

Holy Week

*³¹ Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”
(John 12:31–32 ESV)*

It Is Finished

Good Friday

April 3rd, 2015

John 19:16b-37

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Open your Bibles to John 19:16-37. That’s on page 905 in your pew Bibles. This is what God’s Word says:

¹⁶ So they took Jesus, ¹⁷ and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. ¹⁸ There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. ¹⁹ Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” ²⁰ Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. ²¹ So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but rather, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’” ²² Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.”

²³ When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom,

²⁴ so they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be.” This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, “They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.” So the soldiers did these things, ²⁵ but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” ²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

²⁸ After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), “I thirst.” ²⁹ A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. ³⁰ When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

³¹ Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away. ³² So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. ³³ But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴ But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. ³⁵ He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe. ³⁶ For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken.” ³⁷ And again another Scripture says, “They will look on him whom they have pierced.” (John 19:16–37 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

Our task this morning is to contemplate Christ upon the cross. My task is to serve as your guide in contemplation. Towards that end I want to help you ask and answer 3 questions. What happened? What does it mean? And how should I respond? First of all then, what happened?

What Happened?

Crucifixion is not something we are familiar with in our time and culture. It isn't enough for us to know that Jesus died – he had to die a certain way, the Bible makes that very clear. When Pilate suggested that the Jews deal with Jesus according to their own customs, the Jewish leaders refused and insisted that he be killed by the Romans. John told us explicitly in chapter 18 that this was no accident. After the exchange between Pilate and the Jewish leaders John records:

³²This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die. (John 18:32 ESV)

How Jesus died is treated in the Bible as significant therefore we need to know what happened. It seems very likely that John had Mark's Gospel open in front of him when he wrote his account. He seems to follow Mark's account pretty closely adding details here or there that he felt were significant. By putting those two accounts side by side we can reconstruct with a fair degree of confidence the sequence of events on that day. Fairly early in the morning Jesus is brought by the Jewish leaders to Pilate. The Jewish leaders wanted Jesus to be crucified as John 18 makes clear. They wanted to make a public spectacle of Jesus. They wanted to so shame and humiliate Jesus that no Jewish person would be likely to believe in his claims to have been the Messiah and the Son of God. They know the Scriptures which say: "cursed is the man who hangs upon a tree" (Deuteronomy 21:23). That is still the verse that is quoted to you by Jewish people when you make the case for Jesus as Messiah and Son of God.

Pilate however did not want to play along. He feared that the death of Jesus would incite a riot. He knew that there were many different crowds in Jerusalem that day. There was the crowd of Galileans who had cheered and welcomed Jesus into the city on Palm Sunday. And there was the crowd from Jerusalem more easily swayed by their leaders who would later cry out: "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Pilate feared the clash of these two crowds and so he was looking for a way out. He had Jesus flogged in hopes that this would be viewed as a sensible middle ground. Jesus

would be humiliated publicly and terribly chastised, the Jewish leaders would feel vindicated but the crowd of Jesus' followers would be less likely to riot. So he has Jesus flogged and he presents him to the crowd in John 19:5 and declares:

“Behold the man!” (John 19:5 ESV)

However, the crowd was not appeased and Pilate's plan backfired. Finally under immense pressure he handed Jesus over to be crucified. At this point where we began reading this morning at verse 16, Jesus would have received the standard pre-crucifixion scourging. The flogging Jesus received in verse 1 is not the same as the scourging he would have received as part of the crucifixion ritual. Different words are used when we compare Mark's Gospel and John's and we see different timing. The Romans had three different forms of scourging or flogging. Pilate gave Jesus the second type of scourging – translated here as “flogging” as a way of hopefully avoiding the necessity of crucifixion. It was brutal and humiliating and served as a stand alone punishment for serious but sub-capital crimes. The scourging that preceded crucifixion was altogether different. It was intended specifically to shorten the amount of time people spent dying on the cross. It targeted the chest area and it was intended to maximize the flow of blood. D.A. Carson describes it this way:

