

THE CRUCIFIXION

John 19:17-30

As we resume our study today, we see that Jesus' trial was now over and the time was drawing close for Jesus to be nailed to the cross. We pick up the story after Jesus has been flogged, ridiculed, and sentenced.

John 19:17-30 NAS:

¹⁷ *They took Jesus, therefore, and He went out, bearing His own cross, to the place called the **Place of a Skull**, which is called in Hebrew, **Golgotha**.*

¹⁸ *There they crucified Him, and with Him two other men, one on either side, and Jesus in between.*

¹⁹ *Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It was written, "JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS."*

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

²¹ *So the chief priests of the Jews were saying to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews'; but that He said, 'I am King of the Jews.'"*

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

²³ *Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His outer garments and made four parts, a part to every soldier and also the tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece.*

²⁴ *So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, to decide whose it shall be"; this was to fulfill the Scripture: "They divided My outer garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots."*

²⁵ *Therefore the soldiers did these things. But standing by the cross of Jesus were **His mother**, and **His mother's sister**, **Mary the wife of Clopas**, and **Mary Magdalene**.*

²⁶ *When Jesus then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold, your son!"*

²⁷ *Then He said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" From that hour the disciple took her into his own household.*

²⁸ *After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, to fulfill the Scripture, said, "I am thirsty."*

²⁹ *A jar full of sour wine was standing there; so they put a sponge full of the sour wine upon a branch of hyssop and brought it up to His mouth.*

³⁰ *Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "**It is finished!**" And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.*

“Years ago, a Roman emperor said to a Greek architect: “Build me a Coliseum, and when it is done, I will crown you, and I will make your name famous through all the world.” The work was done. The emperor said: “Now, we will crown that architect. We will have a grand celebration.”

The Coliseum was crowded with a great host. The emperor was there and the Greek architect, who was to be crowned for putting up this building. And they brought out some Christians, who were ready to die for the truth and from the doors underneath were let out the hungry lions.

The emperor arose amid the shouting assemblage and said: “The Coliseum is done, and we have Christians at the mouth of these lions, and we have come here to honour the architect who has constructed this wonderful building. The time has come for me to honour him, and we further celebrate his triumph by the slaying of these Christians.” Whereupon, the Greek architect sprang to his feet and shouted: “I also am a Christian.”

And they flung him to the wild beasts, and his body, bleeding and dead, was trampled into the dust of the amphitheatre.”

—Talmage¹

Here was a great man who was about to be honored by the king himself until it was discovered that he was a Christian. Jesus was the greatest of men and they hated and killed Him as well. He had come to offer a great gift but ignorance and greed made them willing to kill what they feared.

There is yet another story about the Coliseum we would like to tell you.

“After three centuries, notwithstanding the spread of Christianity, gladiatorial combats continued to be the favorite pastime of a large proportion of the Roman citizens. Constantine prohibited them. The populace persisted. To avoid an insurrection they were allowed to have their will. Honourous re-enacted the prohibition. It was also in vain.

One day, as the gladiatorial fight was about to commence, Telemachus rushed down into the arena and separated the combatants. Then the spectators, indignant at this interruption, tore up the marble benches and hurled them down upon him “from the amphitheatre, which seemed crowded with so many demons raging for human blood.”

But on his death the benevolent monk Telemachus was victorious—rage yielded to admiration—and gladiatorial combats

¹ Tan, Paul Lee: *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers*. Garland TX: Bible Communications 1996, c1979.

ceased forever. He became the last martyr of the Coliseum.”²

The way in which these early martyrs went to their death and the way Jesus accepted His own tortuous death said something to people about the faith of men and women that could die without fear. It is our feeling that this was one of the main reasons Christianity spread so rapidly in those early years. People saw something in those people that they wanted for themselves. We may learn something about faith as we take a closer look at these verses.

