

196. The Gospel of John 19:17-30

The King is Crucified-Part 2

A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier
(10-23-22)

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John 19:17–18 (NKJV)

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...

So cruel and barbaric was crucifixion that Rome forbid its own citizens from being crucified—no matter what they had done. So abhorrent was even the mention of crucifixion that—it was taboo as a topic of polite conversation.

One author said, *“We have yet to see an accurate, full depiction of crucifixion in modern media. If it were ever made, it would be limited to adult audiences, because of its intense horror and brutality.”*

It’s interesting that none of the gospel writers focus on the details of the crucifixion, they simply say, **“they crucified Him...”**—this is primarily because the Holy Spirit didn’t want to ‘sensationalize’ the crucifixion.

But also, because everyone back then knew full well what crucifixion entailed—there was no need to emphasize the obvious—however, what was obvious to them in their day is completely obscure to us in ours.

The Romans didn’t invent crucifixion—but they *perfected* it as one of the cruelest forms of execution imaginable designed to produce a slow death with maximum pain and suffering. In fact, so painful was crucifixion that they actually had to invent a new word to describe it—a Latin word we get our English word “*excruciating*” from.

New Testament crucifixions involved the condemned criminal carrying his cross to the place where the execution would take place—which in Jesus’ case was Golgotha.

At that point the Cross was laid on the ground and Jesus was made to lie on top of it.

First His feet were nailed to the upright beam and then His arms stretched across the horizontal beam and nailed through the wrists just below the hand—allowing a slight bend at the knees when the body was extended.

The Cross was then picked up and dropped into a hole with a ‘thud’ causing excruciating pain as the full weight of His body was now being held on the cross by the nails in His hands and feet.

In his book *The Life of Christ*, Frederick Farrar describes crucifixion as follows:

“A death by crucifixion seems to include all that pain and death can have—the horrible and ghastly-dizziness, cramping, thirst, starvation, sleeplessness, traumatic fever, shame, long continuance of torment, horror of anticipation, mortification of intended wounds—all intensified just up to the point at which they can be endured at all, but all stopping just short of the point which would give to the sufferer the relief of unconsciousness.”

The unnatural position made every movement painful; the lacerated veins and crushed tendons throbbed with incessant anguish; the wounds, inflamed by exposure, gradually gangrened [when a victim took several days to die]; the arteries—especially at the head and stomach—became swollen and oppressed with surcharged blood, and while each variety of misery went on gradually increasing, there was added to them the intolerable pang of a burning and raging thirst...

One thing is clear. The first century executions were not like the modern ones, for they did not seek a quick, painless death nor the preservation of any measure of dignity for the criminal. On the contrary, they sought an agonizing torture which completely humiliated him. And it is important that we understand this, for it helps us realize the agony of Christ's death."

In an article that appeared in the Arizona Medical Journal, written by Dr. Truman Davis entitled, *"The Crucifixion of Jesus; The Passion of Christ from a Medical Point of View"*—he adds some additional insights into what Jesus would have endured while dying on the cross:

"At this point another phenomenon occurs. As the arms fatigue, great waves of cramps sweep over the muscles knotting them in deep, relentless, throbbing pain. With these cramps comes the inability to push Himself upward. Hanging by His arms, the pectoral muscles are paralyzed, and the intercostal muscles are unable to act. Air can be drawn into the lungs but cannot be exhaled. Jesus fights to raise Himself in order to get even one short breath. Finally, carbon dioxide builds up in the lungs and in the blood stream and the cramps partially subside. Spasmodically He is able to push Himself upward to exhale and bring in the life-giving oxygen. ...Hours of this limitless pain, cycles of twisting, joint-rending cramps, intermittent partial asphyxiation, searing pain as tissue is torn from His lacerated back as He moves up and down against the rough timber; then another agony begins—a deep crushing pain in the chest as the pericardium slowly fills with serum and begins to compress the heart. It is now almost over ... the compressed heart is struggling to pump heavy, thick, sluggish blood into the tissues. The tortured lungs are making a frantic effort to gasp in small gulps of air..."

