

### 39. The Seven Sayings from the Cross.

John 19:16-30

The Gospel According to John

#### The *Via Dolorosa*, the Way of the Cross

<sup>16</sup>Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. <sup>17</sup>Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). <sup>18</sup>There they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle. <sup>19</sup>Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. <sup>20</sup>Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. <sup>21</sup>The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews." <sup>22</sup>Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written" (John 19:16-22).

As soon as Pilate spoke the judgment against Jesus, the Roman soldiers led Him away. The Lord was probably taken back into the Roman barracks, and a squad of four soldiers would have been assigned to crucify Him. The crossbeam, the *patibulum*, was then tied to His shoulders, and Matthew wrote: that "They led Him away to crucify Him" (Matthew 27:31). It was unusual for a man to be led to the place of crucifixion, for usually a man condemned was forced through much resistance to the place of crucifixion. It was not so with Jesus; again, he was fulfilling Scripture: "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 53:7). He did not fight, but He willingly followed.

Typically, a man to be crucified was paraded by the longest route to a place outside the city walls, a site seen by most people going in and out of the city gate. The early church fathers felt that Isaac's carrying the wood on which he would be sacrificed by his father, Abraham (Genesis 22:6), was symbolic of Jesus' carrying His cross. Each person to be crucified would have a squad of four soldiers, a *quaternion*, one on either side of Him. The leading Roman soldier would parade a sign with the reason for crucifixion. This indictment would create fear in the people who read it so that all would think twice before committing a similar crime.

There were four reasons the Romans used crucifixion as a form of punishment: 1) the death was agonizing, 2) the process of crucifixion was slow, 3) it could be observed publicly, and 4) it was humiliating and served as a deterrent to crime and rebellion.

Pilate instructed that the sign be written in Aramaic, Latin, and Greek with the words *JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS*. The Jewish elders were incensed by this and tried to get the sign changed to say that Jesus had *said* that He was the King of the Jews. Pilate responded to them, saying, "What I have written, I have written" (John 19:22). It was as if God were speaking the truth through Pilate and would not allow the sign to be changed. The *titulus*, or small sign, stating the victim's crime was nailed to the cross above the head. However, Jesus had committed no crime. Pilate himself proclaimed that he found no fault in Christ and may have put this inscription on the cross of Jesus as a cruel jest to taunt the Jews. We don't know Pilate's

motive for keeping the sign the way it was written, but Jesus' Lordship was proclaimed from the cross.

### The Place of the Skull

<sup>33</sup>They came to a place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull). <sup>34</sup>There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it (Matthew 27:33-34).

The place of the crucifixion is also significant. It was likely outside the city gate and near a road where people would be passing. Jesus would have heard their insults. If you go to Jerusalem today, you will find more than one location identified as "Golgotha" or "Calvary" (which means *The Place of the Skull*), e.g., the Catholic Church of the Holy Sepulcher, and the Evangelical Garden Tomb or *Gordon's Calvary*. There is evidence for both as well as suggestions as to why the place was so named. One is that there was a legend that Adam's skull was buried there. A second reason for *Gordon's Calvary* being a possible place was because the shape of the location looks like a skull. A third suggestion for the name *Golgotha* was because it was a place littered with the skulls of crucified criminals. This third explanation is unlikely because Jewish law would not permit a body to decompose in the open.

The Roman method of crucifixion would often last for days, and they would let the bodies decompose on the cross as a warning to others. The Scriptures, though, demanded that those hung from a tree were to be taken down by nightfall (Deuteronomy 21:22-23). Whatever the reason for the grim name, it was a desolate place, i.e., a place of rejection outside the community reserved for punishment where the King of Heaven gave Himself for us (Hebrews 13:12-13). It is worth noting that the anointed priest of Israel had to completely burn up the sin offering of Israel, i.e., the sacrificial burnt offering, outside the camp (Leviticus 4:21). Here, we again see the foretelling of the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ outside the city gate.

