"The exegete cannot afford to neglect any means that may give him a better understanding of the nature and background of the gospel testimony."

(A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture, 4:16:4)

I have lectured for more than twenty years on the events of the Passion of Jesus Christ. I would like to thank my wife, Midge; my children: Gerard Stanley Jr., MD, and his lovely wife, Melissa, my daughter, Katy, and her wonderful husband, Matthew Pierson, and my sons Michael and Chuck Stanley; and all my precious grandchildren for their unending support and encouragement throughout the years. They have witnessed firsthand my passion for spreading the word about what Jesus Christ underwent for our sins.

—I must also thank Father Harry McAlpine for his encouragement to follow my dreams. It is for my family and friends that this book has been written.

—Gerard Joseph Stanley Sr., MD

In thanks for the faith and life of Allen L. Burreson, my sainted father, who lived in Christ Crucified, the Wisdom of God.

—Kent J. Burreson, PhD
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This devotional book can be used anytime during the Church Year to reflect on the Passion of the Lord Jesus Christ. It would be particularly appropriate to read this book during the seasons of Lent and Holy Week. If the book is read during Lent, the Passion accounts from the Gospels can be read in association with each chapter: Matthew with chapter 1, Mark with chapter 2, Luke with chapter 3, and John with chapter 4. In addition, readings, prayers, and hymns for the seasons of Lent and Holy Week appear in each chapter and associate each chapter with a day of Holy Week: chapter 1 with Holy Monday, chapter 2 with Holy Tuesday, chapter 3 with Holy Wednesday, the first two sections of chapter 4 with Good Friday, and chapter 5 with Holy Saturday. Thus the book, along with reading the appropriate Gospels, can enliven the faith of Christians as they journey through Holy Week to the cross and resurrection.

Ways to Use

He Was
CRUCIFIED

The Passion of Jesus Christ is the fundamentally formative act of God in shaping the faith and life of Christians.

Lord Jesus, in agony in the garden of Olives, troubled by sadness and fear, comforted by an angel:
Have mercy, O Lord, have mercy on us!

Lord Jesus, betrayed by Judas’ kiss, abandoned by your apostles, delivered into the hands of sinners:
Have mercy, O Lord, have mercy on us!

Lord Jesus, accused by false witnesses, condemned to die on the cross, struck by servants, covered with spittle:
Have mercy, O Lord, have mercy on us!

Lord Jesus, disowned by Peter, your apostle, delivered to Pilate and Herod, counted among the likes of Barabbas:
Have mercy, O Lord, have mercy on us!

Lord Jesus, carrying your cross to Calvary, consoled by the daughters of Jerusalem, helped by Simon of Cyrene:
Have mercy, O Lord, have mercy on us!

Lord Jesus, stripped of your clothes, given vinegar to drink, crucified with thieves:
Have mercy, O Lord, have mercy on us!

Lord Jesus, insulted on the cross, praying for your executioners, pardoning the good thief:
Have mercy, O Lord, have mercy on us!

Lord Jesus, entrusting your mother to your beloved disciple, giving up your spirit into the hands of your Father, dying for all of us sinners:
Have mercy, O Lord, have mercy on us!

By your sufferings, Lord, heal the wounds in our hearts. Let your tears be the source of joy for us, and let your death give us life.

—Lucien Deiss
Upon the cross extended
See, world, your Lord suspended.
Your Savior yields His breath.
The Prince of Life from heaven
Himself has freely given
To shame and blows and bitter death.

In his article "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ," Dr. William Edwards of the Mayo Clinic and two collaborators discuss the medical aspects of crucifixion in an attempt to prove that Jesus Christ died on the cross as His followers and historians claim. Dr. Edwards’s article inspired me to educate others on the realities and significance of Jesus’ crucifixion. Along my journey, I have come to realize how little I appreciated what Jesus experienced for me as He suffered and died. I have pondered the extreme anguish Jesus experienced in the Garden of Gethsemane. And I have considered the possibility that Jesus may have already experienced in the garden what would happen to Him in His Passion. I comprehend more fully why Jesus asked His Father to take the cup of suffering and death from Him. Through my training and practice as a medical doctor, I can grasp how terribly He suffered at the hands of the Roman guards as they whipped and scourged Him in the Fortress of Antonia.