It's important to remember that Jesus was no victim of circumstances—He affirmed this when He said—**"No one takes My life from Me by force—I lay it down for the sheep of My own will."** (John 10:17-18 paraphrase)

John 19:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called *the Place* of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha...

The Latin for '**Golgotha**' is '*Calvary*'—they both mean the **"place of a skull"**.

Some interpret this to mean that Jesus was crucified on a burial ground (cemetery)—a place that was called '*the place of a skull*' because of all the skulls of dead bodies found there.

However, the Romans didn't crucify people in remote locations away from the population (as in a cemetery)—they always crucified criminals along the roads where they could be looked at, mocked, spit upon and so on—for maximum humiliation.

Besides, it wasn't called "*the place of skulls*"—but **"*the place of a skull*"**.

I believe this is a reference to a place right outside the walls of Jerusalem (to the north)—which is today called—'*Gordon's Calvary*' where they have found the Garden Tomb. Near there you will see a cave in the side of a hill that looks like a skull—'*place of a skull*' or *Calvary* where Jesus was crucified.

Now as we study the events that led up to and included the crucifixion of Jesus, the gospel writer's record for us 7 aspects of it—and most are fulfillments of specific Old Testament prophecies.

1. Jesus prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem

John 19:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ And He, bearing His cross...

Luke 23:26–31 (NKJV)

²⁶ Now as they led Him away, they laid hold of a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, who was coming from the country, and on him they laid the cross that he might bear *it* after Jesus. ²⁷ And a great multitude of the people followed Him, and women who also mourned and lamented Him. ²⁸ But Jesus, turning to them, said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹ For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, 'Blessed *are* the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!' ³⁰ Then they will begin '*to say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!"*' ³¹ For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?"

Here in these verses, Jesus predicted the destruction of Jerusalem which would occur 38 years after His resurrection—in 70 AD.

Jesus had first made this prediction in His famous 'Olivet Discourse' (teaching on the Mt. of Olives)—

Luke 21:20-24 (NKJV)

²⁰ "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. ²¹ Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. ²² For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. ²³ But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. ²⁴ And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

All of this came to pass in 70 A.D. when the Romans seized the city of Jerusalem from the Jews, burned it with fire and destroyed the city and the Temple.

The Lord concluded His warning with the proverbial saying, "*For if they do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?*"

One author,

"In other words, 'He is the green tree, full of life and fruitfulness. If this is what the Romans did to Him, what will they do to the dry, dead, barren nation of Israel in 70 A.D.?'"

Another commentator offers this interpretation—

"Probably the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, as well as the judgments on Jerusalem in the Tribulation, are in view here in Jesus' words. The destruction by the Romans would only be a foretaste of the worse judgment still future."

2. He was crucified between two thieves

John 19:17–18 (NKJV)

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.

Each of the Gospels tell us that two others were crucified at the same time with Jesus—only Matthew, Mark and Luke call them *robbers*—and only Luke tells us that Jesus and one of the thieves had a brief conversation resulting in his conversion.

The word ‘**robber**’ is the same word that was used to describe Barabbas (*leistes*), and it probably means more than just “*thief*.”

Commentator Jim Boice—

“The word refers to what we would call a guerrilla soldier or revolutionary and probably suggests that those who were crucified along with Jesus were Barabbas’s companions. This is more than likely because stealing was not a capital offense. Was Barabbas intended for the cross in the center? Probably. If so, Jesus literally took his place, just as in a figurative sense he took the place of all who believe on him and trust him alone for their salvation.”

Luke records the scene this way—

Luke 23:39-43 (NKJV)

³⁹ Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us." ⁴⁰ But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation?" ⁴¹ And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." ⁴² Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." ⁴³ And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

What a blessing this has been to countless thousands over the centuries that thought it was too late for them to get their lives right with God by receiving Jesus as their Lord and Savior—the conversion of the thief on the cross teaches us that God even accepts ‘*death bed conversions*.’

At this point we can’t help but remember another prophecy this fulfilled out of Isaiah 53:12—“*He was numbered with the transgressors.*”

3. The mocking and blasphemy directed at Jesus

a. The insults directed at Jesus from those passing by

Matthew 27:39-40 (NKJV)

³⁸ Then two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and another on the left.

