

# The Crucifixion and Its Significance

## Understanding the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ

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Good evening everyone, welcome to the auditorium of Calvary Road Baptist Church. We are located in Monrovia, California, about 20 minutes northeast of Los Angeles, California, and all of the excitement associated with being an Angelino, or all of the excitement associated with being someone who's in Los Angeles but not an actual Angelino, in the state of California presided over by Governor Gavin Newsom. Glad that you're here tonight. It's appropriate that we turn to a study of God's word midweek, so I ask you to join with me as we go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, we thank you for your goodness. We appreciate so much the opportunity, the access we have to the throne of grace, that we can obtain grace and mercy to help at time of need. And we are at a time of societal and cultural unrest and decline. There's all kinds of issues going on. We're thankful that we have the peace that passes understanding through Christ, who has made it possible for us to have peace with you through this thing called justification by faith. It's a wonderful thing the Lord Jesus Christ made possible for sinners to trust him and to be forgiven all of our sins, to have new life in Christ, to be declared righteous in your sight. And we ask that you might bless us as we live out the lives that you've set before us. We pray this now in Jesus' name and for his sake, amen.

I want you to turn in your Bibles, if you would please, to John chapter 19. We are making our way through the last day of the Lord Jesus Christ's life in his earthly ministry. If you'll recall, in John chapter 19, we are at a place where the Lord Jesus Christ was presented to Pontius Pilate just after dawn on Friday. Pontius Pilate tried him, found no fault in him. Upon discovering that he was a Galilean, he sent him to Herod Antipas, who was also in Jerusalem for the high holy days, and Galilee, the Galilee region, was under the jurisdiction of Herod, so he sent him to Herod to be tried. Herod tried to get him to perform miracles; he wouldn't perform miracles. Remember, this was the Herod that had beheaded his cousin John the Baptist several years earlier, and he found no fault in the Lord Jesus Christ. So he sent him back to the Antonia fortress, where Pilate tried him for the sixth and last of the trials that he had from the time that he was brought to Annas, the former high priest, the night before.

So after he was beaten brutally, Pilate attempted to set him free. The Jews would have none of it. They actually preferred Barabbas instead of the Lord Jesus Christ. Barabbas was a known criminal, a known killer, but they preferred him. So the population of

Jerusalem, the representatives of the population of Jerusalem, sided with a known criminal over someone who was just and righteous and without sin. He then had a sign made so that over the cross was "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" in three languages. And the Lord Jesus Christ carried a portion of his cross on the Via Dolorosa, certainly with the two thieves that were crucified on either side of him. About 9:00 in the morning, he was crucified. He was on the cross from 9 until noon. At noon, the sun darkened, and it was darkened pitch black over the earth for three hours. The Lord Jesus Christ, when the sun began to shine again, cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He was then on the cross for three more hours, and as it began to approach the Sabbath, which was as it began to approach sundown, the Lord Jesus Christ gave up the ghost.

And then the Jews, suddenly being very meticulous about making sure that there was no one hanging on a tree in violation of the prohibition in the law of Moses that would violate the Sabbath—I mean, they didn't mind conspiring against an innocent man, they didn't mind lying about an innocent man, they didn't mind killing an innocent man, but we mustn't have a corpse hanging on a cross in violation of a Sabbath. So they were meticulous about some things while ignoring far greater issues.

And so we are now in John chapter 19, and last time we looked at verse 32, this time we're going to look at verse 33, where the Lord Jesus Christ has given up the ghost. The chief priests went to the Antonia fortress to appeal to Pilate to allow the deaths of those hanging on the cross to be expedited so that they would be already dead, so their bodies could be taken down before the onset of the Sabbath. Pilate granted permission, dispatched presumably a second death squad to carry out his will, and we're now in verse 33 of John chapter 19. It reads, "But when they came to Jesus," that's this second execution squad. Remember, we talked last time, I pointed out the fact that if the Lord is crucified and there was a thief on one side and a thief on the other side, for some reason, when those soldiers came to those three men, they came to the one thief and then they came to the second thief, passing by the Lord Jesus Christ. So they either came to this thief and went over to this thief, or they came to this thief and went over to this thief—whichever way they came, they skipped over the man in the middle and went to the third person crucified. That is unusual behavior.

