

The Customary Stations of the Cross

Jesus is condemned to death

Preserved in Scripture: Matthew 27:15-26, Mark 16:6-15, Luke 23:17-25, John 18:33-40

Pilate found himself in a bind. He had to choose between what was politically expedient and what was right, so he did what was politically expedient and had Jesus crucified.

Jesus takes up the cross

Preserved in Scripture: Matthew 27:27-31, Mark 15:16-20, John 19:17

It was Roman practice to scourge, whip, and insult a capital prisoner, then make him carry the crossbeam of the cross to the site of the crucifixion. On the way, they made a public spectacle of the prisoner and encouraged the crowds to insult him.

Jesus stumbles the first time

Preserved in Christian memory

There is no scriptural reference that I can find that says directly that Jesus stumbled, but the fact that the soldiers had another man carry His cross for Him strongly implies it.

Jesus encounters His mother

Preserved in Christian memory

There is no scriptural reference of Jesus encountering His mother along the way to the site of the crucifixion, but it is very likely that it happened. Mary was present at the crucifixion itself, so she was strongly motivated to make her way to Him while He was still carrying the cross.

Simon of Cyrene is forced to carry Jesus' cross

Source: Matthew 27:32, Mark 15:21, Luke 23:26

Jesus had been up the whole night, first at a Passover Seder, then praying in the garden, then being arrested and tried. He was tired even before He was scourged and whipped. The Romans wouldn't want Him to die of exhaustion, because that would be merciful. They would only get someone else to carry the cross for Him if they had reason to believe that He might die too early and thus escape the torture of the cross.

Veronica wipes Jesus' face with a cloth

Preserved in Christian memory

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Jesus was bloody and sweaty from the ordeal. According to Christian lore, a woman came forward and wiped His face with a cloth (traditionally called a napkin). When she took the cloth back, it had an image of Jesus' face on it. If she just pressed the cloth to His face, I could see that happening. The problem many people have with this story is that 'Veronica' was never used as a name before the story became widespread, and it is Greek for 'true image.' So many people think Veronica is fictitious, but hold off a moment on that—it could be that this really did occur, that she acquired Veronica as a nickname, and that she proudly used it as her name.

Jesus stumbles the second time

Preserved in Christian memory

There is no record in Scripture that I can find of Jesus stumbling again, but there is no reason to think that He didn't.

Jesus speaks with the women of Jerusalem

Preserved in Scripture: Luke 23:26-31

Under Jewish law, a woman cannot be a witness in a trial. That protects women from violence by men who want to influence their testimony beforehand or punish them for it afterwards. This meant that the women had greater freedom of movement than the men, because they could not be required to give an account for what they saw and heard. That is why women figure prominently here and at the crucifixion.

Jesus falls a third time

Preserved in Christian memory

There is no record in Scripture that I can find of Jesus stumbling again, but there is no reason to think that He didn't.

The soldiers strip Jesus for crucifixion

Preserved in Scripture: Matthew 27:35, Mark 15:24b, Luke 23:34

The Romans not only tortured capital criminals, they also humiliated them publicly. For that reason, people were crucified in the nude. We learn here what Jesus had worn to the Last Supper: a himation, a sari-like garment, over a tunic. In other words, He was dressed in what we would call His Sunday best.

The soldiers crucify Jesus

Preserved in Scripture: Matthew 27:35, Mark 15:24a, Luke 23:33, John 19:18

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Jesus was crucified at about 9:00 in the morning. This is approximate, since there were no clocks.

Jesus dies

Preserved in Scripture: Matthew 27:45-56, Mark 15:33-41, Luke 23:44-49, John 19:30-33

Jesus died about 3:00 in the afternoon, at the time of the evening sacrifice in the Temple. The Lamb of God was slain at the same time as the paschal lambs were being slain in the Temple.

Joseph of Arimathea Takes Jesus down from the Cross

Preserved in Scripture: Matthew 27:57-61, Mark 15:42-47, Luke 23:50-56, John 19:38

The bodies had to be removed from the crosses before sundown to avoid profaning the Sabbath. The bodies were customarily thrown in a common grave for criminals, but Joseph stepped forward and asked for and received custody of Jesus' body.

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus Lay Jesus in the Tomb

Preserved in Scripture: Matthew 27:57-58, John 19:39-42

Joseph and Nicodemus prepared Jesus for burial and put him in a tomb that Joseph had donated. Preparing bodies for burial was normally women's work, so this is an act of devotion. The women witnessed this from afar. Because they stood at a distance and because it was near sundown, they could not see that Joseph and Nicodemus had prepared the body, but they did know where the tomb was.