



Disciplers Bible Studies

JOHN
LESSON 20

The Sentencing, Crucifixion and Burial of Christ John 19:1-42

Introduction

A. God's Providential Guidance

Chapter 19 continues the Roman trial of Jesus under Pilate's wavering leadership. At the time of the trial, none of the participants and bystanders realized that God was providentially guiding the entire process of Jesus' passion and death. We are able to understand that God was in total control only because of: 1) the after-death miraculous events later described by the New Testament writers; and 2) the precise fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy concerning this event. Jesus' voluntary sufferings and forgiving demeanor clearly validated His authority, power and majesty as the Son of God.

B. Review of Hearings and Trials

In Chapter 18, the first religious hearing began with Annas' interrogation right after Jesus' arrest. The Jews then moved Him to Caiaphas' palace for the second Jewish hearing where they trumped up charges of blasphemy. Next, they took Him to the official Sanhedrin council to confirm the religious charges of blasphemy. Then came Pilate's first political trial and his attempt to release Jesus. He sent Jesus to Herod in an attempt to avoid handling the situation himself. That failed, so, as Chapter 18 closed, Pilate began the second Roman trial by attempting to release Jesus. The Jews wanted Barabbas released rather than Jesus.

C. Check the Other Gospels

In his account, John omitted some of the details of Pilate's second trial. For example, Matthew described Pilate declaring his innocence by washing his hands (27:24;) the Jews taking responsibility for Jesus' death (27:25;) the release of Barabbas (27:26); Pilate's wife warning him to have nothing to do with Jesus (27:19;) Jesus' most severe scourging (27:26) and Jesus' promise to one of the other victims being crucified (Luke 23:42-43.) Read these as you study the lesson to get a full understanding of Jesus' passion.

Outline of John 19:1-42

- I. Behold the Man (19:1-5)
- II. Pilate's Dilemma (19:6-11)
- III. The Sentencing (19:12-16)
- IV. The Crucifixion (19:17-37)
- V. The Burial (19:38-42)

I. Behold the Man (19:1-5)

A. The Scourging

In response to the Jews yelling for Barabbas to be released, Pilate had Jesus scourged inside the Praetorium. This was the practice of the Romans before a crucifixion. The Roman soldiers tied Jesus to a whipping post and stripped Him so that His bare back and chest were fully exposed. The whip was a flagellum – a short, broom stick-like handle with long, leather thongs. Small pieces of lead and sharpened pieces of bone were imbedded in the leather thongs. The flagellum was designed to tear a person's flesh to shreds. Most people who were scourged lost consciousness. Some died and some went insane. The Romans called scourging the half-way death.

B. The Crown and the Robe

During the scourging, the Roman soldiers mocked and slapped Jesus. They wove a crown of palm fronds with sharply pointed spikes and placed it tightly on Jesus' head. They also put a purple robe on His shoulders in mockery of His claim to be a King. They struck Him, spat on Him and beat Him on the head with a reed while awaiting Pilate's next orders.

C. The Result Pilate Hoped For

Apparently, Pilate thought that this action would satisfy the Jews. He went outside to the Jews and announced that he found no guilt in Jesus. He brought Jesus out so that they could see the humiliated, physically-abused, pathetic figure that they had regarded as a threat to them and their belief system. Pilate hoped that the terrible wounds on Jesus and His unheard-of endurance under

this extreme torture might touch their hearts and change their murderous intentions into admiration and compassion.

II. Pilate's Dilemma (19:6-11)

A. The Jews' Response

The chief priests and officers were blood thirsty and in no mood to be pacified. Seeing Jesus dressed mockingly as a king enraged them even more. They were further exasperated by the Roman soldiers' contempt and ridicule of Jesus. "*Crucify Him, crucify Him!*" they cried out to Pilate. The Provincial Governor said in effect, "You crucify Him yourselves. I don't want any part of this miscarriage of justice." But then the Jews unintentionally startled Pilate with the statement, "*He made Himself the Son of God.*"

B. Pilate's Reaction.

As a pagan worshiper, Pilate believed that his Roman gods were super-human. He may have reasoned that Jesus' claim to be the Son of God was a claim to be one of these creatures who wielded superhuman powers. Pilate became uneasy and fearful. He took Jesus back into the Praetorium for a private conversation and wanted to know from where Jesus came. He probably had ignored Jesus' earlier words about being a King and having a Kingdom. This time, Jesus did not answer Pilate's question, and it provoked him to reply arrogantly that he had the power to crucify Jesus or to release Him.

