

How Awesome Is That Day to Me

*How awesome is that day to me-
O day of hallowed history!
Set time in God's determined plan
To sacrifice the Son of Man.
What famous work that day was done
By Jesus Christ, His Perfect Son!
The Second Adam, sent to save,
Humbly obeying to the grave!*

*How savage is that day to me-
O day of pure brutality!
When Christ, the Son of God Most High,
Was fiercely whipped and hung to die.
And O the horror of my sin,
Seen there in His appalling skin!
For God struck down- as meant for me-
The sinless One, at Calvary.*

*How precious is that day to me-
O day of purchased liberty!
In Him, a freeman now I live;
My sins, through death, did God forgive.
No wrath at length looms o'er my head,
But lovingkindness there instead.
His righteousness, my guilt replaced,
And Love, this ransomed soul embraced!*

*O awesome, savage, precious day-
'Tis God the Savior on display!
What peerless, holy, gracious Mind
Would fashion such a Grand Design?*

-- K. Hartnett, September 2001

BODY

Over 2500 years ago, the prophet Zechariah prophesied to the Jewish nation, returning from exile, dejected and without hope.

Zechariah 9:9

Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

In hopeful expectation, they began to rebuild the temple. Unbeknownst to them, the true temple of God would not come to earth for another 2 millennia. It was around the year 33 AD when Jesus entered into Jerusalem riding on the back of a donkey. Almost 3 million Jews were gathered in the city for Passover.

Luke 19:29-44

As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, 30 "Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 31 If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it.'" 32 Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. 33 As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" 34 They replied, "The Lord needs it." 35 They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. 36 As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. 37 When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: 38 "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" 39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" 40 "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out." 41 As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it 42 and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. 43 The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. 44 They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

While the disciples cheered in hopeful expectation of deliverance, Jesus knew the time for His kingdom had not yet come. Knowing His rejection was sure, Jesus prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem.

Recognizing there was great conflict over His person, Jesus withdrew to spend the night in Bethany. According to Jewish tradition, the Jews were to select their Passover lamb that night.

Luke 22:7-8, 13-16, 19

7 Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. 8 Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover." 13 They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover. 14 When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. 15 And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. 16 For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God." ... 19 And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

Later that same night, Christ was betrayed by His own disciples and sent before Pilate. Emerging from his palace, Pilate said, "I find no basis for a charge against him" (John 18:38). This would be the first of five times that Jesus would be judged innocent.

Luke 23:8-25

8 When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform some miracle. 9 He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. 10 The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. 11 Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. 12 That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies. 13 Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, 14 and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. 15 Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. 16 Therefore, I will punish him and then release him." 18 With one voice they cried out, "Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!" 19 (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.) 20 Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. 21 But they kept shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" 22 For the third time he spoke to them: "Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him." 23 But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. 24 So Pilate decided to grant their demand. 25 He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.

With that, Jesus was betrayed by His own people and sentenced to death.

HYMN 66 – To God Be the Glory

Luke 23:26, 32-43

26 As they led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. ... 32 Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. 33 When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. 34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. 35 The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One." 36 The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar 37 and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." 38 There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. 39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" 40 But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? 41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." 42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

It was His final hour. When most would have fallen into self-pity, Jesus remained about the Father's business. Though mocked, Jesus forgave. Though humiliated, He offered hope.

HYMN 185 – When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

Luke 23:44-48

44 It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, 45 for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. 46 Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last. 47 The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man." 48 When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away.

When Jesus drew in His last breath, the world was forever changed. The temple veil was torn from top to bottom symbolizing the new found access to the throne of grace. Jesus left His heavenly abode to walk the dusty streets of earth only to be nailed to a tree and crucified so that we, desperately depraved sinners, might have life. Jesus said, "He who believes in Me, has (presently) eternal life" (John 6:47). As we take the bread, which symbolizes the sacrifice of His body, may we remember His most precious gift, eternal life.

BLOOD

Before the Exodus, God promised Pharaoh that every firstborn male would perish because Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites leave Egypt. In order to save the Israelites from this same fate, God asked them to make a blood sacrifice and spread the blood over their doorposts as a sign of protection and deliverance. The Passover illustrates Christ's imagery as the perfect lamb of God.

