

"We Do Not Know Of Ourselves"

In the 1970s, an ossuary with the name Yehohanan carved on it was excavated in Jerusalem. It is known to be from around 2000 years ago. Within it were the remains of his bones and on his heel was a nail.

Back during those times, Jerusalem was ruled over by the Roman empire, which sentenced criminals and rebels to death by crucifixion. It is said that when the Spartans rebellion occurred in 71BC, an estimated 6,000 people were crucified on the cross. This Yehohanan was most likely also convicted of some crime and put to death by crucifixion.

Those who were put on a cross were all criminals, so the bodies were treated carelessly. At times, even being abandoned with the nails still intact. Yehohanan, having been placed in an ossuary, must have been from a well-off family. This heel bone and nail is currently on exhibit at the Israel Museum.

In this way, it is undoubtedly true that crucifixions happened in Jerusalem under the rule of the Roman empire. And Jesus Christ was one of the many crucified. Jesus Christ was crucified at a place called "place of the skull" as written in the bible. In Aramaic it is called Golgotha and in Latin, Calvary as we call it today.

Before Christ was led to Golgotha, he was flogged by the Roman soldiers. There is a scene in the movie "Passion of Christ" which shows a soldier grinning as he vigorously whips the back of Jesus with a whip. The whip, having bones and sharp objects attached to the ends, rips open the skin of his back. Some may have even lost their lives by the flogging, but Jesus was made to carry his own cross after he was violently whipped to Golgotha. Jesus had been a carpenter for many years. Thus, he must have had a strong body. But the damage he bore by the flogging was great, and it is written that he carried his cross, stumbling many times, even needing a substitute to carry the cross in his place by the end.

When he arrived in Golgotha, he was stripped of his clothes and they divided among the soldiers. And so, nearly naked, he was made to lay down on the cross with his arms outstretched. His hands were nailed. The nails would not hold the weight of a body if pierced at the palm, and so the nails were driven through his

wrists. His feet were overlapped and nailed. The nails tore skin, and smashed bones.

A small splinter, even one that is hard to see, can cause enough pain for us to cry out. It cannot be left as is, so we take a heated sewing needle to pick it out. In those moments my forehead drips with sweat and I complain of the pain the tiny needle end causes.

Jesus Christ was not pierced by a needle but by a nail. It did not just pierce his skin, but also crushed his bones. 750 years before this event, the prophet Isaiah precisely prophesied what would occur. **"But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed."** (Isaiah 53:5) Here, Isaiah clearly states that he was "crushed" rather than "torn." This shows just how precise the details of the prophecy were. Jesus' body was torn and his bones crushed. When the cross was erected, the weight of his body weighed heavily on the torn and crushed areas.

When people are asked "What do you associate with Christianity?" Many will answer "the cross." They can be seen on the roof top of churches, inside the sanctuary, on the cover of bibles, on bumper stickers, on necklaces and earrings, and some even as tattoos. But as we have just spoken of, the cross is an execution device much like an electric chair or guillotine. In this way, Christians have made an execution device their symbol. Needless to say, an execution device is an object of fear, detested, and "ill-omened" as Japanese people would say. There is no other country, company, organization, or religious group that uses such device as their symbol or logo. Then why do Christians raise this cross?

It is written in the bible that, as Jesus was crucified on the cross, he spoke 7 times. The first of them were the words, **"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."** (Luke 23:34) Yes, Jesus' first words upon the cross was a prayer to forgive the people who had gathered around and had lead him to the cross.

Let's say that someone committed a sin against you. That person will apologize saying, "I'm sorry, please forgive me." The reason why that person will ask you for forgiveness is because you are the victim that have suffered the damage.

Jesus, before arriving at the cross, was wrongly tried and convicted. Neither the flogging nor crucifixion was justifiable. In such situation, we would look to the people who whip, accuse, and take from us our clothes with resentment, shouting, "You will pay for this grudge I hold against you!" or "even in death, I will return to curse you!"

