

## **38. Jesus Sentenced to be Crucified**

### **John 19:1-16**

Warm-Up Question: What was the most physically painful thing that has happened to you?

<sup>1</sup>Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. <sup>2</sup>The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe <sup>3</sup>and went up to him again and again, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" And they slapped him in the face. <sup>4</sup>Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews gathered there, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him." <sup>5</sup>When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!" <sup>6</sup>As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, "Crucify! Crucify!" But Pilate answered, "You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him." <sup>7</sup>The Jewish leaders insisted, "We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God." <sup>8</sup>When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, <sup>9</sup>and he went back inside the palace. "Where do you come from?" he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. <sup>10</sup>"Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?" <sup>11</sup>Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." <sup>12</sup>From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jewish leaders kept shouting, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar." <sup>13</sup>When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha). <sup>14</sup>It was the day of Preparation of the Passover; it was about noon. "Here is your king," Pilate said to the Jews. <sup>15</sup>But they shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!" "Shall I crucify your king?" Pilate asked. "We have no king but Caesar," the chief priests answered. <sup>16</sup>Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified (John 19:1-16).

### **The Scourging and Humiliation of Christ (John 19:1-3)**

We have already seen in our last study that Pilate had pronounced Jesus not guilty (John 18:38), but the Jews would not accept it and persisted in asking for Jesus' crucifixion. Pilate then gave them an opportunity to release Christ by making them choose between Jesus and a notorious insurrectionist and murderer by the name of Barabbas. Their choice was to have Barabbas released and to crucify Christ. Both John and Matthew record that after the releasing of Barabbas, Pilate had Jesus flogged. <sup>26</sup>Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified (Matthew 27:26). Luke informs us that Pilate's motive in having Jesus flogged was to appease the Jews. "Therefore, I will punish him and then release him" (Luke 23:16). He hoped that the scourging of Christ's back would elicit some sympathy and mercy for this innocent Man when they saw Him. He reasoned that sentencing Jesus to the "halfway death" would satisfy the mob's bloodlust. Roman scourging was called "the halfway death" because it

was supposed to stop just this side of death. It was not administered in addition to another punishment. The two “thieves” who would die on this day were not scourged. And the Jewish law, the Mithah Arikhta, forbade any manner of prolonged death for condemned criminals, and exempted any who were to die from the shame of being scourged. Considering that both Jewish and Roman law was disregarded in the matter of his punishment, Jesus was treated worse than a criminal.

Flogging or scourging was a terrible way to inflict pain on a man. Jesus’ back would have been stretched over a whipping post so that He could not move, while two men on either side would prepare themselves by choosing the implements of scourging. Scourging by the Romans took one of three forms. There was the *fustes*, a light beating with strips of leather administered as a warning, and then there was the *flagella*, a severe beating, and *verbera*, which was much more severe and administered with a whip with several leather thongs with pieces of metal or bone tied on the ends. Chuck Smith, pastor and author, states that with each stripe of the whip the victim was expected to confess his crime. If the victim would shout out one of his sins, the lictor (the one administering the scourging) would ease up on the punishment until at the end the implement used was just the leather strap. This was not the case with Jesus. He had no sins to confess, and so as a sheep before its shearers is silent, the Lord Jesus did not open His mouth.

The silence of Christ and the lack of a confession of any sin would have brought the lictor’s to use the severest form of scourging, the *verbera*. This kind of scourging would tear pieces of skin off of His back and leave Him with bone and entrails exposed. The prophet, King David, saw this and wrote in the book of Psalms: <sup>17</sup>**All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me (Psalms 22:17)**. We don’t know how many times Jesus was whipped, the gospels do not say. The apostle Paul was whipped 39 times on five different occasions (2 Corinthians 11:24), so tradition has it that this was so with Jesus as well. As Jesus did not confess to any crime, the scourging probably increased in severity until the 39 times was reached. The Law of Moses limited scourging to 40 times (Deuteronomy 25:3), so if Jesus did receive 39 lashes, then the Romans were just falling short of the maximum Jewish sentence. There was no set number of stripes to be administered under Roman law. Under the Roman system, the scourging would continue until the victim was just on the verge of unconsciousness, and close to death. According to a forensic pathologist, the scourging typically resulted in rib fractures and severe lung bruises and lacerations with bleeding into the chest cavity and partial or complete pneumothorax (collapse of the lung).