C. The Meaning of Verse 11

With royal dignity, Jesus told Pilate he really didn't have any power over Him. By His answer in vs. 11, Jesus meant that Pilate reported to an Emperor who wielded his power by the grace of God (Proverbs 8:15.) Jesus' expression "*from above*" denotes heavenly derivation. Caiaphas, who had been given authority by God to lead His people, Israel, had a greater sin than Pilate because God had given him greater light. Though guilty of sin, Pilate had less light and his was the lesser sin.

III. The Sentencing (19:12-16)

A. Attempt to Release Jesus

Jesus' words about authority over Pilate caused the governor to ponder the situation further. He knew what he ought to do. Even his wife had told him to have nothing to do with that just man (Matthew 27:19). He was convinced of Christ's innocence and

realized for the moment that he should administer justice. He sought to release Jesus.

B. The Jews' "Last Weapon"

But the Jews had their last but strongest "weapon" - intimidating Pilate on the basis of his position under his king, Caesar. "If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend," they said. This threat was very real to Pilate. He knew that anyone who set himself up to be a king would not receive Caesar's approval. He knew also that Tiberius Caesar was a suspicious, uncompromising Emperor. Any suggestion of high treason on the part of Pilate could end his career and possibly his life. He was afraid of Caesar even more than of Jesus. He chose earthly security of position, money and comfort over eternal life.

C. Behold Your King

When Pilate saw that he could not prevail against the Jews, he brought Jesus out and sat down in his judgment seat for formal sentencing. He said to them, "*Behold your King!*" as an expression of his contempt for them. Then he took water and washed his hands before them saying that he was innocent of the blood of this just Person. The multitude responded with, "*His blood be on us and on our children*" (Matthew 27:25.) He then delivered Jesus to the Roman soldiers and they took Him to be scourged and crucified.

D. Greatest Historical Tragedy

Warren Wiersbe wrote, "From the human standpoint, the trial of Jesus was the greatest crime and tragedy in history. From the divine viewpoint, it was the fulfillment of prophecy and the accomplishment of the will of God. The fact that God had planned all of this did not absolve the participants of their responsibility. In fact, at Pentecost, Peter put both ideas together in one statement" (Acts 2:23)!

IV. The Crucifixion (19:17-37)

A. The Process

John did not attempt to describe the horror and painful process of Jesus' crucifixion. He simply recorded the fact, "*They crucified Him, and two others with Him.*" His concern was the sacrificial, voluntary death of Jesus for sinners, emphasizing love and substitution rather than pity and sorrow. Whatever John's reasoning, we need to review the actual process of Christ's suffering and death in order to understand and appreciate Old Testament prophecy and the horrendous, vicarious agony He went through for each one of us.

B. Background

In Jesus' day, crucifixion was considered to be the most cruel, diabolical form of death ever devised by man. It was developed by the Phoenicians who had tried many other forms of execution, including stoning, strangulation, burning in oil, spearing and drawing out the internal organs. However, these methods all brought on death too fast. The Phoenicians wanted the suffering, agony, and humiliation to last longer. Additional time would also bring on unbearable thirst, intolerable insects and the horror of rigid fixation. So, they invented crucifixion which was later embraced by the Carthaginians and Romans. It was so brutal and violent that Roman citizens could not be crucified without a directive from the Emperor.

C. The Lord's Execution

Following Pilate's decision, Jesus was scourged and then carried the horizontal piece of His cross (crossbar) to the Place of the Skull. Once the crucifixion started, the executioner worked quickly and efficiently. He put Jesus down with the crossbar under His neck, shoulders and arms. Two soldiers knelt inside His elbows and pressed down on His forearms and hands, palms up. The executioner pulled two 5-inch square nails from his apron and put them in his teeth. He knelt down to Jesus' right hand, found the right spot near the wrist, took a nail from his teeth and drove it in. He continued pounding until it was well imbedded in the wood. He did the same in the left hand and then brought both of his arms up fast – the signal to raise Jesus up to the vertical beam. It took four men to do this. They lifted the crossbar holding Jesus up to the vertical beam and fastened it. Then, the executioner drove a large nail to the wood through both feet.

D. Excruciating Pain

This inhumane process was excruciatingly painful from the first nail to the last breath. Jesus' arms and shoulder muscles were severely cramped. His pectoral muscles along the rib cage were momentarily paralyzed, causing Him to go into involuntary panic because He couldn't get air into His lungs. He literally slid up and down on the small peg on the vertical beam in order to breathe. Most men stayed alive two or three days like this, but by God's grace, Jesus died in just a few hours.