That's the kind of thing that when someone is reading the Bible with common sense, that someone is reading the Bible as an ordinary human being would read the Bible, they would notice that's weird, that's unusual. Why did they do that? Those are the kinds of questions that come up in the minds of a person who is reading the Bible with the right approach. They're not just scanning words to get through a passage so they can finish the chapter, close up the Bible, and turn on the TV. They actually are reading the Bible to glean truth from it. They want the Bible to have an impact on their thinking, upon their understanding, about their knowledge of the events, and so they're mining truth as they read the word of God.

But when they came to Jesus, these are the Romans now, the "they" is the Romans, this second squad of men sent by Pilate in response to the chief priests' pleadings. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs.

So let me just stop here because I'm going to assume that some of you, if not most of you, will have purchased a study Bible. I'm not an advocate of study Bibles, okay. The problem is people have a tendency to think that the study Bibles are right, and sometimes they're not right. It's just like sometimes people have the opinion that the hymns that are in the hymnal are always right, and sometimes the message of the hymns that are in the hymnal are not right. And when you read a song out of a hymnal, you need to read with a critical eye, okay.

I remember, and brother Moya will remember, that almost 40 years ago, we stopped singing a certain hymn because the message of the hymn was not scriptural. And when I announced to the congregation the reason why we were not going to sing it anymore, a guy got mad at me, and he complained that I've been singing that hymn my whole life. How ridiculous of him to claim that there's something unscriptural about it, and he left, never to return. So we have to understand, this is true, not always the hymnal, this is true, not always the commentary, this is true, and it's not a study Bible, okay. I especially abhor Bibles that have a gray section and a blue section and a pink section and a— that's, I just, if I were you, I would never buy one. Do whatever you can, if you already have one, park it and let it collect dust. I don't care what kind it is. It creates very, very, very bad study habits to make use of a study Bible like that, okay. So let me caution you, if you read the notes found in study Bibles, okay, and if you read commentaries, you need to be careful about. And you would read commentaries to help you in your understanding. I'm not against commentaries, I think they can be helpful, but what you do is you read the Bible, and then you study the Bible, and once you've come to a conclusion about what you think the passage means and how you think it could best be applied, then and only then you crack open a commentary and read it to see if this scholar has a recommendation or an observation that you hadn't thought of or that you were not aware of, okay. That would be also the time that you crack open the study Bible if you're going to read the note, okay, because maybe there's an insight that you hadn't thought of. But you should only turn to that after you have come to a personal conclusion. Now, maybe the commentary will correct you, maybe the study Bible will correct you, but you need to rely on them to correct your misunderstanding, not as the primary source of your understanding, okay. So you study the Bible first, always first, always first, and then you resort to these things, okay. So with that understood, it's incumbent upon me to make mention that one of the most popular and highly respected New Testament scholars of our day is a guy by the name of D.A. Carson. And he, I think he is now retired, the research professor of New Testament at the Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, which is in the suburbs of Chicago.

And I would like for you to consider this statement that he wrote in his commentary on the gospel according to John, which is a good commentary. It's not as good as Arthur Pink's, but it's good. And this is what he wrote in his commentary, a remark on the gospel according to John. I will read it, and then you let me know what you think is wrong with it, and of course, if you get it wrong, you don't get to go to heaven. I'm teasing, but if you can't catch what's wrong with it, it ought to alarm you a bit. I don't think you should lose sleep over it, but it ought to be a little bit of a wake-up call, okay.

So here's what he wrote about John chapter 19:33: "Apparently the soldiers began by working from either side. John has already explained that Jesus was crucified between the two others in verse 18. They found Jesus already dead, an unusually speedy death that may well have been hastened by double floggings, and therefore did not break his legs." What's wrong with what he said? Because what he said was wrong. Yes, sir. He doesn't mention—that's right, he does not mention that the Lord Jesus gave up the ghost, but I want to know what he said that was wrong. You pointed out what he didn't say, which is good. What did he say that is wrong? His assertion that was wrong? Yes. He did have double floggings, so that was an accurate statement, okay. Yes, ma'am. Yes, he attributes Christ's death to the double floggings. In other words, it was the very, very harsh beating that the Lord Jesus Christ had that hastened his death. No, it wasn't. No, it wasn't. No, it was not. No, it was not. No, that's not why he died. That is not why he died. He died because he gave up the ghost.

