

Crucifixion Medical Account

Before the crucifixion, Jesus prays throughout the night in the Garden of Gethsemane. He begs his Father not to have to go to the cross. The writer Luke describes Jesus's emotional and physical condition: "And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground" (Luke 22:44). The medical condition, Hematidrosis or bloody sweat, occurs when the capillaries in the sweat glands break. Under great emotional stress, the capillaries burst with blood. Then the blood mixes with the sweat. This stress made Jesus's body very weak, so weak that he could have gone into shock. Yet Jesus finds his way to surrender to the Lord's plan when he says, "...yet not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42).

When Jesus rises from his prayer, the soldiers come to Jesus and take him to Caiaphas, the Jewish high priest, to be tried in court for the rest of the night. The men guarding Jesus mock and insult him. They blindfold Jesus and beat his tired body. As they beat him, they demand, "'Prophesy! Who hit you?'" (Luke 22:65). In this way, the soldiers mock Jesus's prophetic abilities. Even though Jesus is blindfolded, surely he would know which one of the soldiers is beating him, if he is even a prophet. Yet Jesus remains silent. He never defends himself or strikes any of these men in defense. In court, Caiaphas asks Jesus if he is the Son of God. When Jesus says "Yes," the soldiers strike Jesus with their fists, slap him, and spit in his face. They do this because they believe that Jesus has dishonored God when he says he is the Son of God (Matthew 26).

Without sleep, and most likely without food or water, Jesus is taken early the next morning to Pilate, the Roman governor. Pilate releases Jesus to be flogged and crucified. The soldiers strip Jesus of his clothes and tie his hands to a post above his head. A Roman soldier takes a whip. The whip has several leather strips at the end. At the end of each strip are small balls of lead and sharp objects, such as glass. With this whip, the soldier beats Jesus again and again across the back, shoulders, and legs. This torture first begins to break, scratch, and bruise Jesus's skin. But after many lashes, blood begins to ooze from the deep tissue of Jesus's back. After thirty-nine lashes, Jesus's back hangs like ribbons of bloody skin. The beating stops when Jesus is near death.

Pilate asks Jesus if he is the king of the Jews. Jesus replies that he is. When Jesus is handed over to the Roman soldiers, they mock him because he says that he is a king. After flogging Jesus, they throw a purple robe across his back of torn, raw flesh. They place a long stick in his hand to dress him up as a king. Then they take branches covered in long thorns and twist them to make a crown. The soldiers take the stick out of Jesus's hand and beat the thorns into his head. While blood streams down Jesus's face, the soldiers again mock him. They kneel down before Jesus and cry, "Hail, King of the Jews!" Then they too spit in his face. The robe sticks to the blood on Jesus's freshly torn back. The soldiers then rip the robe from his tender flesh and tear away the scabs. Then they throw Jesus's own clothes on him (Matthew 27). The soldiers then strap a 110-pound horizontal wooden beam across Jesus's bleeding shoulders. They force Jesus to carry this part of his cross across the streets of the city and up the hill of

Golgotha. Exhausted from lack of sleep, weak from lack of food, drained from being flogged and beaten, and emotionally empty from the soldiers' insults, Jesus stumbles and falls. He is unable to carry the cross. The pain against his skin and muscles is too much. A Roman soldier forces a man in the crowd, Simon of Cyrene, to carry Jesus's cross. At the top of the hill, Jesus is again stripped of his clothing, tearing the scabs on Jesus's back. Jesus is left only wearing a cloth around his waist.

Roman soldiers throw Jesus against the wooden cross. His shredded back scratches against the wood, while soldiers spread his arms across the beam. Two soldiers beats large, thick wrought-iron nails through a tender part between the bones of Jesus's wrists. The soldiers stretch Jesus's legs down the cross. They place his left foot over his right foot. Nails are driven through the arches of Jesus's feet. The cross is then lifted and fixed into the ground. Jesus's body slumps into the nails of his feet, and he hangs from the nails in his wrists. Because the nails are pressing against nerves in Jesus's wrists, sharp pain shoots along his arms, across his shoulders, and into his brain, causing explosive pain. To adjust himself, Jesus pushes against the nails in his feet. These nails too are pressing against nerves in his feet and cause the same shooting pain through his legs. All along, the splintered wood scratches against the raw flesh of Jesus's back as he lifts himself up for every breath he takes. Someone offers Jesus wine mixed with myrrh to help with the pain. But Jesus refuses. He serves faithfully as the Savior who understands even the worst pain a man could ever endure.

As Jesus's body slowly wears out, his muscles begin to cramp and knot. His chest muscles are now paralyzed. The muscles along his ribs are no longer able to hold up his body. His ability to breathe becomes difficult and almost impossible. Carbon dioxide fills his lungs. Fluid fills his chest and crushes his heart. Jesus gasps for small breaths of air, but slowly, he loses his senses as he suffocates. With his last breath, he whispers, "It is finished" (John 19:30) and then, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46).

Within a few minutes, Jesus is dead after six hours of torture on the cross. His mission is complete. He took on the God's punishment for man's sins so that all men could be saved. By his wounds, Jesus offers us healing (Isaiah 53:5). If there had been any other way for God to save men, the Father would have offered it to his One and only Son. If another way to the Father and to heaven was possible, then Jesus would have told his disciples, and he never would have had to die. He would have said, "There's another way!" Paul describes the purpose of Jesus's death in II Corinthians 5:14-15: "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again."

(Adapted from Dr. C. Truman Davis's *The Medical Account*, 1965 *Arizona Medicine*.)