

## PILATE WAS SURPRISED

**“Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. . .” (Mark 15:44)**

It had been a busy morning for Pilate. Very early he had caved in to the demand of the Jews and considered the case of Christ. His wife had a dream the night before and warned him not to have anything to do with this just man. So when Galilee was mentioned, Pilate eagerly sent Jesus to Herod who was in Jerusalem at the time. Herod found no fault in him and sent him back. Pilate’s fear of condemning Christ was increased when the Jews reminded him that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. Still seeking to avoid the death penalty, Pilate had Jesus flogged. When even this did not satiate their anger, Pilate bowed to political pressure, washed his hands before them, and gave Jesus over to be crucified. He did, however, salvage something in his conscience by putting a sign on the cross reading: “JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS” (Jn. 19:19).

All of this happened before 9:00 a.m. which was the third hour of the day (Mk. 15:25).

We are not told what Pilate did during the next six hours. Perhaps he had breakfast, took a nap, or possibly dealt with pressing affairs of government. At any rate, the time went by quickly. Jesus was out of sight and out of mind! The agony of Christ on the cross apparently did not enter his mind. Consequently, when he heard that Jesus was “already dead”, he was “surprised”.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, was not surprised. She stood “near the cross” throughout the whole “long” ordeal (Jn. 19:25). Later the Scriptures would admonish believers to remember those being mistreated as if they themselves were suffering (Heb. 13:3). Surely, Mary loved Jesus so much that she didn’t need anyone to remind her to identify with His suffering.

Pilate, of course, was not the only one emotionally detached from the cross. Lots of people passed by shaking their heads and hurling insults (Mk. 15:29). The chief priests and the soldiers also joined the calloused crowd and built mental barriers to the suffering taking place before them.

The crowd of those who really cared about the suffering of Christ was very small. It still is!

Jeremiah faced a similar situation centuries before. As he walked amidst the smouldering ashes and dead bodies in Jerusalem he wailed: **“Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look around and see. Is any suffering like my suffering that was inflicted on me, that the Lord brought on me in the day of his fierce anger?” (Lam 1:12)**

Fortunately, God has provided a way for us today to identify with, and remember the sufferings of Christ.

- First, when we take the Lord’s Supper we are commanded to remember the Lord’s death until He comes again (1 Cor. 11:26). To eat this supper without discerning the body of Christ is to eat and drink judgement upon ourselves (1 Cor. 11:29).
- Second, in some mysterious way, when we suffer for Christ we fill up in our flesh what is lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions for the sake of His Body, the church (Col. 1:24). The sufferings of Christ did not take the Gospel to the Gentiles, the sufferings of Paul did!
- In the third place, when we minister to those in need, our sacrificial service to them is like ministering to Christ Himself. At Judgement, Jesus will remind the saved that when they ministered to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the prisoner, they were actually ministering to Him (Matt. 25:34 - 40).

One of the most difficult commands in Scripture is to love our neighbor in the same way that we want to be loved (Matt. 7:12). To put this into practice is indeed a “straight gate” and a “narrow way”. When we love in this way, we cannot pass by on the other side oblivious to the suffering of a fellow human being. Like the “Good Samaritan” we will dare to have compassion and get involved. When we truly do this, we will never be “surprised” by their suffering!