May this Saxon prayer prepare you for the journey:

Lord Jesus Christ, for the sake of thy holy cross, be with me to shield me.
Lord Jesus Christ, by the memory of thy blessed cross, be within me to strengthen me.
Lord Jesus Christ, for thy holy cross, be ever round about me to protect me.
Lord Jesus Christ, for thy glorious cross, go before me to direct my steps.
Lord Jesus Christ, for thy admirable cross, come thou after me to guard me.
Lord Jesus Christ, for thy cross, worthy of all praise, overshadow me to bless me.
Lord Jesus Christ, for thy noble cross, be thou in me to lead me to thy kingdom. Amen.

Preface

From Jesus’ triumphal entry (upper left corner), throughout the various trials, to Golgotha, and to the empty tomb (upper right corner), Hans Memling paints the city of Jerusalem as the backdrop for the Passion story. With the residents of Jerusalem, relive the events of the world’s salvation.
I believe that Christians are not fully aware of the agony and anguish that Jesus experienced in the hours following the Last Supper. What happened immediately prior to His crucifixion gives insight into the physical and emotional intensity of Jesus’ suffering. Christian faith can be strengthened by reflection upon Christ’s suffering both before and during the crucifixion. That is the purpose of this book!

Within these pages, I reflect on the Passion of Jesus Christ in light of the “medical aspects of crucifixion.” I invite you to reflect with me on what Jesus endured during the final days of His life. Consider the intensity of His anguish after the Last Supper and ask: What intense emotions would cause Jesus to sweat blood and to ask His Father for help? Reflect with me on the cruelty and severity of Jesus’ scourging and beatings, which destroyed the otherwise healthy body of a thirty-three-year-old man, leading to death in a short time on the cross. Finally, reflect on the excruciating nature of the Passion itself. What does it really mean to be crucified? Jesus’ robes were stripped from His bloodied and torn body. He was thrown to the ground, His hands and feet were nailed to the cross, and He was hung upon it to die. Each word Jesus spoke to His followers while suspended from the cross brought increased pain. Reflect with me on the agony of death by crucifixion.

Clearly Jesus underwent several remarkable events during His last two days on this earth. As a physician, I find the physical and emotional nature of Jesus’ agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, the severity of His scourging at the pillar, and the reality of death by crucifixion to be intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually strengthening for a life of faith in the Crucified One. Reflections on these events through the eyes of a family physician give a unique perspective to the physical and emotional trauma Jesus experienced. In this way, I hope to give you a much clearer and deeper understanding and meaning of what Jesus endured in His arrest, trial, beating, and crucifixion.

Every time I reflect on Jesus’ Passion, I grow in my appreciation of what my Savior endured for me and my sins. As you reflect on the events of those two days presented in this book, I hope you, too, will meditate a little longer on the words and artistic depictions of the Passion. If you receive insight into Christ’s suffering, then this book has accomplished its purpose. Please join me in reflecting upon the significance of Jesus’ suffering as we journey through the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This carving by William C. Severson depicts Saint Luke—described by Paul as the “beloved physician”—as both physician and biblical writer. His authorship of the third Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles is indicated by the traditional pose of the author presenting his writing. The raven perched on Luke’s shoulder is a Greek symbol of the medical profession. In ancient times, the “dumb” creature that speaks became associated with Greek oracle health shrines, where under the guise of miracles a rather scientific approach to medicine was practiced. The circle on the bracelet on Luke’s left wrist is a Christian symbol of the perfection of God. It is also a symbol of the Greek god Apollo, to whom the shrines of healing were most often dedicated. A fish shape outlines the figure of Luke, which suggests the encompassing effect of Christ, the great fish who swallowed up sickness and death, on Luke, the trained Greek physician.
Introduction

Come, see these things and ponder,
Your soul will fill with wonder
As blood streams from each pore.
Through grief beyond all knowing
From His great heart came flowing
Sighs welling from its deepest core.

This book begins with an examination of the historical context for the Passion of Christ. The lens through which we see this context is the four books of the New Testament that detail the Passion: the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ deals with four different, yet related, events that occur on the final days of Christ’s life. These four events are the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, the scourging at the pillar, the bearing of the cross, and the crucifixion. These events take place in three distinct time periods during the last days of Jesus’ earthly life: from the Last Supper to the arrest; from the arrest to the crucifixion at Golgotha; and from the crucifixion at Golgotha to the burial. As we follow these events through the stages of Christ’s Passion, we see what Jesus endured to redeem our lives from sin and deliver us into new life through His resurrection.