For victims who, like Jesus, were neither Roman citizens nor soldiers, the favoured instrument was a whip whose leather thongs were fitted with pieces of bone or lead or other metal. The beatings were so savage that the victims sometimes died. Eyewitness records report that such brutal scourgings could leave victims with their bones and entrails exposed.¹

From there Jesus was forced to carry his own cross – this refers to the cross piece to which his hands would later be nailed. The upright bar would have already been planted already in the ground. All three synoptic Gospels record that at some point in the journey Jesus fell and was then assisted by Simon of Cyrene. This would accord naturally with the fact that Jesus had now suffered through TWO extraordinary scourgings as opposed to the normal one. Once Jesus arrived at Golgotha he would have been stretched out and his arms nailed to the cross bar after which he would have been hoisted up and fixed to the upright beam of the cross.

The Romans crucified their victims naked. This was intended to humiliate. Jesus would have

¹D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 597.

hung naked on the cross and would have suffered the abuse of hundreds of people travelling into the city that day. Romans crucified people on the side of the road to maximize humiliation and as a deterrent against future rebellion. The soldiers divided the clothing of Jesus amongst themselves. Such that Jesus dies naked, reviled, robbed, abandoned and abused.

Because the next day was a Sabbath and because that Sabbath was a particularly holy day, falling as it did during the Week of Passover and The Festival Of Unleavened Bread, the Jews asked the Romans to send soldiers to break the legs of the three men being crucified that day. The reason this was done was because victims of crucifixion generally died slowly of asphyxiation - it was designed to be slow and awful. For hours, or even days victims were forced to fight for breath by pushing up on their feet which had been nailed to the upright beam. They simulataneously pulled up on their arms nailed at the wrist to the horizontal beam. They did this until their chest muscles were exhausted at which point they collapsed and sank upon the nails and suffocated to death. By breaking their legs the strain upon the chest and arms was greatly increased and the time to total exhaustion was shortened.

When they came to Jesus however, he was already dead. Again, this was likely due to the fact of his double scourging. To make sure that he was dead a soldier thrust a spear into his side and out of the wound came blood and water. Doctors who comment on this text suggest two possible reasons for this. I won't go into the details other than to say that which ever it was it is clearly related by John in order to establish the fact of death. Jesus died. There were already at the time John was writing this Gospel some docetic heretics claiming that Jesus had not ACTUALLY died on the cross – he only appeared to be human and he only appeared to die. John puts that error to bed. Jesus was flesh and blood and he actually did die.

John was concerned that we understand that as fact. He concludes his summary of the events with these words:

He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe. (John 19:35 ESV)

John has not related these facts just to inform us. He wants us to know what happened but more importantly he wants us to believe. Believing means more than knowing what happened. The

devil knows what happened; he had a front row seat. But believing is more than knowing what happened. Believing begins with understanding what it means.

That is the second question I want to direct your attention to. What does it mean?

What Does It Mean?

I would imagine we could talk about the meaning of the cross for all eternity and not exhaust the topic. However, two things in particular seem to be important to the Apostle John. We read last week from John chapter 12 where some Greeks come and they want to see Jesus. Jesus receives their visit as a signal that the hour has come for the climax of his ministry and the supreme manifestation of God's glory. In verses 27-28 Jesus says:

²⁷ "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." (John 12:27-28 ESV)

God says that he has been glorified in the life of Jesus but now he will be SUPREMELY GLORIFIED in the death of Jesus. Very clearly John wants us to understand the death of Jesus Christ upon a bloody Roman cross as:

1. An Astonishing Display Of God's Essential Character

I've chosen that word "astonishing" because scholars generally agree that John's theology of the cross is heavily influenced by the prophesy of the suffering servant in Isaiah 52 and 53. The prophet said:

¹³ Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. ¹⁴ As many were astonished at you— his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind— ¹⁵ so shall he sprinkle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand. (Isaiah 52:13-15 ESV)

Isaiah says that the display of the suffering servant will be an astonishing display – making clear to people things they would never have imagined. People are not prepared for what they see when they look upon Christ on the cross. We are not prepared for what that says about the HOLINESS OF GOD. We are not prepared for what that says about the LOVE OF GOD. We

struggle to take that in which is why the Apostle Paul admonishes us in Romans 11:22:

Note then the kindness and the severity of God (Romans 11:22 ESV)

Do not allow yourself to look away. Do not allow yourself to see less than is there. The cross is meant to be an astonishing display of God's essential character as HOLYLOVE.

