



# GRACE

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI ♦ DEO ♦ GLORIA

## THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

### Sermon Notes

#### *The Crucifixion of Christ, Part I*

Jesus before Pilate

John 19:16-24

September 24, 2006

- I. The Obedience of Christ
- II. The Humility of Christ
- III. The Fulfillment of Christ
- IV. The Exaltation of Christ
- V. The Glory of the Father

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### I. The Obedience of Christ

- ❖ It is essential to realize that the obedience of Christ did not begin during His trial, but long before:

Luke 9:51 states,

“When the days drew near for him to be taken up, **he set his face to go to Jerusalem.**”

But, Christ's obedience begins will before this, as well, for, according to Ephesians 1:4,  
“...He [the Father] chose us in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world.”

- In Verse 17, John informs the reader that *He* went out – that is Christ went out, **bearing His own cross**, to the...the Place of a Skull.
  - The practice of a convicted criminal carrying is own cross was common in the first century.
  - In his, *Divine Vengeance*, Plutarch writes, ‘Each criminal as part of his punishment carries his cross on his back.’
    - This ‘cross’ was really the cross-member, known as the *patibulum*.

- ❑ In the Synoptics, Simon of Cyrene (Matthew 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26) had to carry Jesus' cross after the Lord collapsed; however, John doesn't mention this.
- ❑ The reason is most likely because, **from John's theological perspective Jesus is in complete obedience to the will of the Father.** Yes, He suffers to a degree we cannot fathom, but it is Christ's obedience to the will of the Father, not His sufferings, per se, which are the focus of John's Gospel.
- ❑ "It is possible to think of Jesus' death in terms of his resolution, his obedience to the Father, his Father's plan; it is also possible to think of Jesus' death in terms of Jesus' suffering, struggle, weakness and anguish. Both perspectives are correct; both are in some measure taught in each of the four Gospels. But John, even though he makes room for the suffering (e.g. 12:27-28), greatly emphasizes the sovereign plan of the Father and the Son's obedience. And so he reports, rightly, that Jesus carried his own cross." D.A. Carson
- ❑ Also, it is significant that by John stating that "He went out, bearing His own cross..." **Christ did that which no one else could do. Only the work of Christ could save us.**
- ❑ Note: The Place of a Skull may have been named that because of its appearance. There is a place in Jerusalem that fits this description today, but it is unknown as to whether this was the actual 'Place of a Skull.' Also, both Golgatha and Calvary mean 'Skull.'



## II. The Humility of Christ

- Again, in Verse 17, it states, ‘They took Jesus’ or it could read ‘They took charge of Jesus.’
  - It is, likely, here and now that they administered the second scourging that Jesus received, the *verberatio*, the most severe, brutal and grotesque form of scourging known.
  
- Then, in Verse 18, John simply says, ‘There they crucified Him...’
  - It is certainly not that he is trying to downplay the horror of crucifixion; however, the emphasis remains on Christ’s obedience to the will of the Father.
  - At this point, Jesus would have been [and is evident later] stripped naked, nailed to the crossbar, and lifted up onto the vertical portion of the cross already fixed in the ground.
  - Josephus wrote that crucifixion was ‘the most pitiable of deaths’ (J.W. 7.6.4 203; 1.4.6 97), Cicero called it ‘that cruel and disgusting penalty’ (*In Verrem* 2.5.64.165).
  - According to Andreas Kostenberger, “**Those crucified were made a public spectacle**, often being affixed to crosses in bizarre positions, and their bodies left to be devoured by vultures...For hours (if not days), the victim would hang in the heat of the sun, stripped naked and struggling to breathe.’

A. Reville wrote: ‘it [crucifixion] represented the acme of the torturer’s art: atrocious physical sufferings, length of torment, ignominy, the effect on the crowd gathered to witness the long agony of the crucified. Nothing could be more horrible than the sight of this living body, breathing, seeing, hearing, still able to feel, and yet reduced to the state of a corpse by forced immobility and absolute helplessness. We cannot even say that the crucified person writhed in agony, for it was impossible for him to move. Stripped of his clothing, unable even to brush away the flies that fell upon his wounded flesh, already lacerated by the preliminary scourging, exposed to the insults and curses of people who can always find some sickening pleasure in the sight of the tortures of others, a feeling that is increased and not diminished by the sight of pain – the cross represented miserable humanity reduced to the last degree of impotence, suffering and degradation. The penalty of crucifixion combined all that the most ardent torturer could desire: torture, the pillory, degradation, and certain death, distilled slowly drop by drop. It was an ideal form of torture’ (*The Life of Jesus*).

- Then, in Verse 23, John now tells the reader that the soldiers took Jesus’ outer garments and made four parts.
  - In the ancient Roman world, it was custom that the executioners would be allowed to take the clothes of the executed criminals.
  - The fact that John mentions ‘four parts’ leads us to an understanding that there were four soldiers in this ‘execution squad.’