John 19:17-18 NAS:

¹⁷ *They took Jesus, therefore, and He went out, bearing His own cross, to the place called the **Place of a Skull**, which is called in Hebrew, **Golgotha.***

¹⁸ *There they crucified Him, and with Him two other men, one on either side, and Jesus in between.*

Golgotha was probably located on the same site that the **Church of the Holy Sepulcher** is located today. There have been several churches built on this site and later destroyed and rebuilt. The present church was completed in A.D. 1149 by the Crusaders.³

In that culture crucifixion was a form of capital punishment and was reserved for the worst kind of lawbreakers, especially those who were involved in rebelling against the authority of the government. In Jesus' time, death on the cross represented rejection, shame, and suffering. The convicted prisoner had to carry his cross, or at least the crossbeam, from the court to the place of execution. It was approximately one-mile from the place where Pilate sentenced Jesus to Golgotha. From what was said earlier you can imagine what kind of physical condition Jesus was in after His severe scourging. Somewhere along the way Jesus began stumbling and falling under the weight of the cross, so the Romans commanded a passer-by to take the cross from Jesus and carry it the rest of the way to Golgotha. The man who took the cross from Jesus was **Simon of Cyrene**. The scene here fulfills two Old Testament **symbols** or **types**. Isaac carried his own wood for the sacrifice in Genesis 22:1-6, and the sin offering used to be taken outside the camp or city as we read in Hebrews 13:11-13. So Jesus was first made sin according to 2 Corinthians 5:21. He was then made to carry the wood on which He would be presented as an offering, and then sent outside the walls of the city as that sin offering. Golgotha in Aramaic meant "*the place of the skull*," and that was probably because this hill resembled a skull in appearance.⁴

So the chief priests and the Roman soldiers led Jesus off to be crucified. It was probably the most cruel and shameful punishment imaginable, and extremely painful. Not only

² Tan, Paul Lee: *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers*. Garland TX: Bible Communications 1996, c1979.

³ Hughes, Robert B.; Laney, J. Carl; Hughes, Robert B.: *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001 (The Tyndale Reference Library), S. 482.

⁴ Alvord, John F.; Zuck, Roy B.: Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:339

were spikes similar to railroad spikes driven through your hands and feet to hold you on the cross, which would be bad enough, but the weight of a person's body hanging on those spikes would cause excruciating pain. To top it all off, crucifixion would cause suffocation if the person did not put pressure on his feet and pull up with his arms so that he could breathe. Often a person would hang there for days in that kind of agony. God ended Jesus' agony after several hours.

John 19:19-22 NAS:

¹⁹ *Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It was written, "JESUS THE NAZARENE , THE KING OF THE JEWS."*

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

²¹ *So the chief priests of the Jews were saying to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews'; but that He said, 'I am King of the Jews.'"*

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

It was customary for the Romans to place a sign above the head of the person being crucified for the purpose of letting everyone know what crime had been committed. In Jesus' case it was written in all three common languages of the culture: Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, so that all that went by would be able to understand what crime Jesus had committed. The wording on the sign has been translated with some variations, depending on which gospel account is quoted, but they all say the same thing: that Jesus was the king of the Jews. This implied of course that Jesus intended to lead an uprising among the Jews against the Roman government. Additionally there could be little doubt that Pilot also wanted it to be an embarrassment to the Jewish leaders that their king would suffer such a humiliating judgment and death. Yet you also have to consider the possibility that Pilate was saying, "*Here is the King of the Jews and look how He is treated.*"

The chief priests therefore asked Pilate to edit the sign to read: "*He said, I am King of the Jews.*" Pilate refused their request because he wanted to rub salt in their wounds in order to make them squirm in their humiliation. "*What I have written, I have written,*" Pilate told them, and that was final. Thus the cross proclaimed that Jesus was the King of the Jews, and is it not ironic that that is exactly what He is?

