hour (Jewish time) is equivalent to 9:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. These six hours can be equally divided. God divided them. God sent utter darkness from the sixth to the ninth hours (Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44). Jesus died at the ninth hour.

The death of Jesus is the most famous death in history. It is all that Christianity has, wants, or needs. Paul wrote, “For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2). This is the heart of everything that Paul knew and everything that he preached (1 Corinthians 1:17-25).

DETAILS NOT TOLD

We know so little! Details are few. John was the only apostle to witness the crucifixion. Luke (the historian)

reduced the cross to one short sentence in one verse: "There they crucified Him" (Luke 23:33b). We know more about His burial than His crucifixion. We have more questions than answers.

We do not know the shape of the cross. The "X"-shaped cross is out of the question. There is also the Tau cross, which looks like our capital "T." Since Pilate had a sign placed above Jesus' head, this, too, is eliminated. The Latin cross, shaped like a plus sign, is probably what was used. It is the universal cross that has been widely accepted and placed in art, jewelry, and architecture. Anecdotaly, the plus sign is called "the sign of the cross."

Pilate wrote a sign and placed it above Jesus on the cross (Matthew 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19). Each account of it is different, but they all say the same thing. The writers were not interested in the exact words, but in the message that was given through them.

How was Jesus nailed to the cross? We do not know. We know the day Jesus was resurrected: the first day, Sunday (Matthew 28:1-7; Mark 16:2-9; Luke 24:1-7; John 20:1-10). There is no argument here. The early church assembled on that same day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2).

However, the day of the crucifixion is not named specifically. To find that day, we must count backwards. Ten times the Gospels¹ refer to Jesus' being raised on "the third day."² Although the timing is debated, the Bible clearly says the crucifixion day was the preparation day,

¹The Gospels are the first four books of the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These books tell the story of the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

²See Matthew 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; 27:63; Mark 9:31; 10:34; Luke 9:22; 13:32; 18:33; 24:7.

that is, the day before the Sabbath (Mark 15:42; Luke 23:50–56; John 19:31).

We know how long Jesus was on the cross: six hours. These hours are the wedge in the center of time.

THE FIRST THREE HOURS

Immediately, Jesus was offered vinegar with gall (Matthew 27:34; KJV). Amazing! He rejected it. Jesus refused a painkiller. He did not want anesthetic. He would keep His full senses upon the cross. He would not numb the pain at the price of His faculties. Pain and agony were not issues at the cross. Jesus was the only person at the cross who knew what was taking place.

No sooner was He on the cross than the people chanted for Him to come down (Matthew 27:39–43; Mark 15:29–32; Luke 23:35–37). The thieves joined in also (Matthew 27:44; Mark 15:32; Luke 23:39). What defiant cynicism! This demonstrated the ultimate depravity of unbelief, of disbelief. How dare man tell God the conditions on which he will believe! If Jesus had come down from the cross, sinners would have been condemned and without hope. Jesus was born to die. He died that we might be born to live (Romans 5:10). God, righteous and holy as He is, cannot forgive anyone without punishing the sin. At Calvary, Jesus bore the punishment for our sin.

Even forgiven sins have consequences. In His first statement on the cross, Jesus asked God not to count this sin against His tormentors; however, theirs was the sin of sins! God destroyed Jerusalem. In its biblical history, Judaism existed for one thing—the coming of the Messiah. Jesus came, fulfilling all the prophecies about the Messiah. The Jews crucified Him! Ironically, this put them out of the “Messiah business.” They rejected God as their

King, accepting Caesar (John 19:14, 15). They fell further by placing Jesus' blood upon themselves and, to add to their sin, upon their children (Matthew 27:25).

When Jesus spoke again, He addressed the thief next to Him. As Jesus was dying for the sins of all mankind, it was only fitting for Him to forgive a sinner. Study the exchange in Luke 23:39–43. A thief found true religion while being executed. Amazing! Come to the cross, and stay at the cross. The cross saved the thief; the cross can save us! We cannot be saved by ideas, thoughts, philosophies, mysticisms, or ignorance—only Jesus can save us.

Although dying in intense pain, Jesus took care of His mother, Mary. He instructed John to care for her as his mother (John 19:26, 27). Many think John took her into his own home for the rest of her life. Stop and think. Two of her sons later wrote New Testament books (James and Jude). Mary and some of her sons were at the prayer service in the upper room in Jerusalem soon after Jesus' resurrection (Acts 1:13, 14). It is obvious that they would take care of their mother's future needs. Mary needed help *at the cross*—right at the foot of the cross, at the time of the cross! This was her hardest day, her longest night. Jesus was saying, "Stay with My mother!"

Golgotha is ugly. Crucifixion is more ghastly than the cinema could ever picture. God did what only a Father full of love could do. He allowed His Son to bear the divine judgment of sin; He hid His face from His Son.

*The cross . . .
there is no other way!*