

IT IS FINISHED
John 19:1-30

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Introduction

Jesus has been both arrested and interrogated by the Jewish and Roman authorities. Following the custom of releasing a prisoner at the feast, Pilate has already attempted—but failed—to achieve Jesus' release from the trumped-up charges (18:39-40).

Scourged (19:1)

Scourging a prisoner before execution was standard practice in the rough world that existed under Roman rule. Oddly enough, on this particular occasion it appears as if the scouring is intended by Pilate to avoid crucifying the “criminal” rather than hastening his death. Luke makes Pilate's intentions clear: Pilate says, “I will, therefore, punish Him and release Him” (Luke 23:16). While the verbs “took” and “scourged” imply that Pilate is the subject, in reality it is quite clear that the soldiers would have been the actual actors. Making Pilate the subject of the verbs, John links Pilate to the harsh treatment of Jesus, while Pilate himself constantly tries to distance himself from the harsh treatment that Jesus receives (19:4, 6; cf. 18:38).

The violent act of flogging involved tying the prisoner to a post and beating him with leather whips (*flagella*), to which were attached pieces of iron, bone, or spikes intended to shred the skin. Although not necessarily followed by the Romans, Jewish law limited the lashes to 40 (Deuteronomy 25:3), knowing that more lashes actually threatened the life of the prisoner. Usually, only 39 lashes were given to ensure the law had not been broken. The flogging itself was a public event, adding shame and humiliation to the physical pain.

Crowned (19:2)

Interestingly, John spends little time describing the physical pain that our Lord endured. Alternatively, he spends much time focusing on the humiliation and shame that Jesus faced. Expressing their contempt not only for Jesus, but, more broadly, for the entire Jewish nation, the soldiers began mocking the Messiah. If Jesus is claiming to be “king of the Jews,” then the soldiers will, indeed, treat him like a king! Doesn't every king need a crown?

The crown for our Christ was not made of gold or precious stones, but was, most likely, the woven thorns of the date palm. Pressing the crown upon the head of Jesus, they pierced his brow.

Adding to the mockery, the soldiers adorn Jesus with a royal robe of purple. Combining the crown with the royal robe, the soldiers build upon their parody of the “royal coronation” of a king.

Matthew builds upon the mockery of our Messiah when he adds that they put “a reed in his right hand...” (Matthew 27:29). With this scepter, however, the king could not rule, but, rather, was beaten with his own reed.

Humiliated (19:3)

Adding vocals to the visuals (crown of thorns, purple robe, and reed-scepter), the soldiers kneel (most likely) before Jesus and declare, “Hail, King of the Jews.” This “praise” was likened to what one might declare before the Roman emperor, “Hail, Caesar!” In lieu of the kiss of loyalty, however, the soldiers struck him in the face (Matthew 27:30). Adding insult to injury, all the elements of mockery combine so as to treat Jesus like a clown-king.

We realize, however, that the greatest irony is found in the fact that these soldiers were, unknowingly, mocking the real King. Thinking they were only kneeling before a Jewish political upstart, they failed to realize that they were actually kneeling before the creator of the cosmos. Paul reminds us that there will be a day when all persons, including these soldiers, will kneel before the Christ and confess him as Lord (Philippians 2:10-11).

Innocent (19:4-5)

Pilate makes another attempt to proclaim the innocence of Jesus. Seeing Jesus both scourged and mocked, Pilate hopes that the bloodthirsty crowd will, at last, be satisfied.

As the Christ comes out wearing the royal robe, the garb of mockery, Pilate declares, “Behold the man.” Surely this pronouncement by Pilate reminds us of an earlier pronouncement by John the Baptist, “Behold the Lamb of God” (1:29). “Behold the man” is a reference to “the man of sorrows” in Isaiah (“He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, but appeared to them as ‘a man of suffering, familiar with pain,’ and ‘like one from whom people hide their faces’” Isaiah 53:2-3).

Crucify Him (19:6)

If Pilate was trying to prove to the crowd that Jesus didn’t need to die, he failed miserably. Rather than relenting, they called for the Christ to be crucified. Pilate’s use of pronouns is emphatic. His statements are along these lines: “You, yourselves, crucify him, for I, myself, find no fault with him.”

Religious Reasons (19:7)

Having been forced into a corner by Pilate’s reluctance, the Jews, at last, finally bring their actual charge against Jesus. Up until this point, the Jews had used political purposes as the cause for crucifixion. Now, however, they make clear that the real issue is religious—blasphemy. Because Jesus, indeed, claimed to be the “Son of God,” he was a blasphemer who must die! (Leviticus 24:16).

Afraid (19:8-9)

Showing the humanity of the Roman ruler, John reveals the heart of Pilate: “He was the more afraid.” Though one might not call Pilate a religious man, he certainly is rattled by the fact that his prisoner is surrounded by divine claims. Matthew, moreover, tells us that Pilate’s wife had been disturbed by a dream, as she advised her husband, “Have nothing to do with that righteous man;

for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of him” (Matthew 27:19). Hearing of Jesus’ claims to be divine, “the Son of God,” the Roman ruler becomes rattled and wants no part in the process of crucifying Jesus.

The silence of our Savior was deafening to Pilate. He wanted to know if Jesus was, indeed, divine or dangerous: “Where are you from?” Pilate’s question is an indirect way of asking Jesus if he is a god or a man.

