

Christ Crucified (John 19:16–27)
By Pastor Jeff Alexander (11/6/2022)

Introduction

1. John omits details found in the other gospels but adds new details for one reason—to show the glory of Jesus Christ. In no place is this more obvious than in the events of the crucifixion. Jesus was fully in control of everything. He was a victim in no sense. This is evident in two ways:

He played Pilate and the Jews against each other in the trial, revealing their true natures: (1) Pilate was fearful and weak, yielding to the mob, terrified that an uprising would occur that would cause him political damage with Rome. (2) On the other hand, the Jews exposed their hatred for God and apostasy from His ways. However, these things worked for good—the redemption and salvation of God’s true people.

2. That Jesus was in absolute control of His circumstances and not a victim is revealed by the number of OT Scriptures that were fulfilled. The plan for the Son of God to die was purposed in eternity (1 Peter 1:18–20).
3. Consider two points: (1) We read in verse 24, “*So the soldiers did these things.*” (2) We note in verse 25, “*Standing by the cross of Jesus were ... [four women and John].*” The Greek syntax of these verses plays two things against each other: the soldiers and the bystanders.

I. The Crucifixion of the King

1. John focuses on the agents used of God to put His Son to death. It was not the Jews, but Roman soldiers who “*did these things,*” crucifying the Lord of Glory. “*He [Pilate] delivered Him over to them [the soldiers] to be crucified. So they [the soldiers] took [charge of] Jesus*” (v. 16). Matthew 20:19 records Jesus’ prediction that the Jews would turn Him over to the *Gentiles* to be mocked and flogged and crucified.

Their animosity against Jesus merely changed from Jesus to His followers (John 15:20). Why did the Jews hate Jesus? Jesus answered that question: “*If I had not come and spoken [the truth] to them, they would not have been guilty of sin*” (John 15:22, 23).

Christ followers must beware of the compromise of loving peace over truth. Believers are to “*stand therefore having fastened on the belt of truth*” (Ephesians 6:14). Jesus warned, “*Whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.*” (Matthew 10:38, 39; 16:24–26).

2. Why did John omit any reference to Simon of Cyrene whom the soldiers ordered to carry the cross? (Mark 15:21). He simply states that Jesus “*went out bearing His cross*” (v. 17). There are a couple of explanations for this omission in John: (1) John, being written late in the first century, may have sought to avoid a grievous gnostic error, which states that Simon of Cyrene was crucified in the place of Jesus. This error is held by Muslims to this day. (2) John’s purpose was to focus on the humiliation of the Son of God. The image of Jesus carrying His cross reminds the reader of Isaac’s carrying wood for his own sacrifice as commanded of God. (Genesis 22:6).
3. John also focuses on the *place* Jesus was taken to be crucified, “*Golgotha*” (v. 17). The site is uncertain, but the evidence leans toward a place near the present Church of the Holy Sepulcher just outside the northern wall of the city and on a main road. “*There they crucified Him*” (v. 18). Crucifixion was the cruelest form of torture and death ever devised.

Verse 18 also informs us that Jesus was crucified “*and with Him two others.*” This fulfills Isaiah 53:12. Matthew and Mark call the other two men *lestai*, “guerrilla fighters” or insurrectionists, the same word John uses to describe Barabbas (John 18:40). Only Luke informs us of the repentance and salvation of one (Luke 23:40–43).

4. An important focus is the inscription Pilate had written and posted on Jesus' cross (vv. 19–22). Such postings bore the description of the crime committed. Pilate wrote to spite the Jews, which is clear by their reaction, who wanted the inscription to state only that it was Jesus who *claimed* to be the King of the Jews.
5. Finally, John notes that when the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took His garments as spoil. The clothing of the criminal was also considered spoil for the executioners (vv. 23–25). They saw their actions as victorious; God saw them otherwise, showing the sovereignty of God in every aspect of Christ's death (v. 24; Psalm 22:18). It also ties to His being a High Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:5, 6). It was an act of humbling as Paul explains in Philippians 2, He humbled Himself in obedience, even to the point of death, so that God would exalt Him.

II. The Cross and the Bystanders in Helpless Grief

1. The Greek syntax of verses 24 and 25 (“*So the soldiers did these things, but ...*”) play two things against each other—the soldiers and the bystanders. John tells us that standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene. Two areas of some confusion are raised: (1) Why does John have the bystanders near when other gospels have them at a distance (Matthew 27:56 and Mark 16:40, 41)? (2) The number and identification of the women is an issue. There were four women: (1) Mary, the mother of Jesus; (2) her sister (unnamed) who we know as Salome, the mother of James and John; (3) Mary, wife of Cleopas, the mother of James and Joseph; and (4) Mary of Magdala, out of whom Jesus cast seven demons. It is very likely that John was a nephew of the mother of Jesus, which explains why Jesus placed her in his charge. What is puzzling is where were her other sons? John mentions nothing of the grief and wailing of the women, as would be expected.
2. Finally, the main focus of this section is Jesus' *compassion* for His mother (vv. 26, 27). The Lord's calling Mary “woman,” while neither harsh nor discourteous, was designed to *end* their natural relationship. Jesus' death and resurrection would forever alter everything. Unlike the Roman error of deifying Mary, Scripture exalts her only in the sense that she was chosen of God to bring God's Son into the world. Now and forever, she was to be as all other believers, a *follower* of Jesus.

Lessons

1. Everything about this scene of Christ's crucifixion and death points to its power and glory. Do you cherish the cross?
2. Jesus is King and Lord. No one makes Him so. He either reigns in hope and salvation, or He reigns in judgment and damnation. How does He reign in your life?
3. Paul gloried in the cross (Galatians 6:14, 15), not in the wood, but in the fact of Christ's crucifixion as opposed to the religion of the Jews with its glory in the flesh (circumcision). Any religious activity that detracts from His work alone is a grievous error. He will not share His glory with another.