

# The Reality of the Cross

John 19:16-30

Go ahead and be turning in your Bibles to John 19. While you're turning, I have a couple of announcements. First off, GUYS, there will be NO IRON MEN meeting this week. If you show up, it'll just be you and the other guys who weren't listening. We'll be back on in August. Secondly, THANK YOU for your outpouring of love with the Eller Love Offering. You have graciously given just over \$30,000 (\$30,373.37), which is AMAZING!!! If you wanted to give but never got around to it, you can still give on the Mount Pleasant website.

As human beings, we are shaped by our experiences. Events impact us, and as a result, they become part of our story. It could be a personal experience from your childhood or an event like meeting and marrying your spouse, the birth of a child, or a once in a lifetime journey. It could be the tragic loss of a loved one or an event that touches an entire nation like 9/11. It could be an historical event that affected us all before we were even born. Such an event is our focus this morning. The crucifixion of Jesus is at once the darkest and the brightest moment in all of human history. In one gruesome, gutwrenching scene the rebellion of fallen humanity reached its climax as they put their Creator to death on a cross. Meanwhile the ever-faithful, unconditionally-loving God purchased our redemption at the cost of His only Son's life, and the story of humanity was rewritten. Sadly, however, we as human beings have short memories and we're prone to distractions, and such an earth-shaking, eternity-altering event can fade into the background of the busyness and routines of our lives. Oswald Chambers appropriately said...

***“All of heaven is interested in the cross of Christ, hell afraid of it, while men are the only ones to ignore its meaning.”***

This is certainly true among the lost, but even among the saved, such an all-important event can become familiar and lose much of its meaning. So, today, as we study what is arguably the MOST FAMILIAR scene of Christendom, I pray that we'll all be stirred up by way of reminder. In verse 16, we read...

**John 19:16-18**

**16 So he [that's Pilate] delivered him [that's Jesus] over to them [that's the Jews and the Roman soldiers] to be crucified.**

**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.**

That first verse pretty much summarizes Pilate's tenure as governor over Syria. As Pastor Kevin taught a couple of Sundays ago, Pontius Pilate wasn't beloved by the Romans, MUCH LESS the Jews! He spent all of his political capital on a couple of stupid stunts, and when the Jews applied pressure, even complaining to Tiberius Caesar at one point, Pilate was forced to bend to the peoples' wishes. He had ZERO political capital to spend now in a moment when he truly needed it. Had he not been so foolish earlier on, he probably could've stood his ground against the Jews and even prevailed when they complained to Caesar, but he didn't, so HE CAVED. In the grand scheme of things, that being the LORD'S scheme, it didn't matter. Jesus was supposed to die this way, and all persons involved got to maintain their records of apathy, cruelty, and false piety.

John said that Pilate delivered Jesus to the Jews for execution at the hands of the Romans, but it could easily be read, "**So he** [God the Father] **delivered him** [God the Son] **over to them** [the demonic hordes and fallen humanity] **to be crucified.**" This was the Father's plan all along as the best-known Bible verse tells us this. "**For God so loved the world that he GAVE his only son...**" (John 3:16a).

Those who received Jesus into their hands for execution "took Jesus," as if they had AUTHORITY they hadn't received, as if they were carrying out a plan that was original to them. However, not only were the wicked actors of this scene in history pawns in the hands of the demonic, the demonic were pawns in the hands of God. The Bible tells us that...

#### **1 Corinthians 2:8**

**None of the rulers of this age** (the demonic forces of Satan) **understood this, for if they had** [if they'd understood that Christ's crucifixion was the wisdom of God, and that it would result in our righteousness and sanctification and redemption], **they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.**

The Father manipulated the demonic realm manipulate wicked humanity to crucify His Son, and in so doing, the Father poured out all His wrath for sin upon the Son, who being sinless Himself, took it and thereby made atonement for sin. As the apostle John would later write...

#### **1 John 4:10**

**In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.**

However, this scene also shows us that Jesus wasn't an unwilling participant in the Father's plan of redemption. When John says that "[Jesus] went out, bearing his cross," it was really just a repetition of Jesus' own words when He previously said...

#### **John 10:17-18**

**17 For this reason the Father loves me, because I LAY DOWN MY LIFE that I may take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I LAY IT DOWN OF MY OWN ACCORD. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.**

So, yes, Pilate delivered Jesus over to be crucified, but the Father had already delivered Him over for that very purpose, and the Jesus willing laid down His life in obedience to the Father's command. There is NO GREATER MONUMENT TO THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD than the cross of Jesus Christ. When things seem like they're spinning out of control in your life, look to the cross and be reminded that the Lord who had everything in hand then has everything in hand now and in your life.

