

# JOHN CHAPTER NINETEEN

## The Crown of Thorns

### John 19:1-5

“In his commentary on John, Harry Ironside tells of a meeting of the Synod of the Free Church of Scotland many years ago. One minister was invited to preach the sermon on a particular Sunday morning, and he gave a marvelous oration on the beauty of virtue. He concluded, ‘*Oh, my friends, if virtue incarnate could only appear on earth, men would be so ravished with her beauty that they would fall down and worship her.*’ Many went out saying, ‘*What a magnificent oration that was!*’

“The same evening another man preached. He did not preach about virtue and beauty. He preached Christ and him crucified. As he closed his sermon he said, ‘*My friends, Virtue Incarnate has appeared on earth, and men instead of being ravished with his beauty and falling down and worshipping him, cried out, ‘Away with him! Crucify him! We will not have this man to rule over us!’*’ The second man was right. We do not like to hear it. We resent those who tell us. But the truth is that the natural man (the unbeliever)<sup>1</sup> hates God’s holiness and will do anything rather than allow the light of Christ to penetrate his own deep darkness.”<sup>2</sup>

The eighteenth and nineteenth chapters of John's Gospel deal with the trials of Jesus beginning with his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane and ending with His crucifixion.

#### John 19:1-15 NAS:

<sup>1</sup> *Pilate then took Jesus and **scourged Him.***

<sup>2</sup> *And the soldiers twisted together a **crown of thorns** and put it on His head, and put a **purple robe** on Him;*

<sup>3</sup> *and they began to come up to Him and say, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and to give Him slaps in the face.*

<sup>4</sup> ***Pilate** came out again and said to them, "Behold, I am bringing Him out*

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<sup>1</sup> Parentheses added.

<sup>2</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *An Expository Commentary – John, Volume 5: Triumph through Tragedy (John 18-21)*, , Paperback ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1465-1470.

*to you so that you may know that I find no guilt in Him."*

<sup>5</sup> *Jesus then came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold, the Man!"*

<sup>6</sup> *So when the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they cried out saying, "Crucify, crucify!" Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves and crucify Him, for I find no guilt in Him."*

<sup>7</sup> *The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God."*

<sup>8</sup> *Therefore when Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid;*

<sup>9</sup> *and he entered into the Praetorium again and said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer.*

<sup>10</sup> *So Pilate said to Him, "You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?"*

<sup>11</sup> *Jesus answered, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you (Caiphas)<sup>3</sup> has the greater sin."*

<sup>12</sup> *As a result of this Pilate made efforts to release Him, but the Jews cried out saying, "If you release this Man, you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out to be a king opposes Caesar."*

<sup>13</sup> *Therefore when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out, and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha.*

<sup>14</sup> *Now it was the day of preparation for the Passover; it was about the **sixth hour.** And he said to the Jews, "Behold, your King!"*

<sup>15</sup> *So 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."*

#### John 19:1-3 NAS:

<sup>1</sup> *Pilate then took Jesus and scourged Him.*

<sup>2</sup> *And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and put a purple robe on Him;*

<sup>3</sup> *and they began to come up to Him and say, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and to give Him slaps in the face.*

Incredible as it seems, at the close of John chapter eighteen the crowd has asked for **Barabbas** to be freed instead of Christ. The people were worked up to a frenzy by the Jewish leaders according to Matthew 27:20: "*But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to put Jesus to death*" (NAS). The chief priests and elders wanted Jesus killed so they could continue to pursue their own selfish interests without interference.

There is no explanation for the direction a mob may take. The people who made up this mob were probably many of the same people who had very recently hailed Jesus as both

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<sup>3</sup> Parentheses added.

the Son of God and their King. Now they were more than ready to choose Barabbas over the Son of God. Now it would seem reasonable to assume that Barabbas could have been very much of a hero to the people because of his courage in leading the resistance against the Romans. Because of that they were probably willing to overlook the fact that he was also a thief and a murderer. Add to that the fact that the Jewish leaders were probably very talented at manipulating the masses, and in producing feelings of patriotic admiration towards Barabbas, and it becomes clear how a mob can lose its ability to reason and start to react with its feelings instead of rational thinking. In fact, the field of social psychology has documented for us the fact that people in a group or mob may ignore their own personal ethics, values, and beliefs and be swept along by the group sentiment to do or say things they would never do by themselves.<sup>4</sup>

Even though Jesus had been well-received by many of the people, many also were probably disappointed that He was not the military conqueror they were hoping for to overthrow the Roman government. Undoubtedly many were hoping for just that when Jesus made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem earlier in the week.

We mentioned earlier that Pilate must have thought he was caught between a rock and a hard place. He and everybody else knew that Jesus was innocent, but the Jewish leaders and the crowd were turning up the heat and by this time it would seem logical that Pilate would be feeling very uncomfortable; perhaps the word fear would even be appropriate to use at this point. The crowd had cried "*Crucify Him!*"<sup>5</sup> yet Pilate knew Jesus to be innocent. What could he do? Then Pilate had a thought. What if he were to order Jesus to be scourged? Maybe such a severe punishment would satisfy their thirst for blood and vengeance. It would be difficult for anyone to look upon someone who had been scourged and not take pity on them.