Before they drove the six-inch spikes into His hands and feet, they offered Christ something to drink. Matthew 27:33-34 tells us that Jesus was given sour wine (vinegar) mingled with gall, a word used for a bitter substance. Mark tells us that the bitter drink was Myrrh (Mark 15:23), a mild narcotic. When Jesus tasted it, He spat it out. [Why do you think Jesus spat it out?](#)

Hundreds of years beforehand, the prophets wrote about the Suffering Servant of God who would fulfill all things to restore man to fellowship with God. Some attribute King David to be the writer of Psalm 69. The writer prophesied that the Messiah would be offered sour wine (vinegar) mixed with gall.

<sup>19</sup>You know how I am **scorned, disgraced and shamed**; all my enemies are before you.

<sup>20</sup>Scorn has broken my heart and has left me helpless; I looked for sympathy, but there was none, for comforters, but I found none. <sup>21</sup>**They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst** (Psalm 69:19-21).

Christ's purpose in coming was to die on the cross in place of guilty humanity. He wanted nothing to dull His senses at the crucial time. Christ came to taste death, i.e., the full punishment, for every man (Hebrews 2:9). When Jesus refused the mild narcotic, myrrh (Mark 15:23), they laid Him down on the *patibulum*, the crossbeam, and pierced His hands and feet with six-inch

spikes. Many of the classical painters thought that Jesus was nailed through the palms, but now, through Roman historical accounts, we know that the nails were driven through the small bones of the wrists, (radial and ulna). The *patibulum*, with Jesus nailed to it, was then lifted and slotted into the central vertical part of the cross. The Roman soldiers would then put both feet together and bend the legs slightly before placing one spike typically through the Achilles tendons.

There is some evidence that suggests that, in some instances, there were four spikes used, with the feet nailed separately to the upright. They would then place a *seducula*, a piece of wood under the feet, so that the victim would be able to push His feet down painfully and allow His lungs to fill with air. As the weight of the body hung on the nails, the pain would have been unbearable with the wrists putting pressure on the median nerves. Allowing the victim to breathe in this way would prolong death.

Now, let us consider the timing of His death. It was no coincidence that the death of Jesus took place during Passover. It is a poignant thought that, at the very same time of Jesus' death, several hundred yards away in the Temple area, the Passover lambs were being slaughtered all around Jerusalem for Israelites to eat the Passover that evening. Josephus, the historian, recorded that more than 256,000 lambs were sacrificed for the Passover celebration in 66 A.D.<sup>1</sup> For that many lambs to be prepared, all the priests were busy at their work as the Lamb of God was crucified for the true Passover. The lambs were roasted, and all of the lamb for the household was consumed that night (Exodus 12:8-10). We, also, are to take the Lamb of God into our lives (Revelation 1:12) and partake spiritually of the life of the Lamb of God (John 6:53).

King David was also a prophet and described these moments hundreds of years beforehand when he wrote Psalm 22. Some believe that Christ spoke the whole psalm while on the cross. We know that He recited part of it. Here are excerpts from Psalms 22:

<sup>1</sup>My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? <sup>6</sup>But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and **despised by the people.** <sup>7</sup>**All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads:** <sup>8</sup>"He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him." <sup>12</sup>Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me. <sup>13</sup>Roaring lions tearing their prey open their mouths wide against me. <sup>14</sup>I am poured out like water, and all **my bones are out of joint.** My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me. <sup>15</sup>**My strength is dried up** like a potsherd, and **my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;** you lay me in the dust of death. <sup>16</sup>Dogs have surrounded me; **a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet.** <sup>17</sup>I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. <sup>18</sup>They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing (Psalm 22:1, 6-8, 12-18).

In what ways does this prophetic psalm of David speak of the crucifixion of Christ? What similarities do you see?

---

<sup>1</sup> War 6.9.3 422-427: <http://www.josephus.org/Passover.htm>

It was common for those crucified to be entirely nude to increase the shame, but it is possible that Jewish sensibilities allowed a loincloth.

<sup>23</sup>When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. <sup>24</sup>"Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it." This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said, "They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment." So this is what the soldiers did. <sup>25</sup>Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. <sup>26</sup>When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," <sup>27</sup>and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. <sup>28</sup>Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." <sup>29</sup>A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. <sup>30</sup>When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit (John 19:23-30).