But Jesus did not even say, "I forgive you" towards the people who put him on a cross, but "please forgive them" towards God, his Father. Here he makes it clear that he himself does not judge these people, and prays to God the Father, the one and only who can judge them, to forgive them. Yes, it is because ultimately, God has the authority to judge us, and there are no mistakes to his judgments. They are flawless. We humans cannot properly judge each other, but it is important to know that there is someone who can in this world.

As we are living in a country with a constitutional government, we are judged by its laws. The last themselves are words. And ultimately, it is humans that compare the acts of humans to the written law as judgment. And so, there is a limit to such judgment. As a result, just how much of the judgment given, have been carried out flawlessly? Were they completely fair? Even without trial, we face and have to accept many unreasonable circumstances every day due to human relationships. There are times we see that the wrong goes unpunished and the righteous are blamed.

Knowing of such realities, Matthew documented the following words of Jesus. **"So do not be afraid of them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. 27 What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. 28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matthew 10:26-28)**

These words of Jesus clears out the faulty, injustices of this world. Because Jesus knew of this from his heart, he had prayed to God the Father, who has this authority, to "forgive them." And this prayer was something that did not exist before in human society. It is because there was no circumstance in the history of humans that such prayer could be made. Yes, until this time, it was a world of "an

eye for an eye", revenge what has been done to you. This can also be seen in the bible, as there are prayers wishing for revenge recorded here and there.

"Repay them for their deeds and for their evil work; repay them for what their hands have done and bring back on them what they deserve." (Psalms 28:4)

"May all who gloat over my distress be put to shame and confusion; may all who exalt themselves over me be clothed with shame and disgrace." (Psalms 35:26)

Strictly saying, these prayers were asking for "the execution of God's impartial judgment" rather than asking for "revenge fueled by anger." But what Jesus wished for on the cross was not for "the execution of God's impartial judgment" but for the forgiveness of those who had clearly done wrong. This also fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy.

"Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." (Isaiah 53:12)

A few hours before this event, at the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus told his disciples as the men came to arrest him, **"Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?" (Matthew 26:53-54)**

At that very moment, Jesus could have called fourth a heavenly force of angels to defeat the people before him. He could have avoided arrest, and walked away. But Jesus did not. Why was this? He said, **"But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?"**

Yes, there was a reason why Jesus did not call down a force from heaven. Because it had already been inscribed that "this must happen." What must happen was that "I must be put on the cross." And so, the road to the crucifix must not be altered by the legion of angels.

It is written in the bible that, "All humans (including every one of us here) are sinners." And we must stand before God with our sins. There is no one out there that can prove their innocence before the all knowing God. And because he is flawless in his judgment, we have no other option than to accept God's judgment.

There is no way to be exempt from his judgment. That is because his righteous judgment will be carried out. But Jesus bore all of our sins and took our place as a sacrifice by accepting the punishment, so that we may not suffer the consequences. This was exactly what Jesus had said that "must happen."

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, who was that prayer by Jesus to "forgive them" for? It was for Judas of Iscariot who had betrayed Jesus, for the disciples who had fled leaving Jesus. For the Palestinians and Priests who convicted Jesus and sent him to the cross. It was for Pilot. For the Roman soldiers. And for the crowd that watched the crucifixion of Jesus.

At Golgotha, the people surrounded the crucifixes along with the town leaders. It is as Luke had written. **"The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One.'"** (Luke 23:35)

There were also Roman soldiers present, as Luke continues, **"The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, 'If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.'"** (Luke 23:35,37) And there were even more spectators. When Jesus said on the cross, "For they do not know what they are doing" he meant this about these people.

And these words not only apply to those who were present at the cross, but also to each and every one of us. We don't usually ask ourselves, "Do you know what you are doing?" On the contrary, we tend to believe that we know what's best all the time, and live believing this.

But to Jesus Christ, we live not knowing what we are doing. Yes, we can see ourselves through this event. The words, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." are from Jesus and aimed directed at us.