- Also, that John refers to the ‘outer garments’ [plural] of Jesus likely means that they took His outer garment, belt, sandals, and head covering.
- John also states that the soldiers also took ‘the tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece.’
  - Josephus wrote that the χιτων, *kitone*, of the high priest was seamless; woven in one piece (*Ant.* 3.161). It may be that John is making a veiled reference to the truth that Jesus performed the duties of the great High Priest when He offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for us, his people.
  - Other scholars and commentators have suggested that the seamless tunic of Jesus represented the unity of the Church, the followers of Jesus Christ, who are gathered together through His death (e.g. de la Potterie).
  - M.F. Wiles references Theodore of Mopsuestia, stating that ‘Christ’s seamless robe woven from the top, which suggested to Origen the wholeness of Christ’s teaching, to Cyprian the unity of the Church, and to Cyril the virgin birth of Christ, receives from Theodore [of Mopsuestia] no other comment than that such methods of weaving were common in the time of Christ, although in his day they had died out except for soldiers’ uniforms.’
- The point that John is making; however, is that, as Jesus hangs on the cross **all of His earthly ‘possessions’ have been taken from Him.** The last things He ‘owned’ – His clothing – are stripped from Him and are now in the possession of His executors.
- As R. Schnackenburg wrote, ‘Yet while his last earthly possessions are stripped from him, he remains under his Father’s sovereign care, even as his tunic is not torn or destroyed.’
- Let us never forget; however, that as pitiful a sight Jesus is as He hangs on the cross – this is the point of supreme exaltation in the Gospel of Christ – for it is the crucified Christ that is the expiation of our sins and propitiation of the Father’s wrath!
- **As Christ lays aside His glory, He is ultimately glorified.**

### III. The Fulfillment of Christ

- Verse 17 states, again, that ‘They took Jesus, therefore, and *He went out...*’
  - John Calvin explains ‘[This was written] to prove that he [Christ] is the sacrifice for our sins, he wished both to be led out of the city, and to be hanged on a tree; for the custom was, in compliance with the injunction of the Law, that the sacrifices, the blood of which was shed for sin, were carried **out of the camp**, (Leviticus 6:30; 16:27;) and the same Law declares that ‘he who hangs on a tree is accursed,’ (Deuteronomy 21:23.) **Both were fulfilled in Christ**, that we might be fully convinced that atonement has been made for our sins by the sacrifice of his death;

that he was made subject to the curse, in order that he might redeem us from the curse of the law, (Galatians 3:13;) that he was made sin, in order that we might be the righteousness of God in him, (2 Corinthians 5:21;) that he was led out of the city, in order that he might carry with him, and take away, our defilements which were laid on him, (Hebrews 12:12).’

- John’s description of Christ as the one who ‘went out [of the city]’ demonstrates our Lord’s perfect fulfillment of scapegoat on the Day of Atonement.
- Also, however, many view this as the ‘fulfillment’ of Isaac’s work of carrying wood to the place of sacrifice in Genesis 22:6. Amazingly, there are Jewish scholars who compared Isaac’s work to that of a victim of crucifixion. In one of the Rabbinical commentaries on Genesis 22:6, the author writes, ‘[Isaac carried the wood] like one carries his stake [that is, his cross] on his shoulder’ (*Genesis Rabbah* 56:3 [on Genesis 22:6]).
  - ❖ G. Campbell Morgan correctly asserts: ‘It may be a challengeable opinion, but I think the Church of God has suffered more than it knows by pictures of the crucifying of Jesus; and sometimes by very honest and well-intentioned sermons, trying to describe the matter on the physical side. I am not denying the tragedy and the pain of it physically, but the physical suffering of Jesus was nothing compared to the deeper fact of that Cross.’
  - ❖ In other words, Christ was the perfect **sin-bearer** and did not merely suffer physically for our sins, but died for our sins in order to fulfill the shadow of the Old Testament sacrificial system.
- Then, in Verse 18, John informs the reader that Jesus Christ was crucified with two other men.
  - Matthew and Mark refer to these men as *lestai*, likely ‘guerilla fighters.’ (this was the same word used in John for Barabbas) [In Luke we read of the repentance of one of these].
  - No doubt **this is a fulfillment of Isaiah 53:12**.
  - It is also likely that John included the fact that Jesus died in between two criminals because Jesus *identified* with sinful men in His death.

“This gave Christ the opportunity to show His saving power by reaching out and rescuing a man at the very edge of eternity.”  
Reformation Study Bible, English Standard Version

- ❑ Lastly, in Verses 23-25, John tells of the soldiers, the executioners, who took Jesus' garments.
  - Only John references Scripture and its fulfillment in this scene. This would most definitely serve to evangelize the Jews who were already familiar with the Old Testament and its Messianic references.
  - John, quotes from **Psalm 22:18**, which is directly from the Septuagint, demonstrating that, even this 'small event' was a fulfillment of Scripture.
- ❑ The amazing truth here is that, although this event seems small and insignificant, it was yet another fulfillment of the Old Testament that was **necessary for our salvation!**

“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.” Matthew 5:17-18

- ❑ The smallest letter in the Greek alphabet is the *iota* [ **ι** ]; however, what Jesus is probably referring to here [as Jesus likely was speaking in Aramaic, a dialect of Hebrew] was the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet, called the *yodh* [ **י** ].
- ❑ The “stroke” is most likely a reference to “tiny projections” on some letters what help distinguish them from other letters [for example, notice the difference in Hebrew between the *he* **ה** and the *het* **הּ**].
- ❑ So, what Jesus is stating in Matthew 5:18 is, “Not the tiniest letter [i.e. the *yodh*], or even the tiniest part of a letter will pass from the Law...”