Okay, now this, this is with D.A. Carson, a lapse. This is, this is not good. This is precisely why, if you're reading a commentary, you need to be careful. We have no business attributing the death of the Lord Jesus Christ to anything other than his voluntary giving up of the ghost. He specifically said, "No man takes my life from me." Didn't he? He meant it, didn't he? Then he didn't die because of the floggings. I'm not denying that he got flogged. I'm not denying that he suffered greatly because of the floggings. But there is nothing in the Bible, there is nothing in the Bible that would give anybody grounds for maintaining that he died because he was so severely beaten. No, he died because he gave up the ghost. And don't let anybody tell you any different, because that's the truth. And I believe that when you're reading the Bible, you need to be that alert. I believe when you start reading a commentary, you need to be more on the alert. And I believe that when you're reading the notes of a study Bible, you need to be more on the alert. Why? You need, because truth is important. And the way you learn how to spot truth is the way—and I don't know if they still do that, I'm not even going to ask Jordan—but it used to be that the way they trained tellers to spot counterfeit money was by having them handle so much real money that as soon as they counted and they came to a counterfeit, they would immediately recognize it by feel, okay. And you need to be the kind of person that has such a familiarity with truth that something that doesn't ring true, it immediately stops you. And then you start trying to figure out why is it that what he wrote, why doesn't that sound right, why doesn't that read right, why doesn't that ring true. And if you didn't catch that, that doesn't mean you're not a Christian, okay, but it ought to be an alert to you. You ought to be alarmed by the fact that there isn't a red flag, a red flag being waved in your thinking as you, if you were to read something like that, okay.

Now, I caught that. I don't know how many people would actually catch that. I'm not bragging on myself for catching that. I have the gift of criticism, you know that, right? You know that, okay. So I must emphatically disagree with D.A. Carson. Our Lord's death was not hastened by double floggings. Our Lord's death was the direct result of his decision to give up the ghost, according to verse 30, okay, for the purpose of his body and the bodies of the thieves being taken down from their respective crosses before the onset of the Sabbath. In other words, he gave up the ghost at that time so

that he would not violate the Sabbath, so they would be able to take his body down, okay.

It is important that whenever you approach the footnotes in a study Bible or the comments written in a Bible commentary of any kind that you do so with an abundance of caution, okay. And by the way, there will be people around you that when you do that, they'll just poo-poo, they'll poo-poo the idea that you're being so cautious, okay. There are very few, there are very few men whose comments I trust to always reflect their belief in the absolute accuracy and trustworthiness of God's word. One of one of the Bible commentators that I have—absolutely, I have never discovered something that gives me a whiff of a hint that he waivers on the absolute authority of God's word—is Arthur Pink, okay. He's one, all right. And there are others, almost none alive today would I have that kind of confidence in. So you have to proceed, you have to proceed from confidence in God's word to a consideration of the opinions of men. You start with confidence in God's word, and then you cautiously proceed to a consideration of the opinions of men. You do not go in the other direction. You do not start with the opinions of men and then proceed to the Bible. No, you start here. You always start here. You go from here to the opinions of God's word. You say, "Well, isn't it wrong to do that?" No, because God's plan is for us to have the humility to sit at the feet of teachers, okay.

And, excuse me, there's something—there, there's something not right with you in the head if you've never been in a classroom when the teacher said something that's not right. Because teachers are human beings, and the best teacher in the world will, on some occasion, make a statement that isn't true. And good teachers don't have a problem with a kid that's paying attention and who does this: "Teacher, you said this, but two days ago you said that." You're right, congratulations, that means that the teaching process is ongoing, and there is learning taking place in the classroom, because that's supposed to be that kind of a process. So you proceed from confidence in God's word to a consideration of the opinions of men, not the other way around.