The four soldiers that led Jesus to Golgotha were allowed to keep the clothes and sandals of those condemned, but they cast lots similar to a dice game for his woven, one-piece, seamless undergarment (John 19:23). To tear it would have been a waste, so they cast lots for it. This division of garments and the casting of lots for Christ's seamless garment were just as David had prophesied hundreds of years before (Psalm 22:18). John draws our attention to the seamless undergarment for which the soldiers drew lots. Perhaps, it spoke to John of the high priest's garment, which was also seamless. Josephus, the historian of the time, writes about the high priests clothing: "Now, this vesture was not composed of two pieces, nor was it sewed together upon the shoulders and the sides, but it was one long vestment so woven as to have an aperture for the neck."<sup>2</sup> Christ, our High Priest, wore the undergarment to the place of atonement.

### The Seven Sayings of Christ on the Cross

We will now think about the seven last sayings of Christ on the cross. Jesus was crucified with two others, one on either side of Him. He was in the center as if He were the worst. The middle cross was usually the ringleader's place. Again, prophecies written hundreds of years before were fulfilled:

Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, **and was numbered with the transgressors**. For he bore the sin of many, and **made intercession for the transgressors** (Isaiah 53:12).

As the above prophecy states, Jesus hung there in terrible pain, praying for those who were gathered and watching.

**1st Saying:** **"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing"** (Luke 23:34).

<sup>2</sup> <https://stpaulcenter.com/jesus-as-high-priest-the-significance-of-the-seamless-robe/>

How beautiful are the mercy and grace extended to us in those words! If you ever doubted the love and compassion of God, you should memorize those words. The innocent Lamb of God bore in His body our sin and did away with it, “having **forgiven us all our transgressions,** <sup>14</sup>having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, **having nailed it to the cross**” (Colossians 2:13b-14).

Jesus fought for every breath by pushing His body upon the spikes in His feet, using for leverage the little piece of wood. As He pushed Himself up, the gaping wounds in His back scraped against the wooden upright. From every angle, we can see the infliction of pain. His back and most of His body was a bloody mass: blood dripped from His head crowned with thorns; blood dripped from His hands and feet, and soon blood trickled from a gaping wound in His side as the soldier pierced Him with his spear (John 19:34).

It wasn't long before His critics gathered around Him, breathing out their curses and scorn:

<sup>39</sup>Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads <sup>40</sup>and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!" <sup>41</sup>In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. <sup>42</sup>"He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. <sup>43</sup>He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God'" (Matthew 27:39-43).

Again, this was something that God had foretold through the prophet King David, i.e., one of David's descendants would become king but would be despised and scorned by men. These prophetic writings speak as a testimony to the authenticity of the Holy Scriptures foretold hundreds of years before they happened so that, when the events happened, we might realize the truth of the Scriptures and place our faith in God and His Messiah, Jesus. Here's David's prophecy as it relates to those who scorned Christ while He suffered:

<sup>7</sup>All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads. <sup>8</sup>"He trusts in the LORD," they say, "let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him." <sup>12</sup>Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me. <sup>13</sup>Roaring lions that tear their prey open their mouths wide against me. <sup>16</sup>Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet (Psalm 22:7-8; 12-13; 16).

**2nd Saying: "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."** One of the two robbers crucified with Him joined in the scorning while the other was repentant:

<sup>39</sup>One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" <sup>40</sup>But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? <sup>41</sup>We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." <sup>42</sup>Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." <sup>43</sup>Jesus answered him, "**Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise**" (Luke 23:39-43).

The life of the Lord Jesus causes a division in humanity: "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters" (Matthew 12:30). Each of us is like one of them. We all have to make choices as to which one we wish to be like at our death. Some will see no value in the death of Christ and die in their sins; whereas, others will see the redemptive work of Christ on that day and receive it as being suffered for them. We cannot escape the cross. We must all make our choice: to continue in sin or to believe and place our trust in the substitutionary work of Christ for us and as us. Jesus told the repentant thief that he would be with Him in paradise that very day. Many can't understand such grace given to the penitent thief for he never had time to do any good works, nor was he baptized, but Christ said that his faith in Jesus that day was sufficient. I would remind you that salvation is bestowed to the believer as a gift, not by any works of righteousness we have done (Titus 3:5, Ephesians 2:8-9). If you have never reached out to the God of all grace, then cry out to Him today for the same gift of God.

