

The Warrior

The Warrior Dies

JOHN 19:16-18

April 10, 2022

This is part 3 in the series, ***The Warrior***. Look at last few hours of Jesus' life. The night before His death He gathered his band of disciples in a second floor room in Jerusalem to make final preparations for what was about to happen. He knew . . . but they did not.

They left the room and went to the Garden of Gethsemane where he looked into the face of death. There He anticipated the physical, spiritual, psychological and emotional pain that he was about to endure. The temptation to walk away was intense. But he looked beyond the suffering to the ultimate goal and set his face toward the cross.

He was arrested by an armed mob, led by Judas Iscariot. During the night he was brought before several officials, some Jewish, some Roman. The Jewish leaders were the ones who wanted him dead. The Roman leaders were the only ones who had the authority to get it done. And they did. After unsuccessful attempts to release Jesus, Pilate capitulated to the religious leaders and ordered Jesus to be executed. There, outside the city wall ***The Warrior Died***.

Regardless of your view on capital punishment we can all agree that the idea of putting to death another human being is not pleasant. However, most societies have found it to be a necessary, particularly when innocent lives are purposefully taken. Though the practice has been around since the time sin entered our world, it has changed quite a bit. Two stand out in our modern culture.

First, the number of witnesses has been reduced. For most of human history, executions were public spectacles. They were intended to be seen by as many people as possible, to instill fear in the minds of other would-be criminals.

Second, the means of execution have changed. Now, the goal is to end the life as quickly and as painlessly as possible. This was not true of previous times. It was certainly not true of the Roman empire, when Jesus was killed.

He was not the first warrior to lose his life in battle, nor will he be the last. But His death is unique. There was never another death like His, nor will there ever be. Many soldiers have gone into battle with a premonition of death, but this Warrior entered the battle field not only knowing that He would die, but exactly how and why He would die. Most soldiers hope to avoid it. Not this warrior. He embraced it. Each of the gospel writers offer a perspective on the death of Jesus. This morning, let's walk through John's account. 19:16-42. 7 aspects.

1. The Journey (16-17)

We have very few details about his journey to the execution site. Original readers needed none. They had seen it before. The victim stood in the center of a makeshift square formed by soldiers establishing four corners. The victim was forced to carry the crossbeam part of the cross to the place of execution. The sign, announcing his crime was hung around his neck.

The Romans had designated a place just outside the city wall for these executions. It was in a place where they would get maximum exposure from people passing by. It was called *the place of the skull*, possibly because of the outcropping of rock on the hillside that resembled a skull. Three had been sentenced to die on that day. So, three made the journey but was so exhausted that He was unable to carry His own cross.

2. The Crucifixion (18-22)

John, as with the other writers, simple wrote, *there they crucified Him*. Again, no details were needed for all who lived in that age knew all about it. Let me offer some insight, from Bible scholars and historians.

Of all the ancient methods of crucifixion, nothing was more feared than this. The ancient orator **Cicero** described it as ***the worst extreme of the tortures inflicted upon slaves***. **Tacitus** said it was ***a despicable death***.

The Greek historian **Herodotus** indicated that the **Persians** invented the practice after experimenting with other means of delaying death, such as stoning, drowning, burning, boiling in oil, strangulation and flaying.

Alexander the Great adopted it, as did the Carthaginians and ultimately the Romans. It was intended to extend life, intensify pain, while leading to death.

These men would have already experienced the Roman scourge. The **licitor** (the soldier doing the whipping) could affect how long the person would last on the cross. If the scourging were light, a victim could live on the cross in for days, even up to a week. If it was severe, death might come in hours.

3. **The Humiliation (23-25)**

Crucifixion combined three qualities the Romans prized most in an execution: **unrelenting pain, protracted death, public humiliation**. Multiple ways the victim was humiliated. The walk to the execution. The sign around his neck.

Then, at the site, the victim was stripped of his clothing. Human dignity was stripped away and He was exposed to all. John points out that this included His own mother, His aunt and other women who had followed His ministry.

In that unprotected condition His body was exposed to the heat of the sun as well as the insects that would quickly be attracted to His body. At the foot of the cross, the soldiers callously divided his garments among themselves.

4. **The Compassion (26-27)**

Looking down, Jesus saw His precious mother. The one who had said **yes** to the shocking plan of God for her to be the mother of the Messiah more than three decades earlier. She was the one who risked it all to carry Him in her womb, nurture Him as a child, and release Him to His ministry as a man. No one could possibly understand the depth of pain she was feeling as she watched Him on that cross. No one could possibly grasp the unique relationship Jesus had with His mother.

So there, on the cross, He compassionately arranged for her care. His dearest friend, John, would take care of His mom in the coming years. He had the salvation of the world on His mind, but He was not too busy or distracted to care of her. I love that! Family matters!

