

Jesus is Crucified **(John 19:16-24)**

The cross of Jesus Christ marks the dividing line of human history. The crucifixion was indeed a watershed event. The world hasn't been the same since Jesus died on the cross, and it never will be. Having endured a series of mock trials, Jesus became not only the victim of human injustice but, more importantly, the volunteer for divine justice. He died for our sins, satisfying the holy nature of a loving and just God. Through faith in Jesus' death on the cross we receive forgiveness, hope, and life. The tragedy of the cross is the triumph of God's love.

The cross reveals the inhumanity of the human heart (19:16-18).

When Pilate sentenced Jesus to execution by crucifixion he revealed a great deal about human nature. While we voice our concern for justice, while we claim to uphold humanitarian ideals, deep down inside each and every one of us is polluted by sin. We're much more inhumane than we'd like to think. Our fascination with pain, suffering, and death reveals the reality of the darkness of our souls. The cross revealed this inhumanity of the human heart.

Pilate condemned Jesus to die on a cross (19:16).

Pontius Pilate will forever be a name associated with cruel injustice. While at times throughout Jesus' trial it appeared that Pilate sought Jesus' release, when push came to shove Pilate sacrificed justice for political security. John 19:16 says simply that Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified. Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent, yet he pronounced the death sentence on the holy Son of God. Furthermore, Pilate condemned Jesus to die by crucifixion. By all accounts ancient and modern, death by crucifixion was indescribably horrible. It was absolutely inhumane to impale a person on a cross. Nevertheless, this was the kind of death Jesus endured. Having pronounced this cruel sentence, Pilate handed Jesus over to the Jewish authorities along with the Roman soldiers, who were charged with carrying out Jesus' execution.

Jesus carried His own cross toward the place of crucifixion (19:17).

As was customary for victims of crucifixion, Jesus was forced to carry His own cross to the place of execution. We know from the parallel accounts that Jesus had been so severely beaten prior to His sentencing that He was unable to carry His cross all the way to Golgotha (Matthew 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26). Still, when the cross was laid on Jesus' shoulders His disciples would have been reminded of His words, repeated on at least two different occasions, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matthew 10:38; 16:24). Carrying His own cross, Jesus began the forced march to "the place of the skull"—Golgotha in Aramaic, Calvary in Latin.

Jesus was crucified between two criminals (19:18).

Once He had arrived at Golgotha, Jesus was crucified. His hands were nailed to the crossbeam. He was hoisted into position. His feet were nailed to the upright beam. There, in

indescribable agony, Jesus hung, exposed for all to see. There, the Creator of the universe was displayed in abject humility like a common thief. In fact, Jesus was crucified between two thieves. It wasn't by accident that Jesus was crucified in the middle of this little group of executed castaways. The drama of redemption took center stage for all to see. Humankind's inhumanity stood in stark contrast to God's infinite love.

**The cross reveals the
irony of the human perspective (19:19-22).**

Due to a placard that Pilate displayed on Jesus' cross we learn another lesson about human nature. In an interesting twist of irony Jesus was charged with being a king, while His accusers refused to acknowledge Him as such.

Pilate prepared a written placard for all to read, describing Jesus as the King of the Jews (19:19-20).

It was common practice to identify victims of crucifixion with their crimes by attaching a written charge to the cross of each victim. In Jesus' case the charge read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Although Pilate, due to the political pressures of the day, had conceded to crucify Jesus, he made one last stab at the pride of the Jewish leaders. The written accusation against Jesus was designed to irk the Jewish consciousness. The Jews had threatened Pilate with accusations of disloyalty to Caesar (John 19:12) and then declared, "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15). Pilate's written charge against Jesus, posted for all to read, threw these statements back into the faces of the Jewish leaders. Everyone who passed by the place of crucifixion would have been able to read these charges, since Pilate ordered that they be written in Aramaic, Latin, and Greek—the languages of religion, law, and commerce. No one could miss the message.

The chief priests protested this title for Jesus, but Pilate refused to change it (19:21-22).

