

John 19:1-30 Why The Cross?

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro
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This morning as we return to John's Gospel, we find Jesus in captivity. His miracles have all been done; His famous teachings have all been given. Now He stands bound as a prisoner before men that He created. The men whom He will one day judge are, for now, judging Him.

In a matter of hours Jesus will hang from a wooden cross outside the city, covered in blood, baked by the sun and die.

He was arrested late at night in the Garden of Gethsemane and rushed to two religious trials. The priests had a hard time finding a charge to pin on Him, but they finally agreed that He had claimed to be the Son of God and they found that objectionable enough to merit the death penalty. The problem was, they couldn't administer it. They needed to convince the Romans to do it for them since the Empire reserved capital punishment for its own courts.

We pick things up in the middle of Jesus' interaction with Pilate, the Roman governor who originally didn't want anything to do with the case and offered to release Him. The religious leaders would have none of that and are stoking the crowd.

Pilate fears a riot, so to keep the peace and satisfy the mob's thirst for blood, it's easy enough for him to just order Jesus to be flogged and hopefully he can be done with this.

1 So then Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him.

In Roman law, punishment was delivered based on status. A Roman citizen would never be scourged; they would be beaten with rods called *fascēs* in Latin. *Fascēs* are actually a group of rods bundled together, often with an axe head protruding from the bundle, carried by men called *lictors*, which may be the basis for our expression, "taking your licks." *Fascēs* are a common symbol of government to this day. You can find them all over downtown; there's one on either side of the steps outside the Lincoln monument for example.

If you were a soldier though, and you needed discipline, you would be beaten with sticks because you were supposed to be



tougher. And finally, if you were a slave, or a member of a conquered people, you obviously didn't deserve Roman dignity and would be whipped with strips of leather that sometimes had slivers of metal and bone embedded in them to increase your suffering.

Jewish law only allowed you to receive 39 lashes as an act of mercy, but under Roman law the soldier administering the lashes was allowed to keep going until he grew tired. We're not sure how many lashes Jesus took, but we know it was definitely a horrific beating.

2 And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put *it* on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe. 3 Then they said, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they struck Him with their hands.

It's all a display of power. They're saying, "Oh He's a king alright, but only because WE have made Him one." And then they immediately show their contempt by smacking Him around.

4 Pilate then went out again, and said to them, "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you, that you may know that I find no fault in Him."

5 Then Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And *Pilate* said to them, "Behold the Man!"

By now He's a bloody mess. He has bruises and swelling all over His face from the blows. They've ripped out clumps of His beard by force. It takes a sustained effort just to keep standing as blood runs down His legs from the lacerations on His back.

Pilate points to Him, "Behold the Man!" He's showing the priests and the crowd, "Look, I'm still in charge. Everything is fine. He's no threat to us. Now go away and go about your business." It should have been enough to satisfy them. But it wasn't.

6 Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!"

These men who are supposed to represent God, priests of the nation of Israel, are so blind, so out of touch with their calling that they're demanding Jesus be put to death.

Pilate said to them, "You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him."

But as we've already said, they can't. They don't have the authority and they don't have the tools. If they had the authority they'd put Him to death by stoning, the traditional Jewish form of capital punishment. But the Scriptures had said long ago, and Jesus Himself had foretold, that He would be hung on a cross.

So, we see the Jews make another appeal to Pilate.

7 The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God."

8 Therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid,

You ever have that sinking feeling like something is really going wrong? I think that's what Pilate was feeling. He's wondering, "Why are they so hung up on this guy? Why won't they let it go?" Matthew (27:19) tells us that Pilate's wife even sent him a message saying, "Have nothing to do with this just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him."

The Romans claimed that Caesar was a god, but they believed in other gods too. Remember all the guys our planets are named after? Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Neptune... they're all Roman gods. For Pilate it was at least possible that a god was somehow involved in this in some way, and who wants to be a part of beating the son of a god...who knows what kind of wrath that might bring you? So he:

9 and went again into the Praetorium, and said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer.

10 Then Pilate said to Him, "Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?"

11 Jesus answered, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin."

Far from begging for His life, Jesus is calm, cool, and collected, He's staring death in the face, and it's not moving Him. Which, of course, has to further affect Pilate.