**3rd Saying:** In between painful breaths, Jesus was still caring for those dearest to Him.

He said to His mother, "**Woman, behold your son!**" Then He said to the disciple, "**Behold your mother!**" (John 19:26-27).

We don't hear of Mary's husband, Joseph, being around during Jesus' ministry. We can presume that he died at some point. To care for Mary was Jesus' responsibility due to His being the firstborn of the family. He asked the disciple whom He loved, John, to take care of His mother. He commits her to the responsibility of the one He knew He could trust the most. Even in the moments of agony and intense spiritual warfare, Jesus was concerned with what lay ahead for those who would mourn Him, and He did not forget this very practical detail. He committed them to one another to comfort one another when He was gone.

John's account does not mention this, but Matthew records unusual darkness that came over the Earth for three hours, "Now from the sixth hour there occurred darkness over all the land until the ninth hour" (Matthew 27:45). This darkness was not due to an eclipse because an eclipse cannot last longer than seven and a half minutes; whereas, this darkness lasted for three hours. The prophet Amos prophesied about this time of darkness:

"On that day, says the Lord God, I will make the Sun to go down at noon, and darken the Earth in broad daylight (Amos 8:9).

**4th Saying:** Jesus then cried out His fourth statement while on the cross: "**My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?**" (Mark 15:34).

Why would Christ feel forsaken by God?

Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, "He made Him who knew no sin **to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him**" (2 Corinthians 5:21). There on the cross, Jesus was loaded down with the sin of the world upon Him. He became the sin-bearer for the whole human race. Scripture further tells us that God is too pure to look upon evil (Habakkuk 1:13). The Father looked away from the Son due to Jesus carrying your sin and mine upon Himself. This turning away was the most painful time of the crucifixion.

Thomas Davis, a medical doctor, has studied what effect crucifixion has on the body:

As the arms fatigue, great waves of cramps sweep over the muscles, knotting them in deep, relentless, throbbing pain. With these cramps comes the inability to push Himself upward. Hanging by His arms, the pectoral muscles are paralyzed, and the intercostal muscles are unable to act. Air can be drawn into the lungs, but cannot be exhaled. Jesus fights to raise Himself to get even one short breath. Finally, carbon dioxide builds up in the lungs, and the bloodstream and the cramps partially subside. Spasmodically, He was able to push Himself upward to exhale and bring in the life-giving oxygen...Hours of this limitless pain, cycles of twisting, joint-rending cramps, intermittent partial asphyxiation, searing pain as tissue is torn from His lacerated back as He moves up and down against the rough timber. Then, another agony begins. A deep crushing pain in the chest as the pericardium slowly fills with serum and begins to compress the heart. It is now almost over—the loss of tissue fluid has reached a critical level—the compressed heart is struggling to pump heavy, thick, sluggish blood into the tissues—the tortured lungs are making a frantic effort to gasp in small gulps of air. The markedly dehydrated tissues send their flood of stimuli to the brain.<sup>3</sup>

**5th Saying:** Jesus then spoke the fifth saying: "**I am thirsty**" (John 19:28). This statement was also prophesied by King David, saying, "**My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth**" (Psalm 22:15). John records one of the Roman soldiers bringing a sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant.

A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the **hyssop plant**, and lifted it to Jesus' lips (John 19:29).

Why would John mention the hyssop? With John, there is always significance with the little details. When the Israelites were slaves to Pharaoh and Egypt, the means of deliverance was the blood of a pure and perfect lamb whose blood was to be shed and placed in a basin at the bottom of the door. They were then to take a bunch of the hyssop plant and dip it in the blood in the basin and apply it to the lintel and both sides of the door forming a cross.

Go at once and select the animals for your families and slaughter the Passover lamb. <sup>22</sup>Take **a bunch of hyssop**, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe. None of you shall go out of the door of your house until morning. <sup>23</sup>When the LORD goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down (Exodus 12:21b-23).