John 19:23-24 NAS:

²³ *Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His outer garments and made four parts, a part to every soldier and also the tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece.*

²⁴ *So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, to decide whose it shall be"; this was to fulfill the Scripture: "They Divided My outer garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots."*

At most Roman executions, the execution squad included a centurion and four soldiers to assist him. The soldiers were permitted to divide among themselves whatever personal belongings were seized by the soldiers when the criminal was arrested. So these soldiers

divided up the only things that Jesus possessed, His personal clothing, which very likely would have included an undergarment, an outer garment, sandals, a girdle, and a robe. The four men each took one piece of clothing, and then they threw the dice for Jesus' robe. This fulfilled the prophecy in Psalm 22:18 when David wrote: *"They divide my garments among them, And for my clothing they cast lots."*

As Jesus hung on that cross He not only had to endure the kind of pain that 99.9% of us will never know, but He also had to endure the verbal abuse of the passers-by, as we read in Mark 15:27-32 (NAS):

²⁷ *They crucified two robbers with Him, one on His right and one on His left.*

²⁸ *[And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And He was numbered with transgressors."]*

²⁹ *Those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads, and saying, "Ha! You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days,*

³⁰ *save Yourself, and come down from the cross!"*

³¹ *In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes, were mocking Him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself.*

³² *"Let this Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from the cross, so that we may see and believe!" Those who were crucified with Him were also insulting Him.*

It is interesting to note that even though John was the only disciple who actually witnessed the crucifixion, his gospel gives the fewest details so that we turn to the other gospels to fill in details.⁵ We could speculate about why John gives such a "bare bones" account. Dr. Merrill Tenney suggests that John "did not lay great value upon stressing the physical suffering."⁶ He also comments that since crucifixion was still practiced at the time the gospel was written the details would be common knowledge. Perhaps, also it was so horrific to see his Lord treated in such a manner that John simply did not want to relive the crucifixion by relating all the details of it.

Now let us move on in the story.

John 19:25-27 NAS:

²⁵ *Therefore the soldiers did these things. But standing by the cross of Jesus were **His mother**, and **His mother's sister**, **Mary the wife of Clopas**, and **Mary Magdalene**.*

²⁶ *When Jesus then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold, your son!"*

⁵ Tenney, Merrill. *John: The Gospel of Belief*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company. 1948, p. 265

⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ *Then He said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" From that hour the disciple took her into his own household.*

A group of women, along with the Apostle John, at first stood near the cross, but then apparently had to move farther away for some reason.

Matthew 27:55-56 NAS:

⁵⁵ *Many women were there looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee while ministering to Him.*

⁵⁶ *Among them was **Mary Magdalene**, and **Mary the mother of James and Joseph**, and the **mother of the sons of Zebedee**.*

Mark 15:40-41 NAS:

⁴⁰ *There were also some women looking on from a distance, among whom were **Mary Magdalene**, and **Mary the mother of James the Less and Joses**, and **Salome**.*

⁴¹ *When He was in Galilee, they used to follow Him and minister to Him; and there were many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem.*

John specifies four women: **Mary**, the mother of Jesus; **His mother's sister, Salome**, the mother of James and John; **Mary**, the wife of Clopas (Cleophas); and **Mary Magdalene**. This scene fulfills the prophecy of Simeon who blessed the Baby Jesus when His parents brought Him to be presented at the Temple.

Luke 2:33-35 NLT:

³³ *Jesus' parents were amazed at what was being said about him.*

³⁴ *Then **Simeon** blessed them, and he said to **Mary**, the baby's mother, "This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, but he will be a joy to many others. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose him.*

³⁵ *As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul."*

Jesus' thoughts were for His mother and He singled out the disciple that He knew would take the best care of her. We know that John cared for Mary because later we see that she was among the believers in the Upper Room as they awaited Pentecost (Acts 1:14). Even while He was performing the great work of redemption, Jesus was faithful to His responsibilities as a son. What an honor it must have been for John to take Jesus' place in Mary's life!⁷

Do not confuse Mary Magdalene with the "sinful woman" described in Luke 7:36 and the following verses. Jesus had delivered Mary Magdalene from demons (Mark 16:9; Luke 8:1-2). Mary Magdalene used her resources to assist Jesus in His ministry. Salome had asked Jesus for thrones for her two sons, if you recall, so that they could sit on His