Luke 23:22 NAS:

<sup>22</sup> *And he (Pilate) said to them the third time, "Why, what evil has this man done? I have found in Him no guilt demanding death; therefore I will punish Him and release Him."*

Scourging was possibly the worst torture imaginable. The victim was tied to a post and beaten with scourges, called *scorpions*, leather whips tipped with jagged pieces of metal, bone, and sharp spikes, and many prisoners never survived the beating. The severity of the beating in Jesus' case is evident from His later inability to bear His cross.<sup>6</sup> Josephus wrote about a man whose ribs were laid bare by scourging. Just imagine what Jesus went through for us. He was slapped in the face before Annas (John 18:22), and spat on and beaten before Caiaphas and the council (Matt. 26:67). Pilate scourged Him and the soldiers slapped Him in the face ( John 19:1–3); and before they led Him to Calvary, the

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<sup>4</sup> For additional explanation look up "mob psychology" or "group psychology" in a dictionary of either psychology or social psychology.

<sup>5</sup> Mark 15:14.

<sup>6</sup> Vincent, Marvin Richardson: *Word Studies in the New Testament*. Bellingham, WA : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2002, S. 2:277.

soldiers mocked Him and beat Him with a rod (Mark 15:19).<sup>7</sup> Do not ever forget the suffering and physical pain Jesus endured for you!

Pilate had called Him “King of the Jews” (John 18:39), so the soldiers decided that the “king” should have a crown and a robe. The Jews had mocked His claim to being a Prophet (Matthew 26:67–68), and now the Gentiles mocked His claim to being a King. The verb tenses in the Greek text in John 19:3 indicate that the soldiers *repeatedly* came to Him, mocked Him, and beat Him with their hands. The forces of Hell were having a heyday in Pilate’s hall.<sup>8</sup> Pilate gave in to the accusers and permitted the flogging and the mockery (John 19:1–3).

Pilate thought the Jews might be satisfied if Jesus were humiliated and made to suffer in this fashion. Jesus had predicted this treatment.<sup>9</sup> A purple robe was often associated with royalty.<sup>10</sup> The Roman soldiers mocked Christ with a crown of thorns and a purple robe, shouting in jest, “*Hail, King of the Jews!*” while they beat him. The robe may have been the one Herod put around Him before He sent Jesus back to Pilate, Luke 23:11 (NAS):

*<sup>11</sup> And Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate.*

Then according to Matthew 27:29-31 NAS:

*<sup>29</sup> And after twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand; and they knelt down before Him and mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!"*

*<sup>30</sup> They spat on Him, and took the reed and began to beat Him on the head.*

*<sup>31</sup> After they had mocked Him, they took the scarlet robe off Him and put His own garments back on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him.*

The reed they gave Jesus was in mockery of the regal *scepter* (a king’s elaborate ceremonial staff, Psalm 45:6). “*And they knelt down before Him*” and said, “*Hail, King of the Jews!*” --mocking Him in the manner used when approaching emperors. “*They spat on Him, and took the reed and began to beat Him on the head.*”

Pilate had been a ruthless ruler (Luke 13:1), but in A.D. 32, a year or so prior to Jesus arrest and crucifixion, his friend and protector (Sejanus) in Rome who had been covering up his abuses had been executed. Pilate was then no longer secure and comfortable in his relationship with Caesar. He had to guard against any negative reports coming to the emperor’s ears. The Jews knew that he was vulnerable at this point and forced Pilate’s

<sup>7</sup> The Greek word that is here translated “slap” means to strike sharply or heavily with the hand or an implement held in the hand.

<sup>8</sup> Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 18:39

<sup>9</sup> Mt 20:19). See also Isa 53:5.

<sup>10</sup> Pfeiffer, Charles F. ; Harrison, Everett Falconer: *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary : New Testament*. Chicago : Moody Press, 1962, S. Jn 19:1.

decision to crucify Jesus.<sup>11</sup>

John 19:4-5 NAS:

<sup>4</sup> *Pilate came out again and said to them, "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you so that you may know that I find no guilt in Him."*

<sup>5</sup> *Jesus then came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "**Behold, the Man!**"*

Now Pilate and Jesus went outside again. If we had been there and seen Jesus after that brutal beating it would have sickened us and broken our hearts. He had been beaten within an inch of His life. He must have looked as if He ran into a buzz saw. Pilate took Jesus to the crowd in the street again stating that he found no fault with him, although he had scourged Him. From Luke 23 we see again that Pilate intended to scourge Jesus and then let Him go.

Luke 23:14-16 NAS:

<sup>14</sup> *Pilate said to them, "You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined Him before you, I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against Him."*

<sup>15</sup> *"No, nor has Herod, for he sent Him back to us; and behold, nothing deserving death has been done by Him."*

<sup>16</sup> *"Therefore I will punish Him and release Him."*

If we read between the lines we can almost understand what Pilate is thinking. It is as if he is offering this blood soaked man with flesh hanging from a body that has been ripped apart and ripped open by this vicious whipping, and humiliated, and he is hoping that they will show Jesus some mercy. Pilate then calls out to the crowd, "*Behold the man!*" Pilate does not want to sentence this innocent man to death. He no longer speaks of Jesus as King, but sees Him as a man beaten nearly to death.