Jesus’ agony and the serious intent of our Savior’s prayer to the Father are the focus of this woodcut by Albrecht Dürer. Even as Jesus prays for the Father’s will to be done, an angel holds the cross before His face.

The first stage of His Passion, the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, gives Jesus the initial experience of the suffering He will endure. To appreciate the intensity of His agony, we re-create the timeline for that night, then examine the suffering and grief Jesus experienced on the night before His death. In the garden, Jesus foresees the cruel torture He will endure. Already, His first taste of suffering necessitates that Jesus receive strength and support from an angel of God. To grasp the nature of His agony in the garden, we must ask, What did Jesus experience that was so emotionally intense that it caused His heart to be like blood?

During the second stage of His Passion (from His arrest until His crucifixion), Jesus endures two events of severe torture and pain: the scourging at the pillar and the bearing of the cross. An inhumane practice, scourging was the beating of a condemned victim in preparation for death. This practice was so hostile that a soldier was charged with ensuring that the victim did not die as a result of the beating. To comprehend the pain experienced by the condemned victim, we must ask, How extreme would the beating be to destroy a thirty-three-year-old man’s body, subsequently leading to death in a very short time on the cross? The Shroud of Turin, discussed in the appendix, points to potential answers. It shows a victim that had been severely scourged over most of his body. Large bruises also show that the victim carried a heavy crossbeam across his shoulders. Our review of scourging will demonstrate the cruelty unleashed on Jesus and help us realize why He died so quickly on the cross.

In Albrecht Dürer’s depiction of the scourging at the pillar, Jesus appears strong and healthy, though the vicious punishment to come will unsettle His vitality. The faces of the soldiers reveal the malicious nature of this torture.
The emotional and physical impact of Jesus’ Passion is apparent in Albrecht Dürer’s image of Christ bearing the cross. Having fallen in weakness, His face creased with anguish and pain, Jesus looks back with longing love toward His mother and the beloved disciple, John. At the same time, the soldier mercilessly prods Jesus to continue on to Golgotha.

Following the scourging is the third event of the Passion of our Lord: the bearing of the cross (“the way of the cross”) as Jesus is led from His condemnation before Pilate to His place of execution. The public humiliation associated with Jesus’ bearing His own cross inflicted further emotional and physical torture on Him and on those who loved Him, including His mother and His followers.

These first three events of Christ’s Passion prepare for the fourth event, which completes the final stage of His Passion: the crucifixion. In this ultimate humiliation and torture, Christ accepts the most degrading insults to His human body and soul, along with His resurrection, from us, from our sins. So that our faith in His suffering Passion might be strengthened, we must ask, “What does it really mean to be crucified?” The crucifixion of Jesus must be placed into its historical context as a form of capital punishment. The physiological effects of crucifixion caused the victim extreme pain, even as this torture brought about a slow and painful death. Breathing and talking were excruciating, thus we should treasure the words Jesus spoke as He was dying. The final humiliation for the Son of God was the act that certified His death—the spear plunged into His side.

By contemplating the final act of His Passion, we will know more intimately the depth of Jesus’ love for us, in whose place He suffered and died.

One contemplates the Passion in order to find strength and joy, or as Martin Luther stated:

“We need to study the passion of Christ, in order that we might remember that it happened for our good and for our eternal benefit. I must have regard for his bloody sweat, his agony, and his crucifixion, and say, ‘That is my help, my strength, my life, my joy. All this happened for our sakes and for our benefit. We must believe this and thank him from the bottom of our hearts. Whoever does that and views the suffering of Christ in this way is a Christian.’
As Jesus is presented to the crowds who are seeking to crucify Him, Pilate says, Ecce, homo, that is, “Behold, the man.” Through your reflection, you are responding to Pilate’s call, though not as the Roman governor intended. Rather, you behold Jesus through faith, as this painting by Antonio Ciseri invites you to do.

Through these pages, you will reflect on the suffering of Jesus from His Last Supper with His disciples to His last breath on the cross. You will reflect on what Jesus experienced during these events. You will reflect on what Jesus experienced while praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. You will reflect on what really happened to Jesus’ body as He was scourged in preparation for death. You will reflect on Jesus’ experience while bearing His cross to Calvary. You will reflect on the process of being crucified and the torture and pain Jesus suffered while dying on the cross. Finally, you will reflect on the words by which Jesus’ cross becomes your life and salvation by faith: “out of the cross” (excruciatus) has come the salvation of the world.