Now, before we look at verse 33, let's review something that we know occurred in connection with verse 32, which reads, "Then came the soldiers and brake the legs of the first and of the other which was crucified with him." Okay, now recalling from verse 19 that the Lord was crucified between two thieves, we know that definitively from verse 19 of John chapter 19. Verse 32 revealed the actions of the soldiers, plural, plural. There was more than one guy, approached one of the thieves and then approached the other thief, okay. More than one guy, at least two, possibly more. These soldiers, who were dispatched by the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, and this, of course, to refresh our memories again, this was in response to the Jews' plea for the quick deaths of the three on the cross and their bodies' quick removal before the onset of the Sabbath. They were sent, these Roman soldiers, they were sent, broke one thief's legs and then the other thief's legs before then turning their attention to the man in the middle, who was, of course, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And as I pointed out last week, folks, that's weird. That's not right. That's unusual. That's not the way you would do it. You would go 1, 2, 3 or 1, 2, 3. You would not go 1, 3, 2 or 1, 3, 2. You wouldn't do it that way. You would do it the first way. So why did they do it the second way, huh? I think we have a sermon here. If you ever are called upon to provide a devotional message for someone, you've got one right here. What the second Roman execution squad, who were dispatched by Pilate, what they did that was so typical of sinners in general with regard to the Lord. What did they do that was so typical of lost people? They did it. We see it. We see it done as they approached the three on the cross. In attending to the one person or thing, they then passed by the Savior to attend to another person or thing.

You say, "What do you mean?" This is the guy who graduates from high school. He knows he needs to come to Christ, but not until after I go to college. See, consideration of the Savior, he deals with one thing, skips over the Lord to go to the other thing, thinking I'll come back to him, okay. Or the guy who gets out of high school, and he knows, he's sat under the preaching of the gospel, he knows to get saved. "I'm going to join the Marine Corps, and then I will serve my country, I'll do this." He skips over the Lord, thinking that he'll come back to it later. Doesn't usually happen that way, does it? I've been in the ministry for a long, long time, and it doesn't usually happen that way. But it's such typical behavior. What people will do is they know what they ought to do. They're involved in something, and they know, they know the next thing must be Christ, but then, no, they're skipping. It's what these guys did, isn't it? Isn't that what these guys did? Yep.

So typical of a sinner to tend to someone or something, with the Lord being a consideration who is passed over in favor of another person or another thing. Big mistake, big mistake, common mistake. Delay, delay, delay and procrastinate, procrastinate, procrastinate. That is how people go to hell. That is precisely how people go to hell. Delay, delay, delay, procrastinate, procrastinate, procrastinate. Come to here, but not here. Come to here, then skip over and go to here. That's how people end up in hell. That's exactly how people end up in hell.

But when they came to Jesus, why would they come to the Lord Jesus, meaning, of course, more than one of them? We've got plural, okay. Why would they come to the Lord Jesus? Perhaps several of the execution squad were needed to grab, because the question is, why does it take more than one Roman soldier to do what was done to the one thief, what was done to the other thief, and now what they were considering doing to the Lord Jesus? Why more than one guy? See, what do you mean? Well, what's the one guy doing? The one guy is wielding a very heavy iron mallet with which he swings it and breaks legs. So we're not talking about a five-pound hammer. We're probably talking about a 10-pound hammer, okay. Anybody here ever swung a five-pounder? Pretty heavy, yeah. Yeah, this is probably heavier, okay. And, but it only takes one guy to swing a big heavy mallet like that. So why, why we're, and we're specifically informed that there was more than one soldier. Why? I think the plan was, when you come up to someone who's hanging on a cross, okay, a nail through this part, okay, and through this part, between the radius and the ulna, between the radius and the— not through the wrist, because that would break bones, okay—through this part, and

then driven through—I don't know what these two bones are called, okay, tibia, fibia, is that what they're called? Anyway, do we have a nurse in the room? Oh, yeah, yeah, okay, okay, never mind, okay.

So what would happen is, these guys on the cross, they know what the Roman soldier's doing. They see him approach. They're totally familiar with what's going on around them, okay. And they see this one Roman soldier walking toward them with this big heavy iron mallet, and if they hadn't figured out right away what he was going to do, then they would find out what he is doing there by watching what he did to the first guy, where he swings and the guy howls in pain because he just shattered his leg, and then he gives it another swing, and he shatters the other leg. So what are these guys on the cross going to start doing when the guy gets to them? They're going to start moving and doing as much as they possibly can within the constraints of the three nails that have them pinned to the cross. I mean, these guys are active. They're doing everything they can to avoid the striking of the mallet. The will to live is very, very powerful in most people, because so often the doomed individual knows a terrible fate awaits him in the next life. He may not know exactly what he's going to have to deal with, but he knows it's not going to be good. Most guys that are facing death know it's not going to be good. It's not going to be good.