#### IV. The Exaltation of Christ

- ❑ In the midst of the horrors of Christ's crucifixion, John highlights something that is unique to his crucifixion account.
- ❑ Not only does he speak of the inscription above Jesus on the cross [JESUS THE NAZARENE, KING OF THE JEWS], but he, in a sense, explains to us its significance.
- ❑ Now, it was normal for criminals sentenced to crucifixion to wear a tablet or placard around their necks or carried before them to the place of crucifixion, explaining the crime they were convicted of.
- ❑ Once they were lifted up onto the cross, the placard was nailed to the cross. Most certainly this was intended to deter anyone from committing that specific crime in the future.
- ❑ In Jesus' case, His placard read: 'JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS.'

- John also explains that **the inscription was written in Hebrew, Latin and in Greek.**
  - **This is highly significant, as Aramaic, a Hebrew dialect, was the common language in Judea; Latin was the official language of the Roman army; and Greek was the *lingua franca* of the Roman empire, and well known in Galilee.**
  - Therefore, the placard declares the eternal truth of Jesus Christ in the languages of the world! This foreshadows the spreading of the Gospels to the ends of the earth, which will begin at Pentecost in Acts 2.
  - The irony here is, most certainly, obvious: Pilate, in a final act of revenge against the Jews, writes [or has written] that Jesus of Nazareth is the KING OF THE JEWS!
  - This clearly infuriated the Jews, as the sight of Jesus hanging on the cross was a pitiful and wretched sight.
    - Then, John tells us that the chief priests of the Jews approached Pilate and said to Him, ‘Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews’; but that ***He said***, ‘I am King of the Jews.’
    - Pilate, of course, refuses to bow to this demand of the Jews, having the ‘final word.’
      - This image of Pilate, as unbending, is attested in ancient literature. Philo (in *Leg. Gaium* 301) wrote that Pilate was, ‘naturally inflexible, a blend of self-will and relentlessness.’
  - Further, the title ‘Jesus of Nazareth’ was lowly, humble, and even derogatory. Recall, this is the title that the Jewish guards and Roman soldiers referred to Jesus as when they arrested Him in the Garden of Gethsemane.
  - Also, recall Nathanael’s words in John 1:46: ‘Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?’
  - **The idea of a Nazarene King would be unthinkable to the Jewish leaders.**
  - Most definitely, this was Pilate’s way of having the ‘last say,’ but it was truly God who had the last say – all that the Jews did, all the plotting and scheming, and the planning, and this is what it comes to.
  - As Jesus publicly [in a very public manner] hangs on the Cross, God sovereignly declares His truth to the World – that Jesus is KING!
  - **This is truly Christ’s exaltation!**

How ironic it is that God would use the anger between Pilate and the Jewish leaders, as well as Christ’s own horrific death of crucifixion, as the means to declare His eternal truth!

- ❑ ‘The Lord Jesus is indeed the King of the Jews; the cross is the means of his exaltation and the very manner of his glorification. Even the trilingual notice may serve as a symbol for the proclamation of the kingship of Jesus to the whole world.’ D.A. Carson
- ❑ ‘Thus did Pilate *Tell it out among the heathen that the Lord is King.*’  
E.C. Hoskyns (adopting the language of Psalm 96:10)
- ❑ F.F. Bruce wrote, ‘The Crucified One is the true king, the kingliest king of all; because it is he who is stretched on the cross, he turns an obscene instrument of torture into a throne of glory and ‘reigns from the tree.’
- ❑ An understanding of Christ ‘reigning from the tree’ was popular in the second-century among believers in the young Church. (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 73). This belief arose from a reading of the LXX [the Septuagint, or the Greek Old Testament] translation of Psalm 96:10: ‘Say among the nations, ‘The LORD reigned *from the tree.*’
- ❑ As John tells us, MANY of the Jews read the inscription. However, it is unknown how many of them were possibly saved after the death of Christ.
- ❑ Finally, the truth that **many of the Jews read the sign** further foreshadows the spreading of the Gospel in the manner in which God ordained – first to the Jews, then to the Greeks.

## V. The Glory of the Father

- ❑ Ultimately, this was the goal of Jesus Christ – to obey and glorify the Father!
- ❑ Read John 12:28; John 17:1 [Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You...’] and Hebrews 5:5 [So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him,  
‘YOU ARE MY SON,  
TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU’]
- ❑ It is **through obedience** that Christ glorifies the Father!
- ❑ Even this plan was the Father’s, and Jesus willingly and voluntarily, in His love for the Father, obeyed.
- ❑ As Acts 2:23 states, ‘this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.’
- ❑ The Apostle Paul’s words in **Philippians 2:5-11** once again give us the greatest insight into why Christ did what He did.
- ❑ This, most certainly, should be our desired ends in all that we do!