The many facets of salvation associated with the cross are summarized in this hymn to the cross by Paulinus, a bishop of Nola in the fourth century.

O Cross, ineffable love of God and glory of heaven! O Cross, eternal salvation; Cross, terror of the reprobate.
O Cross, support of the just, light of Christians, for you, God became a slave in the flesh, here on earth; by your means, man in God is crowned king in heaven; from you streams the true light, victorious over accursed night.

You gave believers power to make the pantheon of the nations quake; you are the soul of peace that unites men in Christ the mediator; you are the ladder for man to climb to heaven. Be always for us, your faithful, both pillar and anchor; watch over our homes, set the course of our ship. In the Cross may our faith remain strong, and there be our crown prepared.
Chapter One

Through the Evangelists’ Eyes

The Passion of Christ in Historical Context

In Jesus Christ Blessing, Spanish painter Ferdinando Gallego surrounds the Savior with four symbols from the first chapter of Revelation, symbols that are traditionally associated with the four evangelists. Beginning in the upper right and moving clockwise, Gallego includes the angel in human form, which symbolizes Matthew, whose Gospel opens with the incarnation and emphasizes Jesus’ humanity. The ox symbolizes Luke, who stresses Jesus’ sacrifice in his Gospel. Mark’s symbol, the winged lion, recalls an ancient legend that lion cubs lie for three days as dead until “resurrected” by their father’s breath. His Gospel account emphasizes Jesus’ death and resurrection. John is depicted by the eagle because his Gospel soars to the most sublime, spiritual heights.

Faith and trust in the God who reveals Himself in the person and work of Jesus Christ, especially in His Passion and death on the cross, calls for hearing and knowing the Word that bears witness to Him. The apostles of Jesus Christ and their followers preached that Word as the Gospel (evangelion), or Good News, that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead. They proclaimed His Passion, death, and resurrection as the way to eternal life and salvation.

The apostles, as those chosen and sent by Jesus, announced the events of His ministry, persecution, death, resurrection, and ascension as the saving work of God. As the numbers of new Christians grew and the apostles aged, wore martyred, or died, the need to write down the story and proclamation of Christ Jesus became imperative.

The evangelists completed their record of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection by the end of the first century AD, a record that comes to us in the New Testament Gospels.
Your soul in griefs unbounded, 
Your head with thorns surrounded, 
You died to ransom me. 
The cross for me enduring, 
The crown for me securing, 
You healed my wounds and set me free.

The very heart of God toward His creatures is enfl eshed in the incarnation of His Son and extended to His creatures through Jesus’ death and resurrection. Through this prayer, fi x your eyes on God's heart in Jesus. 
Merciful and everlasting God, 
You did not spare Your only Son but delivered Him up for us all to bear our sins on the cross. 
Grant that our hearts may be so fi xed with steadfast faith in Him that we fear not the power of sin, death, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. 
Amen.

Guercino depicts the betrayal of Christ with power and pathos. The faces of the participants reveal their thoughts and words. Carrying out the temple priests’ will, the men seize Jesus with violence. Feeling guilty, Judas clutches his moneybag and shrinks from Jesus’ disappointment, moving away from the light emanating from Christ. The soldiers pull and grab at Jesus, who seems calm and at peace, the epitome of trust in His Father.

The Trials of Jesus

Jesus’ hour was at hand, the hour of His deliverance into the hands of sinners, sin, death, and, to all appearances, the power of the devil. Jesus’ betrayal and deliverance into the clutches of the kingdom of evil was manifested in His arrest, trial, scourging, and bearing of the cross. Here the Son of God was truly seen as the Savor of Man, whose servanthood to His Father and to humanity in suffering shows the very heart and nature of God. In Jesus, the Suffering Servant, humanity finds God most deeply embodied in the flesh to restore humanity to God’s life for His creatures.

Following His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was taken before the Jewish Sanhedrin and accused of crimes against Jewish law. According to Scripture and Jewish historians, during His trials before the Sanhedrin and while being marched to the Roman authorities, Jesus was beaten on the head and lashed with reeds, though Jesus’ skin probably was swollen and sensitive from the hemodis. And during His trials, the Sanhedrin’s police and Pilate’s and Herod’s guards blindfolded Jesus, hit Him on the head and in the face, and spat on Him. 