⁷ Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 19:17.

right and left hands in the Kingdom and He had denied her request (Matthew 20:20-21).⁸

John 19:28-30 NAS:

²⁸ *After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, to fulfill the Scripture, said, "**I am thirsty.**"*

²⁹ *A jar full of sour wine was standing there; so they put a sponge full of the sour wine upon a branch of hyssop and brought it up to His mouth.*

³⁰ *Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "**It is finished!**" And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.*

We believe that, among other things, Jesus' statement that He was thirsty speaks of His human nature. Sometimes people forget that He was fully human just as you and I are fully human. He was of course also fully God, which many people have a hard time understanding. He was the God-man, forever God and now forever man. In His incarnation He took our humanity upon Himself. How is that true? It is true because Jesus entered into our suffering and finally died that we might be delivered from sin and its effects.⁹

You may think this to be a little bit of a stretch, but we kind of like the idea of relating Jesus' physical expression of thirst here with our spiritual thirst. His death then satisfies our thirst for salvation. Horatius Bonar writes:

"I heard the voice of Jesus say,
 'Behold, I freely give
 The living water; thirsty one,
 Stoop down and drink, and live.'
 I came to Jesus, and I drank
 Of that life-giving stream;
 My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
 And now I live in Him."

If you have not come to Christ, then you need to respond to the One who died for your salvation.¹⁰

It is finished. What did Jesus mean? He meant the suffering that has accompanied His saving and redeeming work for mankind is over. The work that was spoken of throughout the thousands of preceding years, the promises of God communicated by the prophets, is finished. In His report to the Father He had said, "*I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do*" (John 17:4).¹¹

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ 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, 1520.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1983), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, under: "Chapter 19".

John shows us specifically that prophecy is being fulfilled. There are chapters in the Old Testament which are especially concerned with the Crucifixion: Psalm 22, Genesis 22, Isaiah 53, and Leviticus 16. There are twenty-eight prophecies alone that were fulfilled while Jesus was hanging on the Cross. "*I thirst*" is the fulfillment of Psalm 69:21.¹²

We know from one of our earlier studies that Jesus had been meditating upon the Scriptures during the hours of His agony. He had been thinking of Psalm 22 especially. Apparently, His mind had also run over other prophecies, almost, it would seem, checking them off to assure Himself that everything prophesied concerning His life had been accomplished. Was there anything in Genesis that had been left undone? No. Exodus? No. Deuteronomy? No. At last He reached Psalm 69 where it is said in verse 21, "*They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst.*" Already they had offered him gall (a bitter, poisonous herb) to deaden His pain (Mark 15:23), but there had been no offer of vinegar for His thirst. Therefore, he calls out "*I thirst*" that this might be completed. This was the last prophecy. So we are told, "*When he had received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished.'*" With that, He bowed his head and gave up His spirit.¹³

He "*bowed His head,*" or literally laid His head to rest. Dr. Tenney comments that this word had only been used one other time in Jesus' ministry. That was when He said, "*The Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head*" (Matthew 8:20; Luke 9:58). "*The only place where He could lay His head to rest was on the cross.*"¹⁴ Then Christ gave up His Spirit. He released it from the human body He had dwelt in for 33 years.

That, to me, is a great wonder. Jesus, the One who is Life itself, the One who came to give us life voluntarily gave up His human life for you and me. No one, and no amount of suffering or punishment, could take Jesus' life. He gave it up voluntarily. He had the power to call legions of angels to strike the soldiers dead. He had the power to just come down off that cross. However, if He had, you and I would be miserable in our sins with no hope of Heaven or eternal life.

When our problems come and we face hardships, especially those that come because of our faith, we can take comfort in knowing our Lord endured so much more. May we each call on His strength, His comfort, and His guidance as we go through whatever ordeal may come our way. He endured much to be our Savior, let us each make Him Lord of our lives.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Op Cit., Boice.

¹⁴ Op.Cit, Tenney, p. 268.