The Life of Jesus (124)

The Crucifixion of Jesus (2)

Outside the City Gate

Matthew 27:31-32

#1 Outside the City Gates

The fact that Jesus was crucified outside the city gates gives us insight into His death.

"The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood." (Heb 13:11-12)

The Day of Atonement was the day when the High Priest entered the Most Holy Place for the forgiveness of the sins of all Israel. When he entered for the third time, he would bring the blood of a goat and sprinkle it on the atonement cover.

"He shall then slaughter the goat for the sin offering for the people and take its blood behind the curtain··· He shall sprinkle it on the atonement cover and in front of it... (Lv 16:15-16)

#2 Outside the City Gates

Then, the body of the goat was burned outside the camp.

"The bull and the goat for the sin offerings, whose blood was brought into the Most Holy Place to make atonement, must be taken outside the camp; their hides, flesh and intestines are to be burned up" (Lv 16:27)

In the Old Testament, outside the camp refers to an unclean place. The bodies of sacrificed animals were burned outside the camp. If a person was found to have leprosy, they had to be expelled from the camp. Criminals were also executed outside the camp.

These rules were because God's presence was in the camp. Because God is holy, all unclean things were to be driven out of the camp.

"Your camp must be holy, so that he will not see among you anything indecent and turn away from you." (Dt 23:14)

#3 Outside the City Gates

Jesus suffered outside the city gates. He suffered the punishment of the cross outside the city gates just like how the carcasses of sacrificed animals were burned outside the camp in the Old Testament.

The fact that Jesus was crucified outside the city gates implies two things.

First, it suggests that His suffering and death was the fulfillment of His work of atonement as the high priest.

On the Day of Atonement in the Old Testament, the high priest would kill a goat and bring its blood to the Most Holy Place to make atonement for all the Israelites' sin. But Jesus entered the Most Holy Place with His own blood, thus obtaining perfect, eternal redemption.

"He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption" (Heb 9:12)

#4 Outside the City Gates

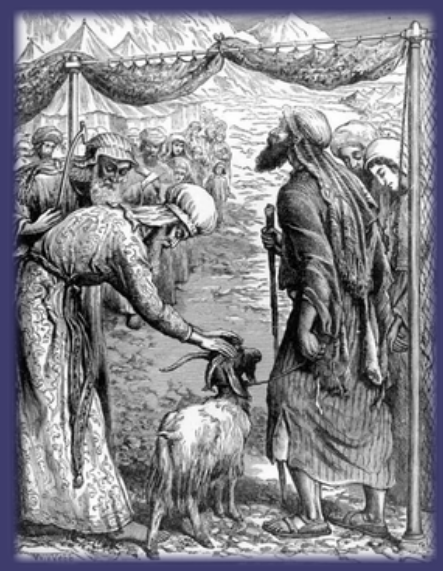
Secondly, Jesus' suffering outside the city gates also represents the shame of exclusion from God's presence.

Because He bore our sins along with their shame and curses, He was made unclean and therefore cast outside the city gates of Jerusalem, away from God's presence.

On the Day of Atonement, two goats were used. One was killed to make atonement for the sins of the Israelites. The other goat was carried to the wilderness and abandoned there. This goat was called the 'scapegoat'.

"When Aaron has finished making atonement for the Most Holy Place... he shall bring forward the live goat. He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites – all their sins – and put them on the goat's head. He shall send the goat away into the wilderness in the care of someone appointed for the task. The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a remote place; and the man shall release it in the wilderness" (Lv 16:20-22)

#5 Outside the City Gates



Before sending the scapegoat away, the high priest laid his hands on its head. By doing so, he transferred all the Israelites' sins and rebellion to the goat. Then, the scapegoat carried all their sins on itself and was abandoned in a remote place in the wilderness.

Through this process, God showed the Israelites that their sins were carried far away from them. Their sins were completely forgiven and no longer remained in them or ruled over them.

"He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities... As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (Ps 103:10, 12)

This is what Jesus did for us. Not only did He forgive us our sins, but He also removed them from us by carrying them in His body to Calvary and crucifying them on the cross.

#6 Outside the City Gates

Outside the city gates, which was considered unclean, was made holy, because Christ suffered outside the city.

The sphere of God's presence, which had been thought to be in Jerusalem where the temple of God was located, now extended everywhere beyond the city gates. Now we can worship God anywhere and feel His presence wherever we are, because Jesus suffered outside the city gates.

"A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth" (Jn 4:21-24)

What Jesus was saying to the Samaritan woman is that it no longer matters 'where' we worship. What is more important is what kind of heart we approach God with.

If our hearts are turned to God, that is where God is present, and that is where God receives our worship.

#7 Outside the City Gates

"Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore" (Heb 13:13)

The author of Hebrews adds an important criterion for us to go to Jesus outside the camp—we must be ready to bear the disgrace He bore on the way to Calvary.

For us to believe in Jesus means that we share in His suffering. There's no way for us to participate in His glory without joining in His suffering. All Christians are asked to take up their crosses with Jesus Christ, joining in His suffering.

"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Mk 8:34)

Taking up our cross and following Jesus means that we share in the disgrace and suffering He endured outside the city gate.