Exodus 12:12-13, 21-23

'For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. 13 Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Pick out and take lambs for yourselves according to your families, and kill the Passover lamb. 22 And you shall take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning. 23 For the LORD will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you.

Christ would become the perfect "lamb of God." As Isaiah 53 explains, He was crucified as a lamb to the slaughter and pierced for our sins.

Isaiah 53:5-7

*But He was pierced for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,
And by His stripes we are healed.
6 All we like sheep have gone astray;
We have turned, every one, to his own way;*

*And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.
7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He opened not His mouth;
He was led as a lamb to the slaughter,
And as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
So He opened not His mouth.*

Christ knew that the cross that lay before Him. While in the garden of Gethsemane under great emotional stress, tiny capillaries in Jesus' sweat glands began to break, thus mixing blood with sweat. Yet, He knew the Father's will was that He would serve as the final and ultimate sacrifice for the sins of the world.

Luke 22:39-44

39 Coming out, He went to the Mount of Olives, as He was accustomed, and His disciples also followed Him. 40 When He came to the place, He said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." 41 And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed, 42 saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done." 43 Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. 44 And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

Matt. 27:24-26

24 When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it." 25 And all the people answered and said, "His blood be on us and on our children." 26 Then he released Barabbas to them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified.

As the Roman soldiers repeatedly struck Jesus' back with full force with a whip, the iron balls caused deep contusions, and the leather thongs and sheep bones cut into the skin and Subcutaneous tissues. Then, as the flogging continued, the lacerations tore into the underlying skeletal muscles and produced quivering ribbons of bleeding flesh. Pain and blood loss most likely set the stage for circulatory shock.

HYMN 195 – Nothing But the Blood

Before His crucifixion, Jesus endured a crown of thorns certainly meant to humiliate Him. He was then nailed to the cross. We know from remains of Palestinian crucifixion victims that these nails were five to seven inches long and about three eighths of an inch square. Besides the sure agony, Jesus surely lost enormous amounts of blood due to these piercings. But the one piercing that demonstrated that Christ's sacrifice was complete was the piercing of His side. It was this event that ensured that His sacrifice was complete.

John 19:34-37

34 But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. 35 And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe. 36 For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, "Not one of His bones shall be broken." 37 And again another Scripture says, "They shall look on Him whom they pierced."

As we reflect on Christ's sacrifice on the cross, let us think of the importance of the blood. It was no coincidence that John called Christ the lamb of God, for he was to be the perfect sacrifice of God. Let us take the juice as a symbol of Christ's sacrifice on the cross—shedding His blood on our behalf.

And Then...

*I saw them lift that awful tree,
And then His face came clear-
The beating by the Roman guards
Had plainly been severe.
His fabled, otherworldly eyes
Swelled thin from blows to them;
And then the soldiers cursed the Jews,
And spit on Him again.*

*He pulled and then He seized a breath,
And fell back from the pain.
A trickle from His punctured brow
Raced past His tongue in vain.
So many times I'd heard Him speak;
So much He taught seemed true...
And then- I'm not sure why- He said:
"They know not what they do."*

*The soldiers sat, and then began
To gamble for His cloak.
That some who touched it had been healed
Was bandied as a joke.
"He lies," the leaders said, and then
Insulted Him in spite;*

*But I had seen it with my eyes-
And knew that they weren't right.*

*Two criminals were there as well,
Both being crucified.
They joined the others mocking that
The Christ would thus have died.
And then one seemed to soften-
Like he feared to God his vice.
He prayed, and then from Jesus
There was promised Paradise.*

*And then the countryside grew dark;
The ground began to shake;
And even the Centurion,
Great dread did overtake.
We heard Him cry, "It's finished!" as
The earth howled in defraud,
And then we knew for certain that
This was the Son of God.*

HYMN 181 – Were You There? (verses 1-3)

As we leave here tonight, I ask that you remain silent, blow out your candle, and exit the sanctuary reflecting on Christ's sacrifice on our behalf. Let's close in prayer.