[Why would God allow His Son to go through scourging as well as the cross?](#)

Six hundred years ago, the prophet Isaiah wrote of the suffering of the Messiah in these terms:

<sup>4</sup>Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup>But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by **his wounds** we are healed. <sup>6</sup>We all, like sheep, have

gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. <sup>7</sup>He was oppressed and afflicted, yet **he did not open his mouth**; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and **as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth** (Isaiah 53:4-7 Emphasis mine).

The Hebrew word, *chabbuwrah*, is the word that is translated by the New International Version (NIV) into “His wounds.” This Hebrew word literally means a stripe or bruise, the mark or stripes on the skin. The King James Version of the English Bible translates this passage as “**by his stripes we are healed**” (Isaiah 53:5). Many people, including myself, believe that Jesus endured the scourging at the hands of the Roman soldiers, and by it, accomplished healing for our bodies. Others say that the wounds that heal us are indicative of His substitutionary death on the cross. Whatever your view, there has been a fountain of healing that has been opened to us by what Jesus experienced on that day.

When the scourging was over, the Roman soldiers had still not finished with Him. The hatred of the Romans for the Jews found expression by the rest of the cohort of soldiers in the Praetorium taking turns to beat Christ and humiliate Him. Mark records that the whole company or cohort (Greek *speira*), took turns beating Him on the head with a staff and spitting on Him (Mark 15:16). They also put a staff in His right hand, put Herod’s scarlet robe around His back over His gaping wounds and then twisted a crown of thorns and set it on His head. They then bowed down paying homage before Him, mocking Him (Matthew 27:27-31). The crown of thorns takes us back to the curse that was placed on the ground in the Garden of Eden. Christ bore the symbol of that curse, the thorns, upon Himself, taking it to the cross with Him.

“**Cursed** is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. <sup>18</sup>It will produce **thorns** and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field (Genesis 3:17b-18).

In the Old Testament, more than five hundred years earlier, Isaiah the prophet had spoken of the Suffering Servant of God that would be sent to Israel. He wrote:

I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting (Isaiah 50:6).

### **Pilate Again Finds Jesus Not Guilty (John 19:4-8)**

When the soldiers had finished their humiliation they returned Christ back to Pilate. I imagine that Pilate was shocked at the mess of the Man before him. The film *Passion of the Christ* by Mel Gibson vividly portrays this, although there is no scriptural evidence of this. Pilate felt sure that this would garner sympathy among the crowd of Jews in the courtyard and by presenting Christ to them looking like He now did, Pilate hoped that they would feel sorry for Jesus and he would be able to release Him.

<sup>14</sup>Just as there were many who were appalled at him—his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human

likeness (Isaiah 52:14).

Christ was appalling to look at. He had been so badly beaten that His form was now disfigured to the degree that He hardly looked human any more. Pilate presented Jesus to them, “Here is the man!” (John 19:5b). Here before them all was the most perfect man ever born, the kindest, most loving and compassionate man the earth had ever witnessed. This was God in the flesh, showing us in a way that we could understand, what God is like, yet mankind rejected him. The scriptures describe Jesus as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3).

Notice that the chief priests and their officials, when Jesus was presented to them after His scourging, allowed no time for the crowd to feel sympathy. They are the ones who immediately respond by shouting, “Crucify! Crucify!” Imagine the feelings of His mother and brothers and the disciples if they had been in the crowd (we are not told), especially as they looked upon their beloved Christ after the company of soldiers had done their worst. They would have been shocked and horrified to hear the crowd cry out, “Crucify! Crucify!” (John 19:6a).

We should not think that if we had been there it would have been any different. The same human nature and sin problem rests in our hearts as much as in theirs. We each see ourselves, there in that courtyard. There could be only one way of deliverance from our sinful nature. There had to be a substitute that would take our guilt upon Himself and do away with it. Thank God for Jesus. He is the perfect Lamb of God.