³⁹ And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads ⁴⁰ and saying, "You who destroy the temple and build *it* in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross."

The mocking statement made by the fickle crowd when they said, “**You who destroy the temple and build *it* in three days**”—was based on something Jesus had said earlier in His ministry:

John 2:18–21 (NKJV)

¹⁸ So the Jews answered and said to Him, “What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?” ¹⁹ Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” ²⁰ Then the Jews said, “It

has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" ²¹ But He was speaking of the temple of His body.

Most if not all of these mockers were probably Jews from the area or pilgrims from out of town that had come to celebrate the Passover.

Because the city couldn't accommodate all of these travelers, they were forced to find lodging outside the city in the nearby towns and villages—this meant that a much higher volume of foot traffic than usual would be coming in and out of Jerusalem.

What is really tragic is that four days earlier some of these very people had been crying 'Hosanna' to Jesus on Palm Sunday only to cry 'crucify Him' that morning—how could that be?

One author gives his explanation for their fickle flip flop—

"Although they were grateful for His miracles and awed by His preaching, they had no desire for Him to cleanse them of cherished sins or to give Him control of their lives. They had expected Him to be their kind of Messiah—a Messiah who would overthrow Rome and establish Israel as sovereign over the Gentile world. The fact that He had allowed Himself to be arrested, mocked, beaten, scourged, and tried before the pagan Pilate while offering no verbal, much less miraculous, defense was proof enough in their minds that He was not the Messiah whom they, and most of Israel, wanted and expected."

Because of it, even though some might have called themselves His disciples, they felt betrayed, let down and robbed of their hopes of kingdom glory—and so they turned on Jesus with a vicious hatred and mocked Him while He hung on that cross.

The Greek indicates theirs was a *continuous* barrage of vile defamations being hurled at Jesus.

To emphasize their disdain for Him even more they '**wagged**' their heads at Him in mockery saying—**"You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself!..."**

David had prophesied about this very thing a thousand years earlier in Psalm 22:7—

Psalm 22:7 (NKJV)

⁷ All those who see Me ridicule Me; They shoot out the lip, they shake the head...

Criminals were often crucified naked to enhance their shame—think about what the Son of God endured to purchase our salvation.

He was beaten first by the Temple guards, scourged, mocked, beaten again by the Roman soldiers, stripped naked, crucified, spit upon, mocked some more before dying at the hands of those He came to save.

**Don't blame the Jews or the Romans for killing Jesus—
we all put Him on that Cross—a Cross He accepted willfully.**

It wasn't the nails that held Jesus to that cross—it was love—and don't ever forget that—His great love for us—

Romans 5:6–9 (NLT)

⁶ When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. ⁷ Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person

who is especially good.⁸ But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.⁹ And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation.

The crowd mocked, **"If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross...save yourself."**

He could have come down from that cross anytime He wanted—all He had to do was call to His Father to send His angels—but if He had saved Himself—He couldn't have saved us!

The clueless crowd had no idea what they were saying—they were truly speaking out of the mouth of Satan who continues to tell those who seek to be crucified with Christ—

"Come down from the Cross—you don't have to be a fanatic...!"

b. The mocking chief priests, scribes, and elders

Matthew 27:41-43 (NKJV)

⁴¹ Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, ⁴² "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. ⁴³ He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.' "

These men made up the Sanhedrin, the Jewish High Council—the very group that had Jesus arrested, tried and condemned earlier that morning.

They challenged him to have God deliver Him if He was truly His Son and the King of Israel—again fulfilling Psalm 22:8—*"He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him; Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!"*

Author Jim Boice—

"That is the straightforward account [of the crucifixion in Matthew's gospel], but this is where we have to stop and go back over it in our mind, remembering what Jesus did for us. Can we imagine it? Perhaps we can think of a lacerated body bleeding from head to foot. His form is so marred that he is hardly recognizable, even to his friends. No representation of Jesus' crucifixion that I have ever seen, even by the greatest of artists, does justice to this horror. They are all too clean, too sterile. The crucifixion was bloody and vulgar, ugly and repulsive. Yet He was the Son of God! Think of that and try to understand something of the horror of your sin and of the grace, love, mercy, and compassion of our God. Do you understand that it was for you that Jesus endured this?"