When God would see the blood, He Himself would protect the household and not permit the destroying angel to enter the house (Isaiah 31:5). In the same way, we believe that the blood of the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31) is applied to our spiritual lives and that we now belong to the Lord and are entirely delivered from Satan (Pharaoh) and the world (Egypt).

**6th Saying:** "**It is finished!**" (John 19:30). As Jesus felt that the time had come, the three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) tell us that Jesus shouted out loudly, but they do

---

<sup>3</sup> "The Crucifixion of Jesus: The Passion of Christ from a Medical Point of View," Arizona Medicine, Vol.22, No.3 (March 1965), 183-87.

not tell us what He shouted. It is only John that gives us the one word in Greek, *tetelestai*. Translated as *it is finished* in many translations in English, this is not a shout of weariness, but a great victory. Jesus pushed Himself up one more time filling His lungs and shouted out for the entire world to hear. "It is finished!" (*tetelestai*) was a word used in accounting in the common Greek language of the day. When a man's debt was paid, it was *tetelestai*. It means to make an end of, complete, or accomplish something, not merely ending it, but bringing it to perfection or its stated goal. It also means to pay in full, as in a tax or tribute.<sup>4</sup> This shout was a cry of triumph! It was accomplished, paid in full, no debt remaining to God's people. They are free! No wonder Christ shouted. He wanted the world to know that the debt of sin was paid. God's judgment and justice had been atoned (to make amends and to reconcile).

**7th Saying:** As this shout was still ringing around Golgotha, His last words, His seventh saying from the cross was spoken, "**Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands!**" (Luke 23:46). With this last saying, Jesus gave up His spirit.

Today, I would like to ask you, how is your debt? Is it heavy upon you? The Messiah has paid your debt for you, but until you receive and accept the pardon, you remain in your sin, carrying that burden that He died to remove from you.

In the year 1829, a Philadelphia man named George Wilson robbed the U.S. Mail Service, killing someone in the process. Wilson was arrested, brought to trial, found guilty, and sentenced to be hanged. Some friends intervened on his behalf and were finally able to obtain a pardon for him from President Andrew Jackson. But, when he was informed of this, George Wilson refused to accept the pardon! The sheriff was unwilling to enact the sentence—for how could he hang a pardoned man? An appeal was sent to President Jackson. The perplexed President turned to the United States Supreme Court to decide the case. Chief Justice Marshall ruled that a pardon is a piece of paper, the value of which depends on its acceptance by the person implicated. It is hard to suppose that a person under the sentence of death would refuse to accept a pardon, but if it is rejected, it is then not a pardon. George Wilson must be hanged. So, George Wilson was executed, although his pardon lay on the sheriff's desk. What will you do with the full pardon offered to you by the Chief Justice—the God of the Universe?<sup>5</sup>

I want to end this story with a thought about what happened as the soldiers cast lots for Christ's clothes. Consider this. At the same time that Jesus was dying in agony for them, these men were indifferent. They were playing games and unconcerned about His suffering. It was just an ordinary day for them. They did not realize that their eternal destiny hung in the balance, i.e., that everything depended upon this act of selfless love. This picture shows us the indifference of the world to Christ. They played a game as if it did not matter. Whatever you do with the matter of Christ's sacrifice, know that this does require a response. What will be your response to this gift, this sacrifice? Like George Wilson, will you leave it on the table?

---

<sup>4</sup> *Key Word Study Bible*, AMG Publishers. Key Word, 5464, Page 1679.

<sup>5</sup> *1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*. Edited by Michael Green. Published by Baker Books. Page 317.



Prayer: Father, thank You for Your great love and mercy, which You revealed in Christ Jesus and His great sacrifice for me. Cleanse me from sin and make me new. I turn my life over to You and desire to be free from the spiritual shackles that have bound me. Amen!

Keith Thomas

Email: [keiththomas@groupbiblestudy.com](mailto:keiththomas@groupbiblestudy.com)

Website: [www.groupbiblestudy.com](http://www.groupbiblestudy.com)