Again, Pilate responds to the crowd a second time that he finds the Man not guilty, saying, “You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him” (John 19:6b). Why didn’t Pilate just close the proceedings at that point? If Jesus was pronounced not guilty, why listen any longer to these manipulative men? <sup>7</sup>The Jewish leaders insisted, “We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God.” <sup>8</sup>When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid (John 19:7-8a). The depth of evil and hatred in these men knows no bounds. In their warped minds, the Son of God would be a lot more powerful and would have already delivered them from the Roman occupation. In their minds the Messiah would be more like the religious leaders. They had no place for a Son of God like this man.

Occasionally, I have run across people that will say to me that Jesus never claimed to be the Son of God. I don’t know what Bible they read, but here in this passage, even the enemies of Jesus are saying that He said that He was the Son of God. They did not believe Him, but do you? The Jews now appealed to Pilate from the Law of Moses, Leviticus 24:16, which states, “anyone who blasphemes the name of the LORD must be put to death.” Of course, they didn’t want Him stoned, the normal Jewish way of execution. They wanted to influence Pilate to place a curse on Him by hanging Him on a wooden pole (the cross was seen as a wooden pole).

**Power and Accountability (John 19:9-11)**

Notice for the first time in this encounter Pilate is moved by fear. It is at this time that the possibility seizes him that maybe this man is the Son of God. He recalls his wife's comment not to have anything to do with that innocent man (Matthew 27:19). Pilate takes Jesus into his residence again to talk with Him privately. "Where do you come from?" he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer (John 19:9). Subjectively he felt that there was something different about Jesus, but now it comes to the forefront of his mind. He asks Jesus where He came from, but the only response is silence. Even though He is a bloody mess with blood dripping on Pilate's floor, Jesus is still regal in His silence and fully in control. It is Pilate that is the one on trial. There is no pleading for a way out by Jesus. He is fully committed to the plan of the Father. Pilate threatens Him to talk by saying, "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?" <sup>11</sup>Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin."

What is Jesus saying in verse 11? Who is the One in power?

Jesus says Caiaphas is guilty of a greater sin. Are there differing levels of sin and what do you think makes one man guiltier than another?

Pilate sees himself as the only one that can now help Christ. From his point of view Jesus does not have a friend in the world. If you are a Christian, never believe that lie of the enemy. You are watched over and your King is ever near. Everything that happens on the physical plane is taken note of; nothing escapes the watchful eye of heaven. The Lord will allow difficult things to be experienced by His people, but every act will be brought into judgment. We are accountable for even every word that issues from our mouths: "But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken (Matthew 12:36). In another place it is written, "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account (Hebrews 4:13).

Pilate thought that he had power, but the Lord Jesus was the One that was really in power. Pilate was accountable and would one day appear before the judgment seat of Christ <sup>10</sup>For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:10). In that day there will be different levels of guilt and punishment if a man is without Christ. It is one thing to corrupt oneself by your actions, but it is another thing entirely to influence others to sin. Leaders are held to a higher level of accountability because of their level of influence. For all those who have trusted Christ, they will not enter into judgment concerning their sin; the judgment was paid for at the cross of Christ (John 5:22-24). Pilate will be judged for his handling of this injustice, but the greater guilt will be experienced by the high priests and ruling leaders for their part in the rejection of the Messiah (Christ).

### **Rejection of King Jesus (John 19:12-16)**

Again we are told that Pilate tried to set Jesus free (verse 12), but the Jews were insistent.

They had one manipulative card still up their sleeve and after Pilate's last intimate conversation with Jesus, and a third declaration to them of his belief in Christ's innocence, the Jews turned up their ace card, shouting, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar."

What threat were the Jews making to Pilate in verse 12?