Of course, the religious leaders reacted as Pilate intended. They took offense at the written charge published on the cross. The chief priests went to Pilate in protest. They wanted him to change the charge. Jesus, from their perspective of unbelief, wasn't really the king of the Jews. They wanted the placard to indicate that Jesus merely claimed to be the king of the Jews. Defiantly, Pilate responded, "What I have written, I have written." Therein lays the irony. The Gentile governor declared that Jesus was the king of the Jews, whereas the Jewish religious leaders rejected this identification. Pilate had no problem executing a Jewish king, whereas the Jews would have never executed a Jewish king. However, the Jewish leaders failed to see Jesus as the rightful king of the Jews. This is the irony of unbelief. Our perspective doesn't make something right or wrong, true or false. Right and truth lie in the object itself. Even though the Jewish leaders rejected Jesus as their king, He is king nonetheless. Even though people today reject Jesus as Lord, He is Lord nonetheless. Our perspective doesn't determine reality.

The cross reveals the

insensitivity of the human appetite (19:23-24a).

As the drama of the crucifixion unfolded, another set of actors reappeared on the stage. The soldiers who led Jesus to Golgotha and who nailed Him to the cross now divided Jesus' belongings among them. Their insensitivity to this dying victim reveals the insensitivity of our human appetite, our desire to accumulate possessions, power, and fame at the expense of others.

The soldiers divided Jesus' cloak among them while He hung on the cross (19:23a).

It was customary for soldiers to lay claim to the personal possessions of those being executed. There were apparently four soldiers who were responsible for crucifying Jesus. Once Jesus was secured to the cross, the soldiers took His only possessions—His cloak and His tunic—and divided these articles among them. At the foot of the cross, in the presence of our suffering Savior, these soldiers uncaringly tore apart Jesus' cloak and divided the four pieces of material, each taking his share. Jesus' worth, in their eyes, had been reduced to a few strips of torn cloth. Such was the insensitivity of these hardened men. Such is the insensitivity of many hardened hearts today that see no value in Jesus, the one who died on the cross for our sins.

The soldiers cast lots for Jesus' seamless tunic, His only valuable possession (19:23b-24a).

In addition to His outer cloak, Jesus wore a tunic. This article of clothing may have been the most valuable possession Jesus ever owned. It was seamless, woven in a single piece from top to bottom, indicating a higher level of quality. Because this tunic carried extra value, the soldiers agreed not to tear it into equal portions. Instead, they cast lots to determine who would take possession of this item. One "lucky" soldier went away that day with this special prize. Such was the insensitivity of their hearts toward their victim who hung in agony on the cross.

The cross reveals the sovereignty of the divine will (19:24b).

While the cross of Jesus Christ reveals a great deal about the human heart, it also reveals the heart of God. God planned from eternity past to provide the only possible atoning sacrifice for our sins. This sovereign will of God, predicted in the Old Testament, was revealed at the cross.

The actions of the soldiers fulfilled an Old Testament prophecy (19:24b).

Having described the incident of the soldiers' division of Jesus' clothing, John pointed out that their actions fulfilled an Old Testament prophecy. Psalm 22, written by King David a thousand years before Jesus, is a Messianic Psalm. It describes the Messiah's agonizing death and His separation from God the Father. Psalm 22:18 states, "They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing." John quotes this verse, proving that what the soldiers did at the foot of the cross was in accordance with God's divine plan of redemption. The Messiah would be rejected, executed, and so devalued in the eyes and hearts of people that even His clothing would be divided by casting lots.

God planned in advance that His Son would be treated as He was so that we can come to Him as we are.

God the Father knew all along that His Son would have to die an undignified death in order for us to be restored to fellowship again. We can't possibly change our own hearts. We can't wash away our own sins. We need a Savior. Thankfully we have that Savior. We have Jesus Christ. Thankfully He accepts us just as we are, laden with sin and guilt. Thankfully He took our sins on Himself as He died on the cross. God planned in advance that His Son would be treated as He was so that we can come to Him just as we are. Through faith in Jesus' death on the cross we receive forgiveness, hope, and life. The tragedy of the cross is the triumph of God's love.