

Bible Study

Gods Word in Focus



Week Twenty Seven

Gospel of John

John 19: 1-42

Pilate said to the Jews, "Behold your King!"

John 19:1-16

Pilate hoped that by having Jesus' scourged the Jews who brought him to trial might be satisfied with this punishment and stop asking for his death. Scourging was the usual kind of punishment given for disturbing the peace and a warning to cease from upsetting authority and civil order. It was also used to weaken a criminal who was about to be executed. The latter was considered a form of mercy since a crucified man could last for days on a cross before expiring.

When Pilate presented Jesus to the crowds robed in purple and crowned with thorns, he emphatically stated that he found "no crime in him" (John 19:3). What finally coerced Pilate to sentence a just man to death? Blackmail! The Jewish leaders told Pilate: "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend; everyone who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar" (John 19:12). The last thing Pilate wanted was a report back to Rome that he supported a dangerous man who was inciting the people to accept him as their king and to revolt against Roman authority. The last thing Rome would accept was civil disorder. So Pilate relented to avoid having a charge brought against him to Rome. Pilate was a ruthless leader, but he lacked one important quality, the courage to do the right thing. He sacrificed justice to save his face and his job.

Are you willing to sacrifice reputation and position for truth and justice?

The Crucifixion of Christ

John 19:17-22

Are you prepared to die well? None of us can avoid the inevitable -- our own death. We try to avoid it, to block it from our minds, but the truth is we will all die sooner or later. Dying is not easy for anyone. It involves mental and physical suffering, loss, and separation. We can choose to live well, and we can choose to die well.

Dying well is a life-long spiritual task. Fortunately there is something stronger than death and that is love (Song of Songs 6:8). "For God so loved the world that he gave us his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Jesus embraced the cross knowing it was the Father's will and the Father's way for him to die.

"They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots"

John 19:23-27

It was Roman custom for four soldiers to accompany the criminal to the place of crucifixion. The four soldiers who crucified Jesus divided his garments among themselves. A Jewish man would typically wear five items of clothing: shoes, turban, girdle, tunic, and outer robe.

The soldiers gambled to see who would win the prize of the fifth article, in this case a seamless garment that had been woven all in one piece. This seamless garment was likely given to Jesus as a gift from his mother, since it was customary for Jewish mothers to make such a garment for their sons as a last gift before they entered the world on their own. Cutting it into four pieces would have made it useless.

John makes a special point to tell us that this was in fulfillment of a Messianic prophecy (Psalm 22:18). John was also likely making a reference to the seamless tunic worn by the high priest in the Temple service (Exodus 28:31-32; Exodus 39:27-29). The priest stood as mediator or liaison (the Hebrew word literally means "bridge-builder") between God and humankind. He offered sacrifice for the sins of the people.

Jesus is the perfect High Priest who opens the way for all to enter into the presence of God by offering the perfect sacrifice for the sin of the world (see Hebrews 5).

Jesus said, "It is finished"

John 19:28-30

John tells us that when Jesus cried from thirst on the cross he was fulfilling the words of scripture from Psalm 69:21: "They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink."

Jesus' death was no mere accident of fate but a direct fulfillment of the will of his Father. He came to lay down his life as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. John's mention of the hyssop (19:29) would remind the Jews of the first Passover feast when God instructed the people to sprinkle the blood of the Passover lamb with hyssop over the lintels of their doors that they might be spared from death (Exodus 12:22).

Jesus is the true Passover Lamb whose blood sprinkles us clean from sin and saves us from eternal death.

"Not one of His bones shall be broken"

John 19:31-37

The Jews showed more mercy than the Romans in their treatment of criminals who suffered the death penalty. It was Roman practice to leave a crucified man on the cross until he died. It was not unusual for a man to hang for days on the cross before he expired. And after he died he was not given a burial, but the body was left exposed for the vultures and dogs to feed upon.

The law of Moses, however, treated crucifixion differently: "And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but you shall bury him the same day" (Deut.21:22-23).

On this occasion it was even more important that the bodies be buried before evening since the Sabbath of the Passover was about to begin. The Jewish leaders had the Romans break the legs of crucified Jews at the end of the day to ensure that they could be buried before sundown.

Fortunately for Jesus, he was spared this further indignity since he had already expired by mid-afternoon.

The Burial of Christ

John 19:38-42

Jesus not only died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3); he also, by the grace of God, tasted death for every one (Heb. 2:9). It was a real death that put an end to his earthly human existence. Jesus died in mid afternoon and the Sabbath began at 6:00 pm. Since the Jewish law permitted no work on the Sabbath, the body had to be buried quickly. Someone brave enough would have to get permission from the Roman authorities to take the body and bury it.

The bodies of executed criminals were usually left unburied as carion for the vultures and dogs. Jesus was spared this indignity through the gracious intervention of Joseph of Arimethea. Who was this admirer and secret disciple of Jesus? Luke tells us that Joseph was a member of the Sanhedrin, the supreme Jewish council that condemned Jesus. We are told that he did not agree with their verdict. He was either absent from their meeting or silent when they tried Jesus.

What kind of man was Joseph? Luke tells us that he was "good and righteous" and "looking for the kingdom of God" (Luke 23:50-51).

Although he did not stand up for Jesus at his trial, he nonetheless, sought to honor him in his death by giving him a proper burial. Nicodemus, another secret disciple of Jesus and a member of the Sanhedrin, also assisted in the burial of Jesus by providing the burial clothes and spices. This was to fulfill what the prophet Isaiah had foretold: "He was cut off out of the land of the living ..and they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth" (Isaiah 53:8-9).