Secondly it is clear that John wants us to understand the cross of Jesus Christ as:

2. A Sacrifice Of Propitiation

Don't worry about understanding that word; I am going to explain it to you. Having described the death of Jesus John makes reference to two Old Testament passages to provide theological framing. He says in verse 36:

³⁶For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken."³⁷ And again another Scripture says, "They will look on him whom they have pierced." (John 19:36–37 ESV)

The first phrase there, "Not one of his bones will be broken" is a reference to the Passover narrative. Speaking of the lamb that was to be slain on the original Passover, Moses in Exodus chapter 12 said:

⁴⁶It shall be eaten in one house; you shall not take any of the flesh outside the house, and **you shall not break any of its bones.** (Exodus 12:45–46 ESV)

Jesus died the way he did, with his blood splattered all over a wooden cross but with none of his bones broken so that you could recognize Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

The second quote in verse 36 is taken from the very end of Zechariah 12. He says:

"They will look on him whom they have pierced." (John 19:37 ESV)

He says that in order to explain the significance of Jesus being pierced in the side by a sword which results in a stream of water and blood coming out from his side. That prophesy in

Zechariah goes on to say that:

“On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness. (Zechariah 13:1 ESV)

When Jesus died and a flood of water and blood came pouring from his side a fountain was opened outside of Jerusalem to cleanse from sin and uncleanness. There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel’s veins and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.²

That is what is meant by “propitiation”. The word just means a sacrifice that changes how we experience God. It satisfies the wrath of God so that we can live forever under the favour of God. That’s what Jesus WAS when he died upon the cross. He was the sacrifice of propitiation, he was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, he was the Rock of Ages cleft for me – now let me hide myself in thee³. That is the truth that makes us sing. That is the death that changes the world and that is the heart and centre of the Gospel.

That brings us to our final question. If that’s what happened and that’s what it means, then what should we do?

What Should We Do?

The text answers that question; John puts his cards on the table and he tells us why he has told us what he told us:

He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—**that you also may believe.** (John 19:35 ESV)

John is not a disinterested reporter of events. He told us what happened, he told us what it was about and he did it for a specific reason. He wants us to BELIEVE. He wants us to stand here before the cross of Jesus Christ and to see and to love and to BELIEVE IN what we see. He wants us to see and to be astonished by the essential character of Almighty God. He wants us to look at the cross and to see God as HOLYLOVE. He wants us to see Jesus on the cross and to

² William Cowper, 1771, *There Is A Fountain Filled With Blood*

³ Augustus Toplady (1740-1778), *Rock Of Ages*

believe that GOD REALLY IS THAT HOLY. He hates sin. He hates sin so much that he condemned it to hell in the body of his Son Jesus Christ. He really is that holy.

And he really is that loving. He loves his children so much that he was willing to do for them what they could never do for themselves and to pay for what they did do in his body on the cross. He is that loving.

John wants you to see that – all of that and to believe. He wants you to see who Jesus is and what Jesus did and to understand that you need it. That you cannot go into God's presence and speak of your good deeds as if they will tip the balance and cover the debt of your bad deeds. That's not who God reveals himself to be in the body of Jesus on the cross. John wants you to see that – he wants you to see the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world – he wants you to see Jesus and to stand beneath flow of the water and the blood and so be saved. It doesn't matter whether you've been a Christian for 5 seconds or 50 years, either way, John wants you there. He wants you standing and staying by the cross.

*Jesus, keep me near the cross:
There a precious fountain,
Free to all, a healing stream,
Flows from Calv'ry's mountain.⁴*

Christ on the cross is the object of all Christian faith and hope. That's the song of the church, that's the heart of the Gospel and this is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

⁴ Fanny Crosby (1820-1915), *Near The Cross*