

John 19:11
Midweek Lenten Service Week 3
March 3, 2010

John 19:11 (New International Version)

¹¹Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin."

The Scourge!

I. An instrument of man's brutality

II. An instrument of the measure of God's love.

Do you know what this is? It's a filet knife. Do you know for what it's used? It's used for cutting flesh away from the bone. When you eat a fish, you don't want to have any bones in it on which you could choke. So filleting fish is a good way to cut meat away from any bones.

Do you know what this is? It's a replica of what a scourge or flog was. I don't want this to become a morbid discussion tonight, but a scourge was used for the same purpose as a filet knife. It tore flesh from bone. There were other weapons used for whipping someone like a stick or rod. That was probably done to Jesus too by the Temple guards. But the Romans were more brutal when it came to this sort of punishment. They would use a whip or scourge that looked like this and the intent in flogging, scourging someone with this was to tear the flesh away from the bone. This is how they would do it. They would take a criminal, (usually this happened after someone had been condemned to death by crucifixion not before like in the case of Jesus,) and tie him up to a pillar. Then they would bare the criminal's back and chest and they would give him 13 lashes on the back, then 13 lashes on the shoulders, and yes, 13 lashes on the chest. Again, the point of such punishment wasn't just to leave a few welts on the flesh. The intent was to tear flesh away from bone.

And what was the point of exacting such punishment on someone who had already been condemned to die on a cross any ways? On the one hand some believe that such brutality was for the sake of brutality. It was an opportunity for brutal Roman executioners to hone their skills of brutality or just burn off a little steam. Why after all, Roman soldiers who had to serve a tour of duty in Palestine were not happy campers. Jerusalem was a hornet's nest and keeping the peace was stressful work. Such brutality was also a warning to others. When people saw such things, who would dare to challenge Roman law and authority if that's what would happen to you?

On the other hand some believe such punishment was used for mercy sake. Crucifixion was one of the most horrific ways to die and it took hours, sometimes days. And so they tried to hasten the death both at the beginning of the whole ordeal as well as at the end. Think of how the Roman soldiers took a big club and broke the legs of the criminals who hung next to Jesus. How brutal. But it was done so that they would die more quickly. But before they ever got on the cross, such a scourging, ripping away of the flesh from bones would begin the bleeding and dying process, and anything you could do to weaken the criminal and hasten his death on the cross would be good. Oh, not that the soldiers felt sorry for them. They had other things to do. Who wants to sit out on the skull of crucifixion and waste time waiting for a criminal to die? Time could be better spent back at the barracks drinking, playing dice, or catching up on some sleep. So let's get the dying going by taking some flesh off the bones and let's get the loss of blood going as soon as we can. It was messy work, but they were efficient in doing it.

So what's it all about? Why talk so much about this gory suffering and spend a whole sermon on one passage that is only eight words long? What are we to learn and take with us tonight as we pick up a replica of a scourge for our Lenten display at home? First, this passage proves that God's Word is true. One doesn't often catch it when Jesus prophesied about his

coming sufferings and death, but the matter of this flogging was there nonetheless. When we read in the Bible what Jesus told his disciples about his coming suffering and death, the word crucify stands out and we don't often catch the other things he said he would suffer. But listen to what Matthew records. "Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, 'We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked, and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life.'"

Before it ever happened Jesus told his disciples that he was going to be flogged. So as you look at the scourge on the pedestal of your display, realize it stands as a reminder of the truth of God's Word. Jesus said it was going to happen and it did.

If Jesus could fulfill that word which prophesied something horrible, you and I have reason to trust all the things he tells us in the Bible, especially his promises of good things for us. Yes, he has promised that we too must carry a cross as we follow him. There will be suffering for us too. But think of all the things of glory he promises us--forgiveness, peace, eternal life. You can trust him.

That scourge is also a reminder and a measure of his great love. Recall Jesus' anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane. He prayed, "Father, if there is any other way we can do this, please take this cup of suffering from me. Not my will, but yours be done." Do you think that one of the things that caused Jesus anguish was the knowledge that he was going to have that scourge ripping flesh off his backside? That was all part of the cup of suffering the Father asked him to drink and it was unsettling to him. It caused him deep anguish. Yet, even though he knew that was going to happen to him and the pain it would cause, he willingly did it for you and for me. He loved us that much. And he suffered all that and even more because that's what it cost to save us. How dare anyone of us ever take our sin lightly again as we look at this sight? How can any of us ever question or doubt God's love again as we look this sight?

Speaking of sights, did you ever watch that movie which caused such a stir about 5 years ago! It's Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ." We have it in our church library and you might want to watch it. It is very accurate and brutal in its depiction of our Savior's passion. When it first came out my wife and two of my daughters went with me to see in a movie theater. The scene that bothered me the most was the scene when Jesus was flogged. When the Roman soldier picked out the flog he was going to use, it took your breath away because you knew what was going to happen. And then it started. And I couldn't stand it. I wanted to cry out, "Stop would you! Isn't that enough?" But he kept flogging him. And I finally gasped out loud enough that my daughter sitting next to me could hear, "What man could survive that any ways?" My daughter leaned over and said, "Remember dad, he was more than a man. He is also God." And that's the point. Only he could save us. And he did. Jesus was born to be flogged and to die for us so that by his stripes, by his wounds we would be healed. So rather than look away in horror at the horror, we look on that instrument of torture with gratefulness, with love, with faith. Jesus, the God man, did all that for you and me that we might live forever.