The ancient, Jewish historian Josephus called crucifixion ***"the worst of deaths."*** The condemned would be stripped and flogged with a cat-of-nine-tails—a whip-like implement of torture consisting of nine cords, each ending with a metal ball or piece of bone tied into it for tearing and ripping flesh. Half of those who underwent this punishment died from this. However, those who persisted were nailed to a cross—spikes driven through the wrists and feet, where they hung until they died of blood loss, or usually, asphyxiation.

The Roman statesman-philosopher Cicero said, ***"It was the most cruel and shameful of punishments,"*** which made it ideal as appropriate punishment for sin this side of eternity. As we already mentioned, Jesus was sent by the Father to be butchered in this way in order to be our *PROPITIATION*, the *ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICE* for our sin. In order for God to forgive sinful humanity, the Sinless Son of Man had to take the punishment for us, so the Father poured out all His wrath upon His Son as Isaiah prophesied...

#### **Isaiah 53:5**

**But he was wounded for our transgressions;  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,  
and with his stripes we are healed.**

Paul would later write that ***"the wages of sin is death,"*** and while the Father sought to show mercy to fallen humanity, He was bound by His holy, righteous, and just character to maintain this requirement, and by executing it upon His Son, He was both ***"just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus"*** (**Romans 3:23a; 26b**). ***"There they crucified him,"*** and by faith and God's grace, we are JUSTIFIED and REDEEMED. Continuing, we read...

#### **John 19:19-22**

**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.**

As we already talked about, Pilate was one dumb move away from completely losing control in Jerusalem. Once again, the Jewish elites had him backed into a corner, so he caved to their will...BUT only as much as was needed to save his skin. Refusing to comply further, Pilate was back to being an

antagonizing despot. I believe he intentionally had the inscription written erroneously in order to STICK IT to the Jews. For these triggered Jewish religious leaders, they were being conquered by Rome all over again. The chief priests were happy to have Jesus executed as a rival to Caesar, but when such an indictment brought embarrassment upon them, they wanted a retraction. They wouldn't get it. Hundreds of thousands, possibly millions, of Jews had descended upon Jerusalem from around the world in order to observe the Passover Feast. Pilate meant the inscription to be a slight against them, but in reality, he was putting up a BILLBOARD with NEON lights, announcing to EVERY JEW that their King, their True King had been cut off. In a way, Pilate actually primed the hearts of those who would hear Peter's heart-piercing message on Pentecost when 3,000 souls were SAVED. After the soldiers had crucified Jesus and the chief priests had squabbled with Pilate over the inscription naming Jesus' charges, we read...

### **Psalm 22:18**

**They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.**

Wait a second. That was Psalms, not John! Hang on. Let's try this again...

### **John 19:23-24**

**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,**

No, the production team didn't get my verses out of order. Though we're studying the gospel account of John, David's prophetic words would more than suffice as a description of events. He wrote with the specificity and accuracy of an EYEWITNESS, for he wrote of what he saw through the eyes of One who was. You see, Jesus never opened His calendar app and thought, *"Okay, let's see. Today, I've got to go heal so-and-so—chew out some Pharisees while I'm there—teach my disciples, and fulfill one...two...no, THREE prophecies. Huh! Busy day!"* When the soldiers crucified Him, He didn't have to instruct them, saying, *"Now make sure you put Me in the middle. Alright, great job, guys. Now, gamble for My clothes."* No, prophecies aren't a divine To-Do List that God must take care of later. Jesus wasn't focused on fulfilling prophecies. He probably thought about that about as much as you and I think about breathing. He just lived and ministered according to the Father's will, and the Holy Spirit simply revealed to the prophets what He had witnessed from His eternal vantage point EARLY. This is prophecy. God knows EVERYTHING, He's SEEN it all from His throne in eternity, and He REVEALED some things EARLY. This is one of the ways that hearing the Word of God gives us faith (Romans 10:17). Fulfilled prophecy also gives us CONFIDENCE. The Apostle Peter wrote...

