

The cross has become a symbol of beauty.

You can buy crosses in all varieties to wear around your neck or decorate your home. Highly ornate crosses are found inside our churches and crosses on the exterior of churches make their identity clear.

But when you stop and think about it, the cross was a **hideous instrument of torture and death.**

To decorate our walls with an electric chair, or wear a hangman's noose around our neck would be considered bad taste to say the least. Yet we find it acceptable, **even beautiful** to use the cross in such a way.

It's become an object of beauty because of what was accomplished on it.

It's become an object of beauty because of what Christ's death on the cross meant.

Instead of a symbol of torture and death it is now (arguably) known as the greatest symbol of love. Its form reminds us that Christ suffered through a slow, excruciating, humiliating death so that we can have peace with God.

That's love!

That's beautiful!

Christ suffered on many levels.

Matthews says, "As they were going out they met a man from Cyrene ..." (Matthew 27:32)

So?

Going from where?

Does it really matter?

I think it does.

They were going out of the city.

The place of execution was **outside** the city walls. It was called: 'The Place of the Skull'.

To have been removed from the city of Jerusalem must have been the ultimate rejection for Jesus. Here he is not only being treated as a criminal but being led out of his own city, by his own people. This was the city he'd wept over (Luke 19:41).

HE SUFFERED REJECTION FROM HIS OWN.

The people who lived outside the city walls were lepers,

people who were unclean,

people who were rejects.

That's how they were treating JESUS.

Jesus' death **outside** that city was very significant. It was in keeping with the laws of sacrifice which governed the *Day of Atonement*. On that day, once a year, a goat was killed as a sin offering and was burnt outside the city walls in order that the sin and guilt of the people would be removed (Leviticus 16:27).

Here we see Christ Himself satisfying the legal requirement for a sin offering.

On his arrival at the place of execution, Jesus was offered some wine mixed with gall (myrrh) to drink. But we read that after tasting it, he refused to drink it (Matthew 27:33). This drink was a sedative. It would have given the criminal slight relief from the pain. It was customary to give this potion to the criminal just prior to their execution.

But it was not given as an act of mercy, **not at all**.

Rather, it was given so that the job of the soldiers would be easier. It meant that they wouldn't have to struggle with someone who was violently resisting their fate. It would make it easier for the soldiers to nail someone to a cross if the person wasn't fully aware of what was going on.

Jesus REFUSED the drink.

Now, why would you do that, really? If it were me I think I would take anything to lessen that kind of pain, or to give me some kind of escape from such horrendous circumstances.

Jesus REFUSED the drink.

I think Jesus wanted to be fully aware of what was happening. He didn't want to have his senses dulled, for this was the **moment he'd come for**. His whole life had been leading up to this. He didn't want to miss it. He wanted to be fully in that moment, fully aware of its enormous significance.

JESUS WILLINGLY SUFFERED PHYSICALLY.

The cross was a horrible, yet beautiful thing.

What an incredible model Christ is for us.

We would, for the most part, do whatever it takes to lessen pain. Ideally we would try to avoid it altogether!

Hey, we don't like PAIN.

PAIN hurts.

PAIN'S not nice, and given a choice we usually choose to escape it.

But here we see one who is prepared to **face** pain and go **through** pain in order that God's plan be accomplished.

Maybe there will be times in our own lives that God's plan is accomplished through pain.

Are we prepared to go through something that's difficult in order that God's plan be accomplished?

My experience is that it's often through the difficult painful times that the most growth occurs. It's then that we're forced to **dig deep**. It's then we ask God the hard questions. It's then we find out who we really are and who God really is.

Jesus suffered in many ways.

Emotionally.

Physically.

Spiritually.

It must have been crushing for him to be rejected by his own people whom he loved so intensely.

It must have been agonising to endure the ordeal of crucifixion with no relief, fully conscious.

It must have been tortuous to take on the sin of the world.

It must have been heartbreaking to (because of that sin) find himself for the first time separated from God, whom he was a part of.

And yet he put himself in a place where he would do that and feel every bit of it.

JESUS SUFFERED.

JESUS SUFFERED ALONE.

Here's the amazing thing.

Because he faced pain alone, we **never** have to.

Carla Lindsey, *the long weekend: reflections on the crucifixion of Christ*, Hamilton: Maruki Books, 2011.

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