5. **The Death (28-30)**

Several times Jesus spoke from the cross. John shares two of the statements that immediately preceded His death. One was a statement of agony. He was thirsty. The other was a statement of triumph. One was a reflection of his physical suffering. The other was an expression of His spiritual victory.

Notice how John describes the death of Jesus. *He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.* There are some things to note from this. **First**, He controlled the moment of His death. That was unique to Him. We generally do not. **Second**, death involved the separation of the spirit from the body. That is not unique to Him. That is the human experience at death for all. At that moment the heart ceased to beat. The lungs took in no more air. The pain ended. He was dead. What follows is important confirmation.

6. The Confirmation (31-37)

Why would John provide these details? In the future there would be some who would declare that Jesus had not really died. He had only fainted. That is how they would explain His resurrection. So, John makes it crystal clear that Jesus was really dead. He offers **three levels of confirmation**.

First, the testimony of the soldiers. They checked carefully to see if Jesus was dead. He was. Just to make sure, they thrust a spear into His side.

Second, John offered to serve as an eyewitness. He would say, for the rest of His life that He saw Jesus die.

Third, as another layer of confirmation, John brings in prophetic words from the Old Testament. What happened to Jesus had been prophesied multiple times in previous generations. The key to a prophecy is its fulfillment.

7. The Burial (38-42)

John then offers some details about the burial of Jesus. Two prominent men, Joseph and Nicodemus approached Pilate, asking for the body that they might bury it. They took the body, wrapped it in a linen cloth, after anointing it with typical burial spices and ointments. They took his body and placed it in a new tomb that had never been used and was near that spot.

The Warrior had died. That was the end of that, or so they thought. We know better. He would rise again in three days. We'll get to that next week.

Before we leave His death and move toward His resurrection, I think it's important to make sure we understand it's meaning. There is more to this warrior's death than simply the loss of a soldier. His death meant something. It was purposeful. I want to make sure we don't miss that purpose. It can be

illustrated by one of the characters in this story that we seldom think much about. Remember, three men were crucified that day. Three crosses were prepared and ready to go. Two were for the two criminals crucified with Jesus. But until that morning, there was no thought among the Romans that Jesus would be killed on one of those crosses. It was meant for someone else. It is reasonable to assume it was for **Barabbas**.

He is mentioned in all four gospels. He was incarcerated for his crimes and was likely scheduled for execution that day. Three crosses were prepared. Three crosses were used. Three men died. But he was not one of them. In a series of events that he could never have imagined, what was supposed to be his day of execution became his day of liberation.

Pilate, as was his practice, agreed to release a prisoner. The people would choose. He offered two options, Barabbas and Jesus. Think about how this likely played out. Barabbas is in his cell. He probably cannot hear the words of Pilate but certainly heard the words of the crowd. Pilate asked, which one do you want me to release? The crowds begin to yell, *give us Barabbas*. Maybe that is all he hears. The crowd calling for him to be brought out.

Pilate then asked the crowd what he should do with Jesus. The crowds begin to yell, *crucify Him, crucify Him!* All Barabbas could hear were the chants of the crowd calling his name, followed by crucify Him. All this is speculation, of course, but it is a likely scenario. Imagine thinking you are being led out to your judgment only to find that someone else will be dying on the cross meant for you. WHAT A SUDDEN TURN OF EVENTS!

He anticipated being executed for his crimes. However, without warning, he was being released and another would be dying on the cross meant for him. I'd love to know what happened to him. I'd like to think it changed his life. I don't know. At the very least it was second chance that he had not earned. He was the recipient of a grace that came at the expense of another. He was guilty, yet was allowed to go free because an innocent man took his place.

Peter wrote, *For Christ also died for sins, once for all, **the just for the unjust**, so that He might bring us to God.* That's exactly what happened for Barabbas. Even Pilate had declared the innocence of Jesus. He was guilty of no crime. Yet He died. The one who was guilty was set free.

That is the meaning of the death of Jesus. What He did for Barabbas in a physical way that day, He did for all of us in a spiritual way. We all deserve to die on that cross, for we are unjust (sinful). Yet He, the just one, died for us. **Why?** Peter wrote, ***that He might bring us to God.*** In other words, to make us right with God and ultimately bring us to Heaven.

Imagine with me. What if Barabbas had declined his freedom, insisting that no one would pay his debt, no one would die in his place. Pretty absurd, for sure. I'm sure he **skipped away like a school kid leaving the building on the last day of school.** We don't know what happened to him later, but we know he was given an incredible opportunity.

But so have you. Jesus not only died for Barabbas, but He died for you and me. Barabbas had no choice except to go free and enjoy his second chance. You do have a choice. You must repent of sins and trust in Jesus. Grace was offered to Barabbas and it is offered to you. What have you done with this offer of grace?