## 2 Peter 1:19-21

**19 And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, 20 knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.**

You see, biblical prophecy is far more than man's lucky guess, or some vague prediction that leaves itself open to being fulfilled in any number of ways depending on a person's perspective (perhaps even by the self-proclaimed prophet himself). No, the prophecies of the Bible were given hundreds of years, or like David's prophecy of the crucifixion, a THOUSAND YEARS in advance, and the prophecies are given with the specificity of an eyewitness because the events WERE WITNESSED, by the triune Godhead and revealed by the Holy Spirit. They're undeniable evidence of the Bible's claim that ITS AUTHOR IS GOD, and as Peter says, the lost and saved alike **"do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in [our] hearts."**

This isn't the first prophetic aspect of Christ's crucifixion. King David already revealed how Jesus would be nailed to a cross before the Romans had even developed their version of crucifixion. Isaiah foretold of how Jesus would be **"numbered with transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12)**, one thief on His right and another on His left. Now, as David also prophesied, we see that the Roman executioners have divided Jesus' clothes among themselves. Having done the deed of nailing a human being to a piece of wood and putting Him on display, they enjoyed a perk of the job, helping themselves to His belongings.

The dividing of the victim's belongings among the soldiers is a picture of how material things mean nothing upon death; they'll always go to someone else, either rightfully or wrongfully. However, the most meaningful aspect of Jesus' garments in this scene is their LOCATION—in the soldiers' hands and NOT on His body. Every artistic depiction of the crucifixion that I've ever seen—sketched, painted, sculpted, or filmed—has tastefully censored this aspect of the crucifixion, but the truth is, Jesus died NAKED, and this means something to us as well.

JESUS TOOK OUR SHAME.

What sin are you ashamed of? A thought you had...something you looked at...the way you treated someone...something you said...the poor way you responded to something... Shame is a good thing when it causes us to consider our ways and repent. We could do with a little more of that kind of shame. The prophet Jeremiah described his day (AND OURS) when he said that people don't know how to blush anymore (Jeremiah 6:15)! However, shame becomes detrimental when it paralyzes us and causes us to withdraw. Shame is a powerful tool that Satan uses to separate us from God and His people, and the grace we might receive from them. That's what he did with Adam and Eve...

When God created Adam and Eve, they were naked and UNASHAMED (Genesis 2:25). However, when they sinned, they became aware of their nakedness. God covered their nakedness and promised the coming of a Savior, and that Savior became naked in order to cloth humanity with His righteousness once and for all. Like Adam and Eve, we once covered in the shame of our sin, but now we **"have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2:13b)**. I'm defined by Him, NOT my past sins. Therefore, may we never allow our relationship with the Lord to suffer harm because of weakness and shame, but **"let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of GRACE, that we may RECEIVE MERCY and FIND GRACE to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16)**.

So, we read that the soldiers divided Jesus' garments among themselves...

#### **John 19:25-27**

**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.**

Four mourners are juxtaposed against the four soldiers dividing Christ's garments (remember, **"four parts, one part for each soldier"**). I say FOUR mourners instead of THREE because three would mean that Jesus' mother and her sister WERE BOTH NAMED MARY, which is highly unlikely in Jewish culture of that day. As other gospel accounts seem to hint at, it's likely that the "sister" was Salome, the mother of James and John, and that this is just another instance in which the Apostle John was removing any and all reference to himself, which is his standard practice throughout the rest of his gospel account. As Jesus beheld them, His heart was going out to the mother He was leaving behind.

It's interesting and a little odd at first glance that Jesus called His mother "woman," not because it was impolite, for it was the essentially calling her "ma'am." What's odd is that He didn't call her "eema," which is Hebrew for "mom." He was beginning to distance Himself from her because He was leaving. Yes, He would rise again, but then He would ascend back into heaven, and He makes sure His mom is looked after, ONE MORE ACT OF LOVE. He called her "woman" just as He had at the wedding at Cana. He told her then that His hour had not yet come, but now it had. Mary and Joseph had several other children, any of whom would've been capable of caring for their mother. However, NONE of them believed in Jesus YET. None of them were present, it seems, for this transfer of responsibility from the firstborn anyway, so Jesus called upon John to care for his mama.

#### **John 19:28-30**

**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.**

One more thing that God saw from His eternal vantage point was that the Messiah would thirst. The prophets recounted this revelation when they wrote...

**Psalm 69:21**

**They gave me poison for food,  
and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.**

*“You’ll know you’ve seen the Messiah when you see this take place.”* The IRONY of this moment is ASTOUNDING. Earlier in His ministry, Jesus claimed to be the source of Living Water. Once...

**John 7:37-39**

**37 On the last day of the feast [of tabernacles], the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. 39 Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.**

The One who was the source of Living Water would die THIRSTY, but this passage sheds light on the fact that Jesus didn’t thirst for water or the swill in the soldiers’ jar. Oh, no, His longing was deeper and higher and far more desperate, like His ancestor who wrote...