Between John 18:38 and Jesus' execution we see several attempts by Pilate to set Jesus free and not comply with the crowd's demand to kill Him. He knew Jesus was innocent of the charges brought against Him; but since the rulers had incited the crowd to demand Jesus be crucified, Pilate (1) sent Jesus to Herod hoping that Herod would make the decision for him, (2) attempted to release Jesus instead of Barabbas, and (3) caused Jesus to be beaten, hoping by this means to promote sympathy for Jesus from the leaders and mob. None of these attempts worked.<sup>12</sup> None care to admit it, but there is in the unsaved person's heart that which leads people to oppose true righteousness.

It was the verdict of all who had dealings with Jesus in His final hours that He was innocent. **First**, Judas declared, "*I have sinned, for I have betrayed innocent blood*"

<sup>11</sup> Jamieson, Robert ; Fausset, A. R. ; Fausset, A. R. ; Brown, David ; Brown, David: *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. Oak Harbor, WA : 1997, S. Jn 19:2.

<sup>12</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *An Expositional Commentary – John, Volume 5: Triumph through Tragedy (John 18-21)*, , Paperback ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1465-1470.

(Matthew 27:4). **Second**, Pilate's wife sent a message to Pilate saying, "*Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him*" (Matthew 27:19). **Third**, Pilate himself declared Christ innocent: "*I find no basis for a charge against him*" (John 18:38). **Fourth**, Herod found Christ blameless, for Pilate reported of Herod's verdict, "*Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death*" (Luke 23:15). **Fifth**, on the cross the dying thief cried out, "*We are punished justly; for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong*" (Luke 23:41). **Sixth**, the centurion in charge of the crucifixion said, "*Surely this was a righteous man*" (Luke 23:47). Lastly, the crowds at the cross, seeing the earthquake and the other supernatural signs accompanying his death, exclaimed, "*Surely this was the Son of God*" (Matthew 27:54).

So therefore it would seem it was almost a miracle that Jesus was crucified—a devastating miracle that One whom so many declared innocent could be executed. This is yet another evidence of everything God did so that you and I, the truly guilty ones, could be declared “*not guilty*” in God’s eyes. We are “*not guilty*” because Christ took our punishment and shed His blood because He loves us so. How loving and gracious our God is to perform all the miracles that would allow us to spend eternity in His presence (His birth, His incarnation, His death, and His resurrection).

As we see Jesus standing before Pilate we see clearly that He is a brave man. The beating when a person was scourged lasted so long that few remained conscious throughout the ordeal and some died. Yet it was after His suffering this brutal beating that Pilate presented Jesus to the crowd calling out to the people to “***Behold the man!***”<sup>13</sup>

William Barclay was on the right track when he wrote:

"It must have been Pilate's first intention to awaken the pity of the Jews. 'Look!' he said. 'Look at this poor, bruised, bleeding creature! Look at this wretchedness! Can you possibly wish to hound a creature like this to an utterly unnecessary death?' But even as he said it, we can almost hear the tone of Pilate's voice change and see the wonder dawn in his eyes. And instead of saying it half-contemptuously, to awaken pity, he says it with a dawning wonder and an admiration that will not be repressed." <sup>14</sup>

In wartime soldiers will frequently admire the bravery of a defeated enemy, wondering how they themselves might bear up under similar suffering were the roles reversed. Did Pilate, an old soldier, perhaps inwardly respect Christ's bravery?<sup>15</sup>

But it is not only bravery that we see in the man standing before Pilate. There is also majesty, and such majesty as befits the Son of God. “Behold the man.” Yes. But behold

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Op. cit. Boice.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

the King too, the King of kings, whose dignity and grace shone through even in the moment of his greatest physical humiliation. This was a great man. But this was also God, as the resurrection was soon to indicate (Romans 1:4).<sup>16</sup>

We have more opportunities to learn about Christ in our day than ever before in human history. Books and magazines and radio programs and movies and television have all told about Him. The call has gone forth, "*Behold the man! Look to this one for salvation. He loves you, he died for you. He rose again. Turn from your sin and place your trust in him as your Savior!*"<sup>17</sup> Most people today pay little or no attention to that message however. They are more concerned about whether a church has a contemporary service or active youth programs over and above whether it teaches the truth of God's Word.

Today is the day of God's grace. Now we see Him offered to us for salvation. His death is our life. But the day is coming when this period of grace will end, and the One who was once judged by the people of this world will be the Judge of the people of this world. The King of Glory will then have exchanged the robe of mockery for the role of divine Majesty, the wreath of thorns for a crown of glory, and the reed for the scepter of universal dominion.

Where will you be on that day. Will you be among the sheep or the goats? Will you receive judgment or a reward? The answer depends on what you do with Jesus today. Will you turn from His call to follow your own path or will you surrender to Him as your Lord and Savior?

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.