Jesus had also once boldly spoken of something which brought about great opposition by those who heard it. **"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in**

your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." (Luke 6:41-42)

We do not even think that there could possibly be a plank in our own eyes. But how Jesus Christ sees us, we live pointing out the speck in the eyes of anyone but yourself, meanwhile, never seeing the plank in our own. How could we say, "let me take the speck out of your eye" while being blinded by your own plank.

We think that we know everything about ourselves. We think that we can see situations clearly. But philosophers from long ago have objectively observed these ways of us humans and have said, "Know thyself." Even when a parent warns their child, they are a hypocrite. Many of the things they are warned against have been done by the parents themselves. We humans are strange in that we pretend to have lived with no association with the certain issue we warn and scold our children for. A parent who does not know what they are doing is raising a child, so we are in need of God's help.

We are convenient living beings. We call someone "hasty", while calling ourselves "clever." We call others "dull" while calling ourselves in the same situation "careful." We say that others have "grown old" while talking about ourselves as having become "more dignified." We live without noticing such contradictions while believing that we know everything.

According to my wife and kids, I occasionally snore. I have woken up from my own snoring about twice in my life, realizing just how loudly I snore. But even knowing this, no matter how loudly I snore, I am sound asleep. And the only ones inconvenienced are my family members. But if I were to share a room with someone else who snores loudly, I would put my own realities aside and think, "What a person!"

Jesus had once talked about "sight" in the following way. **"If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains. (John 9:41)**

Jesus pointed out that we have sin in the fact that even though we are unable to see, we claim to be able to. Even when there is a plank in our eyes, we are unable to see this truth and claim otherwise. This is a human observation that is consistent throughout the bible, and the following words were written to a church in Laodikeia as written in the book of Revelations.

"You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked." (Revelations 3:17)

Laodikeia was a prosperous city well known for their banking, wool, and eye medicine at the time. Thus, they believed that they were prosperous and without any discomfort in life. But in God's eyes, this was not true. He says that they do not realize that they are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked. Again, the bible clearly points out that we do not realize our own state of being.

And so, the words of the book of Revelations continues by advising us, **"I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see." (Revelations 3:18)**

It goes without saying that the salve eye medicine mentioned here is not for our physical eyes, but to open the eyes of our soul. In other words, we must realize that we are blind, and pay the price for the eye medicine that will cure our blindness. But even if we are told to "buy" such an item, what must we pay in return? And what must we pay to buy the white clothes we must wear to cover our shameful nakedness? What is the price? Dear brothers and sisters, do you know what words follow? Yes, the words we know well.

"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches." (Revelations 3:20-22)

Yes. Buy the medicine and white clothes. Those who accept these words in all seriousness are those who have accepted the fact that they are blind; that they are ignorant. And thus they think, "This is what I need!" But what are we to buy them with? Do we have something of such worth? That is when we hear a knock on the door of our heart. No, the truth is that this knocking sound had always been there. But much like the plank, we were also deaf to the sound. We did not even try to hear.

But if we can hear this sound, the Lord tells us to open the door. Yes, the one standing there is Jesus Christ. Jesus, who had prayed for us saying, "They do not know what they are doing." And with the white clothes and medicine in hand, he will come in to dine. Yes, these things needed to be bought but Jesus had already prepared and brought them to us.

These words of counsel end with the following. **"Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches." (Revelations 3:22)** Yes, we are gathered as the body of Christ in this worship service to hear the words of Jesus our Lord, and to face the words written in the bible. Our services are led every week by the Holy Spirit. In other words, the Holy Spirit has spoken to us again this morning through this church.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we cannot defend ourselves before God on "how much we know of ourselves" or "how right we are." Therefore, we exist in the hearts of the crowd of spectators. We exist in the hearts of the priests. We exist in the hearts of the soldiers. We exist in the heart of Pilate. Their image is of our own.

Let us confirm every morning that Jesus' prayer was for us. And let us accept his love and forgiveness as we stand before the cross. Blessed are those who listen to the words from the Holy Spirit to the churches. Let's pray.

Translated by Shirah Vogt