**Psalm 63:1**

**O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek YOU;  
my soul thirsts for YOU;  
my flesh faints for YOU,  
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.**

Since the sixth hour, NOON for us, the brightest part of the day, Jerusalem had laid in darkness as Jesus became our sin and the Father turned His back on Him. For the FIRST TIME IN HIS ETERNAL EXISTENCE, the Son was separated from the Father. THAT, beloved, is HELL. JESUS TOOK OUR HELL! The prophet Isaiah also wrote about this agony when he said...

**Isaiah 53:11**

**Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied;  
by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant,  
make many to be accounted righteous,  
and he shall bear their iniquities.**

The payment for our sin debt didn’t consist merely of the spilled blood and the broken and lifeless body of Jesus. It also included the anguish of spiritual death, separation from the Father, which is the equivalent of hell. Earlier in the day, Jesus had shouted, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** indicating the moment of separation, and almost three hours later, in the most pitiable state and finding no other words to adequately describe the greatest need He’d ever experienced, He simply

utters, **"I thirst."** Devoid of the presence of the Father, JESUS TOOK OUR HELL. Sin was FULLY and FINALLY paid for. For this reason, the Apostle Paul could write...

### **Romans 8:1**

**There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**

Oh, but the devil wants you to live as if you're still condemned. He is the ACCUSER of the brethren, making his case to God of how unworthy we are of forgiveness, life, and love. You see, the longer you linger in that attitude of worthlessness and shame, the weaker you are to temptation. *"I've already blown it this much. What's one more bad decision?"* The devil wants you to believe that you have lost ground with the Lord when you sin, and that you have SO FAR TO GO in order to get back to the intimate walk you had with Him, when THE TRUTH IS, HE'S EAGER TO FORGIVE YOU AND DRAW YOU CLOSE TO HIMSELF!

### **Romans 8:34**

**Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.**

The Bible says, **"he bowed his head and gave up his spirit,"** AND HE DID IT!!! He fulfilled the Father's will and purchased our salvation with His blood! The wrath of God was fully absorbed by Jesus, and through faith in Him, His righteousness could be imputed to sinners! Jesus took our sin and shame upon Himself and suffered death, hell, and the grave so that those who believed upon Him could receive life, inherit heaven, and rise from the grave as He did! The hope for which fallen humanity had waited since the day we were expelled from the Garden had finally come! The devil, sin, hell, and the grave were DEFEATED! In Christ, man could now live the obedient life he was originally intended to live!

Almost a MONTH ago, as I sat under the fireworks at Independence Celebration, the music for "Raise a Hallelujah" began playing, and though it was just instrumental, you could hear the words in your head. The first chorus played, and the show came to the part of the song that says...

***Up from the ashes hope will arise  
Death is defeated, the King is alive***

And the sky ERUPTED WITH LIGHT!!! And as I sat there gazing up at those fireworks, my heart was saying, "THANK YOU, JESUS, FOR YOUR GREAT LOVE!" and at the same time, "God, I'M SORRY..." The reality of the cross should break upon my heart and throughout my life every day as dramatically as those explosions broke upon the night sky!

The reality of this event has the power to FREE YOU FROM ADDICTION. It has the power to TEAR DOWN SINFUL STRONGHOLDS in your life. Christ's death empowers you to live in this world without becoming bent out of shape or despairing over the wickedness of others; yes, the wickedness of others will and should bother us, but the reality of this event sets our heart on the fact that this world is not our home



and our time in it is SHORT. The reality of this moment causes us to DESPISE SIN while LOVING THE LOST because it FIRST grabs hold of us in OUR OWN LOSTNESS, condemning our sin while shouting “GOD LOVES YOU!” and we humbly come in repentance, recognizing our need for such sacrifice, and in faith crying out for the forgiveness and salvation it provided. ARE YOU LIVING IN THE REALITY OF THE CROSS???

The reality of the cross is that Jesus took our sins upon Himself and everything else that that entails. He took our SHAME. He took our HELL. Even as He was dying, He gave us assurance of faith as He fulfilled a multitude of prophecies in that one moment. Jesus drank to the dregs every ounce of the cup of God’s wrath, and HE DID IT! He completely paid for ALL our sins, and because of it, we're NEW! We're RIGHTEOUS! We're JUSTIFIED and REDEEMED!

Nothing in this world should move us more than that truth! If there's anything in the world that we allow to have a greater bearing on our ATTITUDE, our BEHAVIOR, and our JOY, any INORDINATE AFFECTION, may we PUT IT TO DEATH TODAY! Meditate on that as we end singing another song this morning.