12 From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, "If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar."

They're backing him into a corner. Pilate knows he could be beheaded if the Emperor thought he was allowing treason to occur. And right now that Emperor is Tiberius, one of the most suspicious and paranoid rulers in Roman history.

Pilate is between a rock and a hard place. Better try to diffuse this situation one more time:

13 When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called *The Pavement*, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. 14 Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold your King!"

15 But they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!"

Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?"

The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar!"

They're implying that they, as Jews, are better Romans than he is! He's trapped, there's no way out. Either he takes the life of this mysterious man or he risks his own when they send accusations to Rome. So, though he believes Jesus is innocent, Pilate caves and gives the order.

16 Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified. Then they took Jesus and led *Him* away.

17 And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called *the Place of a Skull*, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha, 18 where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, one on either side, and Jesus in the center.

Jesus was stripped naked and forced to carry the beam of the cross through town and out the gate, but He only made it so far before His strength gave out. The other gospels tell us Simon of Cyrene, just a man walking down the street, was pressed into service and made to carry the timber out the city gates and up to the site of the execution.

There Jesus and the other men were tied to their beams with ropes, fastened in place by driving nails through their wrists, and hung from uprights that were already waiting.

19 Now Pilate wrote a title and put *it* on the cross. And the writing was:

JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

20 Then many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Greek, *and* Latin.

21 Therefore the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'He said, "I am the King of the Jews."'"

22 Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."

"Don't push back on me anymore," he says. "You've gotten all the concessions you're going to get! If we're doing this, we're doing it my way!"

23 Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece. 24 They said therefore among themselves, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be," that the Scripture might be fulfilled which says:

*"They divided My garments among them,
And for My clothing they cast lots."*

Therefore the soldiers did these things.

25 Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the *wife* of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" 27 Then He

said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour that disciple took her to his own *home*.

Mary's husband Joseph, has most likely passed away by this time. There is no definitive record of what happened to him, but it's generally accepted that he died at some point before Jesus began His ministry. That means Jesus, as the oldest son, is responsible for mom. So, one of His last acts on earth is to give a legally binding oral testament – committing her care to one of His disciples, possibly John, who has also come to witness His death and who now takes responsibility for her physical needs. Remember, this was way before Social Security, pensions, and Medicare.

Jesus is hanging there, on the verge of death, bearing the weight of the sins of the world, and He's still focused on individual human beings. It's proof of His amazing love.

28 After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!" 29 Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put *it* on hyssop, and put *it* to His mouth. 30 So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

That's important you know – He "gave up" His spirit. His life wasn't taken from Him – He gave it.

But why? Here in this chapter John tells you a lot about the death of Jesus. He gives you all the facts; he walks you through the process, step by step. He tells you WHAT and HOW and WHO, but if all you read is the section here in chapter nineteen, you don't get the WHY.

So let's ask that question now. *Why* did Jesus have to do all of this?

Well, if you stood there on Calvary, if you stood at the place where they ended the lives of three men that day, the place where they most certainly had ended many others, you would have seen a mess.

You would have seen blood and bowels and urination and defecation – the natural physiological responses to fear and the final release of the body in the throes of death, you would have seen vomit and bugs and there would have been a stench in the air. It was an unrefrigerated, open air, butcher's shop for human bodies.

It was, a mess.

It was a mess, because our lives are a mess. Do you ever think of it that way?

Maybe you do. Maybe you've had some messes thrown at you. Maybe you've experienced wickedness, been on the opposite end of selfishness, hatred, or greed. Maybe you've been given the short end of the stick a few times and you know life can be a mess.

But do you ever think the same way about what is IN you? About what comes OUT of you? Do you believe, really and truly believe, that the Bible is right when it says “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh” (Rom 7:8). Are you able to take a sober look at yourself and say, “Yes, at times, my thoughts, my motives, even my actions, are that ugly.”

Our lives are as big of a mess as you would have found at Calvary on that day, so Jesus came to clean them up.

