

Luke 23:48

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned.

Analysis

And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned. Following Christ's death, the crowd's response shifts dramatically. The phrase **smote their breasts** (τύπτοντες τὰ στήθη, *typtontes ta stēthē*) describes the ancient gesture of mourning and grief—striking the chest with closed fists. This verb *typtō* (τύπτω) indicates violent, repeated striking, expressing profound anguish. Such public lamentation was reserved for tragedies and deaths, particularly when guilt or horror gripped the participants.

The crowd that hours earlier had cried **Crucify him, crucify him** (23:21) now **returned** (ὑπέστρεφον, *hypestréphon*) in breast-beating grief. The imperfect tense suggests they kept beating their breasts as they walked away—ongoing, sustained mourning. What changed? They **beheld the things which were done** (θεωροῦντες τὰ γινόμενα, *theōrountes ta genomena*)—the three hours of darkness (v. 44), the torn temple veil (v. 45), Jesus's cry of trust and voluntary death (v. 46), and the centurion's confession (v. 47). These supernatural signs pierced their hearts with conviction that they had crucified an innocent man—possibly the Messiah Himself.

This moment foreshadows Pentecost, when Peter's sermon about crucifying Jesus caused the crowd to be **pricked in their heart** (Acts 2:37). Here we see initial conviction; at Pentecost, saving faith. The Greek *theōreō* (θεωρέω, "behold") means

more than glancing—it indicates contemplating, observing carefully, understanding significance. They moved from mob frenzy to sober reflection, from demanding crucifixion to mourning their participation. Their return home marks the beginning of dispersal—the spectacle is over, reality sets in, conviction dawns. Zechariah 12:10 prophesied this: **they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn.**

Historical Context

Public executions in the Roman Empire were designed as spectacles to deter crime and reinforce imperial power. Crowds typically gathered to watch crucifixions, often mocking the condemned. Jerusalem's population during Passover swelled to 200,000+ pilgrims, many of whom had witnessed Jesus's triumphal entry days earlier (19:28-40). The same crowd that shouted 'Hosanna' now participated in demanding His death—demonstrating the fickleness of mob mentality and human hearts apart from grace.

Breast-beating was a traditional Jewish expression of mourning, seen at funerals and times of national calamity. The gesture appears throughout Scripture as a sign of repentance and contrition (see the tax collector in Luke 18:13 who 'smote upon his breast'). The crowd's breast-beating suggests dawning awareness of catastrophic error—they had killed their Messiah. The supernatural phenomena (darkness, temple veil torn) were impossible to ignore or explain naturally, forcing recognition that God had acted in judgment.

Early Christian tradition holds that many from this crowd became believers at Pentecost (Acts 2:41—3,000 converted). Peter's accusation 'ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain' (Acts 2:23) found receptive hearts because many remembered this very moment—their breast-beating grief at Golgotha. God's grace transforms guilt into salvation for those who respond in repentance.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does the crowd's shift from 'Crucify him!' to breast-beating mourning illustrate the Holy Spirit's convicting work?
2. What role do supernatural signs play in awakening spiritual awareness and conviction of sin?
3. How does this scene foreshadow Pentecost, and what's the difference between guilt-driven grief and gospel-driven repentance?

Interlinear Text

καὶ πάντες οἱ συμπαραγενόμενοι ὄχλοι ἐπὶ τὴν
And **all** G3588 **that came together** **the people** **to** G3588
G2532 G3956 G4836 G3793 G1909

θεωρίαν ταύτην θεωροῦντες τὰ γενόμενα
sight G3778 **beholding** G3588 **the things which were done**
G2335 G2334 G1096

τύπτοντες ἑαυτῶν τὰ στήθη ὑπέστρεφον
smote **their** G3588 **breasts** **and returned**
G5180 G1438 G4738 G5290

Additional Cross-References

Luke 18:13 (Parallel theme): And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

Acts 2:37 (Parallel theme): Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

Jeremiah 31:19 (Parallel theme): Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth.