The very heart of God toward His creatures is reflected in the incarnation of His Son and extended to His creatures through Jesus’ death and resurrection. Through this prayer, fix your eyes on God's heart in Jesus. 
Merciful and everlasting God, 
You did not spare Your only Son but delivered Him up for us all to hear our sins on the cross. 
Grant that our hearts may be so fixed with steadfast faith in Him that we fear not the power of sin, death, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. 
Amen.
The facial images on the Shroud of Turin portray a man with significant swelling around his right eye and with broken cartilage in his nose. Jesus was ridiculed and manhandled by His captors throughout the processions from each place of examination and trial. Unable to gather enough evidence to convincingly condemn Jesus, and incapable of rendering the death penalty without Roman approval, the Sanhedrin took Jesus to the Fortress of Antonia for a trial before the Romany hierarchy in the guise of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. The Jewish elders were convinced they could try Jesus as a man who threatened to undermine Roman authority by claiming to be the Jewish Messiah. This was the equivalent of treason, a capital crime punishable by death.

For thirty pence Judas me sold, His covetousness for to advance; “Mark whom I kiss, the same do hold, The same is he shall lead the dance.”

Then on the cross hanged I was, Where a spear to my heart did glance; There issued forth both water and blood, To call my true love to my dance.

Then down to hell I took my way, For my true love’s deliverance, And rose again on the third day, Up to my true love and to the dance.

Jesus suffered in humiliating ways at the hands of the guards of the Sanhedrin, as well as the soldiers of Pilate and Herod. In this woodcut by Albrecht Dürer, Jesus’ face is hidden. Isaiah tells us that in a surge of anger, God hides His face from sinful mankind (Isaiah 54:8).
The Jewish leaders hoped that Pontius Pilate would put Jesus to death with little fanfare. However, Pilate had a great deal to gain if Jesus could oust the Jewish Sanhedrin. Although a cruel man, Pilate appears kindly disposed to Jesus, probably because of His potential to disrupt Jewish tradition. Pilate was in no hurry to put this man to death and tried several times to spare Jesus.

The Sanhedrin could not produce credible witnesses to prove that Jesus encouraged the people to revolt against Rome, so Pilate repeatedly proclaimed to the Jewish leaders that Jesus was innocent. Not to be denied, the Sanhedrin announced that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, and according to Jewish law, this blasphemous claim meant Jesus must die. Again Pilate refused to put Jesus to death. In fact, Pilate did all he could to release this man whose innocence was obvious to all and whose actions and behavior commanded respect. Finally, the Sanhedrin announced that Jesus had declared Himself a king. The Jewish leaders accused Pilate of not being a friend of Caesar if Jesus was released. As a territorial ruler, such a threat struck at Pilate’s Achilles’ heel. If these claims reached Rome and Pilate had failed to address the threat, the Roman emperor might take disciplinary action, threatening Pilate’s political career and even his life. As a result, the Sanhedrin achieved its goal, and Pilate was forced to treat this man who claimed to be a king as a Roman subversive. Condemnation was a forgone conclusion. The law called for crucifixion.

Before handing Jesus over to the Sanhedrin, Pilate visibly expressed his reluctance concerning the death sentence. To absolve himself of guilt related to putting this innocent man to death, Pilate ceremonially washed his hands of the affair and declared himself innocent of shedding an innocent man’s blood.

Notice the contrast in this painting by Caravaggio. The Sanhedrin claimed Jesus was a subversive revolutionary, yet He is shown modestly accepting the mockery of the crown and robe. Jesus appears as a very young man, almost childlike innocence is His robe, recalling that His first title was “the Child.” As Pilate presents Jesus to the people, seeking His release, the crowds call for His death—the ultimate injustice that will bring us forgiveness and eternal life.

The Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, tell how men spit upon and slandered the Lord in the high priest’s home. Who can repeat all these blasphemies? This blasphemous maltreatment went on continuously through the night until morning. The Evangelists touch on this just briefly, telling how they covered up His face and struck him in the face with their fists, toying with him, saying, “Prophecy, Christ, who is it that smote thee?” . . . Just as Christ of his own free will gladly became weak for our sakes, and allowed himself to be taken captive and bound, so also for our sake, of his own free will and gladly, he allows himself to be accused, mocked, spit upon, sentenced, condemned, and killed at aッsinner, even though he was not guilty of death. . . .

We Christians exult in this, that Christ, true God and man, suffered of his own will gladly. He did not wish to exercise His might, and His adversaries were not able to prove him guilty. What he did, he did for our sakes, so that he might break the stranglehold which sin, death, and the devil had on us. —Martin Luther