E. The King of the Jews

Pilate unknowingly became the herald of God's redemptive purpose by placing a sign above Jesus' head in the three great languages of the ancient

world: Hebrew, Latin and Greek. Hebrew represented Old Testament prophesy and the Jewish responsibility to give light to the world concerning the Messiah. Latin represented world law and good government as given by the Romans. Greek was the language of world culture, thought and beauty. As King over all of these peoples, the inscription in these languages was symbolic of His eternal position whether people chose to believe it or not.

F. Jesus' Clothing

In Jesus' day, every Jew wore five pieces of clothing: an inner tunic, outer robe, belt, turban and sandals. The four Roman soldiers each had his pick of clothing, then they gambled for the last piece, the inner tunic. John described once again the fulfillment of Scripture (Psalm 22:18.)

G. Jesus' Mother

During this horrible, humiliating execution, four women and John stood at the foot of the cross, grieving for their suffering Savior. Three of these five people were relatives of Jesus - His mother, His aunt, and His cousin. Jesus thought compassionately about His mother and made provision for her with John. His terms were commonly used in adoption proceedings and implied that Jesus' human father, Joseph, was no longer on the scene.

H. Mission Accomplished

After taking care of His mother, Jesus knew that the end was in sight. He was exhausted and dehydrated and asked for a drink. A Roman soldier callously lifted a vinegar-soaked sponge to His lips (Psalm 69:21.) This did not quench His thirst but it did moisten His mouth sufficiently for Him to say, *"It is finished!"* It was a shout of joy and triumph, not a sign of weary defeat. Luke 23:46 reported Jesus' last words as, *"Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit."* John simply wrote that Jesus bowed His head peacefully and deliberately gave up His spirit. Jesus yielded His life in full faith knowing that His Father would not leave His soul in hell, nor suffer His Holy One to see corruption. (Psalm 16:10.) The physical reason for His death was suffocation and heart failure, but spiritually, He gave His life for the sins of mankind and in obedience to His Father's command. Mark 15:39 recorded that the Roman centurion, probably in charge of the execution, exclaimed, *"Truly this Man was the Son of God!"* Matthew wrote that when Jesus yielded up His spirit, the veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom signifying that mankind now would have direct access to God through His Son's sacrificial death.

I. True Testimony of John

Two other incidents occurred following Jesus' death. Both happened in fulfillment of Scripture. The first was the breaking of the legs of the two other victims to ensure their death. Pilate had ordered this in response to the Jews' request, but it was unnecessary in Jesus' case because He was already dead. (Psalm 34:20.) The second was the piercing of Jesus' side by one of the soldiers (Zechariah 12:10.) John then inserted a significant personal testimony validating his eye-witness account that Jesus really did die, that He was fully man, and that He was God's Son (Matthew 27:54.)

V. The Burial (19:38-42)

A. Joseph of Arimathea

Joseph, a disciple of Jesus, was an honorable man (Luke 23:50) who had not consented to the death of Jesus (Luke 23:51.) He risked ex-communication from the Sanhedrin and the Temple by asking Pilate for Jesus' body to bury in his own tomb. Joseph was a rich, older man who desired that Jesus should have the best resting place available. It was a vault chiseled out of a rock formation in a quiet garden. According to prophesy, Jesus was to be buried in a rich man's tomb untouched by human corruption (Isaiah 53:9.)

B. Nicodemus

Nicodemus, too, was a member of the Sanhedrin. Like Joseph, he was now taking a more visible position as a disciple of Jesus. He was a wealthy man and purchased the best spices and finest linen in which to wrap Jesus' body. Together, the two men pulled out the nails from the hands and feet, lifted off the crown of thorns, washed away the blood and anointed His body lavishly with the spices. A modest funeral procession comprised of Joseph, Nicodemus and a few faithful women proceeded to the tomb in the garden.

Application:

While hanging on the cross, Jesus said an incredible prayer for the soldiers who were killing Him, *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do"* (Luke 23:34). Meditate on this statement in view of the cruel, painful torture Jesus was going through. The depth of His infinite mercy and love for mankind are difficult for our finite, self-oriented minds to comprehend. However, Scripture mandates us to be like Him. Reflect on the times you have been unforgiving toward others who have abused you, used you, disagreed with

you, attacked your integrity, bruised your pride, dented your ego or otherwise offended you. You may have experienced one or more emotions ranging from anger to bitterness. Read Matthew 6:12 and Colossians 3:12-13. Talk to the Lord about it in prayer and ask Him to give you a truly forgiving heart about the matter.