And so, but when they got to the Lord Jesus Christ, and maybe, maybe there was one Roman who was holding the mallet, and then another Roman would hold one leg, and another Roman would hold another leg, where they'd grab him just above the knee, grab him just the—and pull as hard as they could to stabilize him so that the guy could swing and hit with his first stroke, and then swing and hit with the second stroke. And they would have to be restrained, because these guys, for fear, are moving and are suddenly very energized. But when they got to the Lord Jesus Christ, obviously, they saw that he was dead already. The Lord Jesus had, previous to their arrival, given up the ghost, according to verse 30. He's already dead.

So what would cause these Romans to conclude that he was already dead? If you walked up to a guy whose corpse was hanging on the cross, what would cause you to think, "This guy's already dead." There's a couple of things that living people do that dead people don't do, 'cause they're dead. So what would cause you to think, "Oh, this guy's already dead." What's missing is—let's, let's—the only one who can think of what dead people don't do that living people do do? Let's go, hear it, let's hear it. Yeah, yeah, if the guy's not—if he's not doing that, he's probably dead, right? Or he has passed out, and within just a few seconds, he's going to be dead, okay, because he's spent so far nine hours on the cross, right? So he's, he's winded, he's tired, he's doing everything he can with the last ounces of strength he has to keep himself—is it aspirated? He's keeping his, filling up his lungs with oxygen. And so, when they walk up to a guy, and his—there's no, there's no respiration, yeah, he's dead.

But that's not all. There's something else that typically you would see with a person who is alive that would be instantaneously gone when the person is dead. Now, remember, we're not talking about fat boys. See, what—how do you know that there were no fat boys then, okay? Unless you were some rich guy that, you know, was

eating all the time, like the rich man in Lazarus, you didn't see fat boys on the cross, okay. The guys you saw on the cross were lean, okay. They did an awful lot of walking, life was very, very hard, and they were not affluent. So they were lean. So if a person is lean, and he's alive, and he is struggling ferociously to stay alive, in addition to respiration, what else might you notice about him? What would be popping on his neck? His carotid arteries would be thumping because his heart is pounding, okay. And if those Romans saw, he's not breathing, look at his neck, nah, he's dead. He's dead. Arteries on his neck, nothing there. And of course, of course, they're going to verify that he's dead. But they already knew. Remember who these guys are. These are professionally experienced and very cruel executioners. They are practitioners of the dark arts of brutal torture and murder by crucifixion. There is nobody alive anywhere in the world more experienced at meting out death than these guys. Nobody knows how to kill and knows when the kill has been made better than these guys. So the verse continues, they brake not his legs. No need to break his legs. Why not? Well, he's already dead. And why go to the extra effort of swinging that heavy iron mallet when it wasn't needed? They would have broken his legs if it was needed to expedite his death, but he's already dead.

Now, think about this for just a moment. It is a significant component of the gospel that the Lord Jesus Christ died. 1 Corinthians chapter 15:3, Paul writes, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. His death is crucially important to believers in Christ because it's one of the lynchpins of the gospel. Christ-deniers always seem to maintain that either the Lord Jesus Christ never existed, which is very easy to disprove, or that when he was crucified, he did not die. Who denies that he died? Who do you probably know denies that he died? Don't let me down again, I'm already so hurt. Yes, Mr. Ken. Muslims. The Muslims. It is an article of Muslim faith that the Lord Jesus Christ did not die and could not have died. The Muslims acknowledge that the Lord Jesus Christ was a prophet, and because they have a—because of their view of things, they do not believe that it would be possible for Christ to have died and for God to have thereby gained a victory. They, it is incomprehensible to a Muslim that the Savior died in order to conquer death. They completely deny that, okay.

And there are also those who subscribe to some swoon theory, where they don't really believe in the miracle of the resurrection, so they try to explain it away by saying, "Well, you know, the Lord Jesus Christ, he just fainted on the cross. He just passed out from shock, and they took him down." But we're going to learn in the next verse, they took him down after running a spear up into his side. But they would maintain that he passed out, they took him down, they got him into a tomb, they closed it up, and in the cool of the evening, he was somehow revived and somehow rested. No, no, no, no, no. It is profoundly important to the Christian faith that our Lord Jesus Christ actually died, exactly how the word of God predicted he would and did die. You are not victorious over death by avoiding it. You're victorious over death by dying and then rising from the dead, conquering it thereby.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for your goodness. Thank you for the word of God. We pray that you might help us in our discernment as we study your word, that we might read it for understanding. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.