Isaiah 53:5-6 (NKJV)

⁵ But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

The great evangelical Anglican bishop John Ryle—

- "Was he scourged? — *It was that "through his stripes we might be healed."*
- Was he condemned, though innocent? — *It was that we might be acquitted, though guilty.*
- Did he wear a crown of thorns? — *It was that we might wear the crown of glory.*
- Was he stripped of his raiment? — *It was that we might be clothed in everlasting righteousness.* Was he mocked and reviled? — *It was that we might be honored and blessed.*
- Was he reckoned a malefactor, and numbered among transgressors? — *It was that we might be reckoned innocent and justified from all sin.*
- Was he declared unable to save himself? — *It was that he might be able to save others to the uttermost.*

- Did he die at last, and that the most painful and disgraceful of deaths? —*It was that we might live for evermore and be exalted to the highest glory.*"

4. Pilate's written charge against Jesus

John 19:19 (NKJV)

¹⁹ Now Pilate wrote a title and put *it* on the cross. And the writing was: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Even though each of the four gospel writers record this—they vary the actual wording of the placard.

- Matthew states, *"This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."*
- Mark writes, *"The King of the Jews"* (15:26).
- Luke reports the words as: *"This is the King of the Jews"* (23:38).

The Gospel writers are simply giving the essence of what the charge was against Jesus without being exact.

John probably recorded the full charge ordered by Pilate to be written and placed on the cross—which angered Jesus' accusers:

John 19:19-22 (NKJV)

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."

I think at this point Pilate was tired of being 'bullied' by the Jewish leadership—and wrote this in part to act like a *'poke in the eyes'* to these men.

5. Gambling for Jesus' clothes

John 19:23–24 (NKJV)

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.

"...when they had crucified Jesus..."

This doesn't mean that the crucifixion was over but simply that the cross had been dropped into the hole in the ground allowing it to stand upright—it was at that point that the actual crucifixion began.

"...and divided His garments, casting lots..."

Each of the Gospels record how the soldiers divided Jesus' clothing—however John is the only one that says they cast lots for His seamless outer robe not wanting to cut it up because it was valuable.

(Word of faith teachers say “*this proves Jesus was wealthy because He wore designer clothes—and that’s what He wants for you...*”)

Also, Matthew and John are the only ones who tell us that this was a fulfillment of prophecy—

Psalm 22:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸ They divide My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots.

6. Jesus caring for His mother Mary

John 19:25-27 (NKJV)

²⁵ **Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother [Mary], and His mother’s sister [Salome, the mother of the sons of Zebedee—James and John], 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.**

John’s is the only Gospel that records this scene.

This could be the reason John seems to have had some personal details of Jesus’ birth and life while young and growing up with Mary and His stepfather Joseph that the other gospel writers didn’t have (check out the Christmas Day message from 2021 because we talk about this).

7. They gave Him sour wine mingled with gall to drink

John 19:28–30 (NKJV)

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...**

All four of the Gospels reference this—but it is likely that two separate acts were involved.

Matthew and Mark describe what Jewish sources say was customarily done by some wealthy women of Jerusalem who had a ministry to criminals who were being crucified—they offered the victim wine mixed with gall—gall being a narcotic.

Matthew and Mark say this drink was offered at the start of the crucifixion—but that Jesus refused to drink it. Apparently, He didn’t want His senses dulled, He wanted to keep His mind clear—presumably to experience the fullness of his suffering.

However, in John’s Gospel he seems to refer to something the soldiers did later.

He records that when Jesus said, “*I am thirsty*” (in order to fulfill Psalm 69:21—“*They also gave me gall for my food, And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink*”)—the soldiers soaked a sponge in sour wine, put it on a hyssop branch, and lifted it to his mouth—and that this time Jesus did taste what was offered.

This happened at the end of his crucifixion—

John 19:30 (NKJV)

³⁰ So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “It is finished!” And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

There are so many other details surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus—and we’ll explore this more next time.

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

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