He had to decide which kingdom he would serve. To render a verdict of "not guilty" almost certainly would have ruined his political career. He may even have been punished by Rome for not sentencing someone who openly challenged the authority of Caesar. Pilate was comfortable in his role as governor and would rather condemn a man whom he had found innocent than have Caesar be told of his poor leadership. In exasperation, he gave in. Instead of submitting to the kingdom of God, Pilate set aside truth for power, earthly success, and short term comfort.

<sup>24</sup>When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!" <sup>25</sup>All the people answered, "His blood is on us and on our children!" (Matthew 27:24-25).

Do you think that Pilate reconsidered or regretted his action after Jesus had been crucified? What about his encounter with Jesus do you imagine may have plagued his thoughts afterwards?

I wish that guilt and accountability for our sin could be taken away by washing of the hands. If only it was as easy as that! There is only one thing that takes away sin—the shed blood of Christ on the cross in full payment for sin. It is a tragic thing that was uttered by the people on that day—"His blood is on us and on our children!" For nearly two thousand years, from 70 A.D. until the year 1948, the Jewish people were banished from their land. It is a distinct possibility that God has disciplined them as a nation, but at the same time, used those early Jewish believers to export the gospel to the Gentiles. John tells us that Pilate, out of disgust for the Jewish leadership, called Jesus their King: "Here is **your king**," Pilate said to the Jews. <sup>15</sup>But they shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!" "Shall I crucify your king?" Pilate asked. "We have no king but Caesar," the chief priests answered. <sup>16</sup>Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified (John 19:1-16). The Bible says that out of the mouth the heart speaks (Matthew 15:18). It is incredible to think that the Jews claimed Caesar as their king at this point. God's people saw themselves as separate and holy, not to be ruled by another king. But here, they were saying that they were willing to be ruled over by Caesar as their king, rather than by the man Jesus, who they deemed a heretic.

What happened to Pilate later on? Eusebius, a Roman historian and a scholar of the Biblical canon, quoting early apocryphal accounts, stated that Pilate suffered misfortune in the reign of Caligula (AD 37–41), was exiled to Gaul and eventually committed suicide there in Vienne. The 10th century historian Agapius of Hierapolis, in his *Universal History*, says that Pilate committed suicide during the first year of Caligula's

reign, in AD 37/38.

Before we decide to judge the ones who judged our Lord, we should consider our own hearts. We should not think that if we had been there it would have been any different. The same human nature and sin problem rests in our hearts as much as theirs. There may have been those who, convinced of Jesus' innocence, still felt that they could do nothing to stop this and did not want to risk public scrutiny in the midst of an angry mob. While many people in this crowd would have been followers of Jesus, there were many who were not, including the religious leaders of the day. Their attitude was one that has been found continuously over the past twenty centuries: We don't want this man to rule over us! That is the most basic way of deciding who is a true Christian and who is not.

When Jesus talked about the Kingdom of God, He had in mind the reign and rule of the King. Jesus is that King and He demands his rightful place in every human heart as King and Lord. If He is not, then self is. We either let Him be the boss of everything, or we make ourselves the boss of everything. It is that simple and that fundamental. Two thousand years ago the masses rejected His rule and reign. Today it is the same story. Most people reject Jesus for the simple reason that they love worshipping self, they love their sin, and they refuse to bow down to anyone else. They do not want Jesus, because that means saying no to self and yes to Him. It is a radical change of allegiance. The road we travel forks more than once. Our initial decision to trust in Jesus Christ is the most crucial choice we will make, but it is the first of many. Each day, we must choose which kingdom we will serve. Will you submit to truth or succumb to power?

We each could see ourselves there in that courtyard. There could be only one way of deliverance from our sinful nature. There had to be a substitute that would take upon Himself our guilt and do away with it. Thank God for Jesus. He is the perfect Lamb of God. He was the only one who could pay our price in full, being a perfect, sinless sacrifice, just like the Passover Lamb. Thank God that death does not have any hold over us because of His sacrifice of love.

Prayer: Father, Thank you for the sacrifice of your perfect son, Jesus. I ask that your Holy Spirit would keep me from evil, open up your Word to my understanding and give me strength to choose your truth, your will and your kingdom. Yours is the glory forever. Amen!

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