A sacrifice had to be made because a law had been broken. Not the laws of men – no, those change from administration to administration or from civilization to civilization. For many years the laws of this land lined up with the laws of God, but now they’re falling apart rapidly. The United States of America now permits, endorses, and even encourages many things that are still against God’s Law. So you can be innocent in the eyes of men and still guilty in the eyes of God.

In essence, the basis of God’s law is His character. He tells us to be holy, for He is holy. Perfection is His standard and it’s a standard we can’t meet.

He spelled some of it out in the Ten Commandments. Consider them.

Number Three – Don’t take His name in vain. Ever done that? Even once? Ever let a little G-D slip? You’re guilty.

Number Seven – Don’t commit adultery – Jesus said if you look at woman with lust in your heart, you’ve just as guilty as if you had touched her physically. Ever looked at someone with lust? You’re guilty.

Number Eight – Don’t steal – ever taken something that wasn’t yours? The size and the value don’t matter – have you ever taken something that wasn’t yours? You’re guilty.

That’s just three out of ten. None of us can live the way God expects us to. No one can measure up. We’re all a mess.

And when a law is broken there has to be punishment. If a law doesn’t have any consequences, it’s meaningless. Didn’t we see that with the Defense of Marriage Act recently? The Obama administration just decided, “we’re no longer going to enforce it.” If there’s no penalty, it’s really not a law; it’s more like a suggestion.

But God’s law isn’t that way; God’s law is enforced. It’s effects are felt immediately **and** over eternity. You see, when we break God’s law, that’s called sin. And sin breaks things.

It has broken this planet we live on so we deal with birth defects, super storms, and death.

It has broken us as individuals so we struggle with fear, anxiety, anger, and depression.

And it has broken our relationships--with each other, and with God.

Scripture says: *your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear. 3 For your hands are defiled with blood, And your fingers with iniquity; Your lips have spoken lies, Your tongue has muttered perversity. (Is 59:2-3)*

The more sin in our lives, the bigger the mess.

So, what do we do about it? Well, when a law is broken, typically restitution has to be made – something has to be done to make things right.

Sometimes we can handle it - if you get a parking ticket it's probably just a few bucks. It's inconvenient and frustrating, but you can swing it. If you get a speeding ticket, it's going to cost more, but still, you can probably afford to make things right.

What if it's reckless endangerment though, for going over 80 in a 55? That's going to hurt. And, what if you're caught drunk driving? All the sudden the cost of making things right is going up dramatically.

What if you're drunk driving and you flip your car and hit a parked car?
What if someone was in that car, and they died when you slammed into them?
What if you were drunk and got angry and intentionally went out to your car and ran someone down and killed them? All of the sudden you're not going to be able to write a check or make a transfer and make things better. You've broken something you can't fix; you've made a mess you can't clean.

And that's where we are with God. We can't afford what it would cost to make restitution for breaking *any* of His laws. So He sent His own Son to pay the price for us.

The Bible says (2 Cor 5:21), *"He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."*

God allowed them to make a mess of Jesus in order to clean up the mess we had made.

1 Peter 2:24 says, Jesus *"bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness."* And, for all who accept this – who admit that their lives are a mess, He offers forgiveness and healing. That *"by [His] wounds you were healed. 25 For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."*

Without Jesus, your life is an absolute mess – just as messy as the hill of Calvary.

So why was Jesus nailed to the cross? Because He loves you. Because He knows where you are headed without Him. And instead of just watching it all play out, He jumped in and got involved.

So let me ask, has that made a difference in your life? Do you care? Have you done anything about it? You can't pay off this penalty, but Jesus offers to pay it for you. Have you asked Him to do that? If not, you can do it now. You can walk out of here this morning knowing what the cross was all about, and knowing that it has made a difference in your life.

All you have to do is admit your life is a mess, admit it's that way because you've been doing your own thing instead of serving Him, and ask Him to forgive you. And Christian, if you've been blowing it in some area of your life, you know the process is the same for you. Ask for forgiveness once again – you don't need to be saved again, you can't be. But you can ask for forgiveness for the sin that is lurking in your life, and ask Him to help you drive it out – to clean up the mess that you're making in your life.

Let's pray.