From Above (19:10-11)

Intoxicated by his own power, Pilate reminds the prisoner, Jesus, that, indeed, he (Pilate) has within his hands the power either to release or crucify Jesus. Twice Pilate makes clear, in a single verse, that he “has the authority” to decide the fate of Jesus. On the contrary, the Christ reminds Pilate that the only authority he can exercise is authority given to him by God—from above. While Jesus, in no way, releases Pilate from the responsibility of his decisions, he does note that the “one who delivered [him] up” has the greater sin. The “one who delivered Jesus up” is probably a reference to Caiaphas, the high priest, rather than a reference to Judas. While Judas certainly betrayed our Lord, he did not deliver Jesus over to Pilate, but, rather, to the Jews.

Release Him (19:12)

Now even more fearful and superstitious, Pilate tries yet again to release Jesus. Forcing Pilate’s hand, the Jews declare, “If you release this man, you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out to be a king opposes Caesar.” The Jews, in not-so-subtle ways, are reminding the Roman ruler that if he chooses to release their prisoner, they will bring a damaging accusation against Pilate to the emperor. Tiberius, moreover, was known to have a very suspicious nature, and it wouldn’t take much to move his mind against Pilate.

Judgment Seat (19:13)

In the Greek text, it is somewhat unclear exactly who sat on the judgment seat—Pilate or Jesus? If Pilate actually placed Jesus on the judgment seat, then he was making a last moment mockery of the Jews. It is an interesting irony to consider the possibility that Jesus himself was occupying the judgment seat. In a foreshadowing way, such an interpretation symbolizes the forthcoming scene when Jesus himself will actually occupy the seat of judgment over all creation (Romans 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

Behold Your King (19:14)

Heaping some humiliation back upon the Jews, Pilate makes the declaration, “Behold your king.” Little did Pilate know he had actually declared the greatest truth of the cosmos.

Away with Him (19:15)

The hypocrisy continues to build as the chief priest declares, “We have no king but Caesar.” Indeed, at this stage of the story, God is no longer their king, as worldly powers have crept into their schemes. They are “friends of Caesar,” and God is no longer sitting upon the thrones of their hearts (Judges 8:23; 1 Samuel 8:7).

Handed Over (19:16)

Pilate, at last, delivers Jesus over to the Jews to be crucified. The crucifixion itself, however, was actually carried out by the Romans. John uses the language “handed over” to indicate that, despite the fact that Roman hands were doing the deadly deed, Jesus was actually being delivered over to the will of those who sought his death, his own people.

Carrying His Own Cross (19:17)

As was common at the time, Jesus was forced to carry his own crossbeam—the horizontal part of the cross, which would eventually be attached to the permanent, vertical post upon which men were crucified. Some have noted an allusion to Genesis 22:6, where Isaac, being a type of Christ, carried his own wood that would be used in his almost sacrifice. The place of Jesus’ crucifixion is called Golgotha, which means “the place of the skull.” Christians more often refer to the Latin translation, “Calvary” (*calvaria*), which also means “skull.” The meaning of the name is unclear, though many suggest it is a reference to a skull-like shape of the landscape at the place of Jesus’ crucifixion.

One on Each Side (19:18)

The center was the place of greatest honor (or in this case, shame), possibly making Jesus the most visible to the massive crowd that had gathered for the Passover feast. Those being crucified along with Jesus were probably more than mere thieves. Mark uses the term *lēstai*, probably a reference to guerrilla fighters, insurrectionists. The same term was applied to Barabbas in John 18:40. Being in the middle of two criminals, Jesus has fulfilled Isaiah 53:12, which indicates that the Messiah is to be numbered with the transgressors.

Inscription (19:19-22)

Above Jesus’ head a placard was placed which read, “Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews.” Such a placard indicated the crimes of which “the criminal” was found guilty. Interestingly enough, the king motif has been kept up by John throughout the Passion saga. From the mockery of the soldiers, to the questions from Pilate, to Jesus’ own admission (18:37), Jesus has been depicted as a king.

The title was given in three different languages—Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. The trilingual notice may serve as a symbol for the proclamation of the kingship of Jesus to the whole world. Indeed, this one was the kingliest of all.”

The Jews immediately take offense at the designation of Jesus as their king. Pilate, having been forced to yield to Jesus’ crucifixion, wants to humiliate the very ones who had humiliated him. He responds, “What I have written, I have written.”

The Garments (19:23-24)

John now calls his reader to look below the cross to the soldiers as they divvy up the garments at Golgotha. One of the payment perks for the bloody business of crucifixion was that soldiers were allowed to cash in on the clothing of the crucified.

John wants us to note that, like everything else in Jesus’ crucifixion, God is in absolute control. The soldiers have only done what God had said, so long ago, they would do. Psalm 22:18 is fulfilled: “They divided my outer garments among them, and for my clothing, they cast lots.”

Characters at the Cross (19:25-27)

Though there is much controversy about the identity of some of these characters, we will make some educated assumptions. Those standing beside Jesus were:

(1) His mother Mary.

(2) Mary's sister. This would be Jesus' aunt.

(3) Mary, the wife of Clopas. The Greek literally says, "Mary, the one of Clopas." One Christian tradition identifies Clopas as the brother of Joseph (Mary's husband). Furthermore, Hegesippus, a second-century writer, says that Simon, the son of Clopas, assumed the leadership role in the Jerusalem church after James (our Lord's brother)—a clear indication that leadership in the Jerusalem church was assigned to Jesus' relatives. If accurate, this Mary was another aunt of Jesus on Joseph's side.

(4) Mary Magdalene. While this is her first appearance in this Gospel, she is going to play a prominent role in the resurrection saga, as she is the first to proclaim Jesus as resurrected. From Luke 8:2, we learn that Mary ministered to Jesus because he had delivered her from seven demons.

Some scholars have noted the contrast between the four soldiers who crucified Jesus and the four, faithful women who stand by his side.

When Jesus addresses his mother as "woman," we are reminded of the wedding at Cana where Jesus used the same form of address (2:3-5). While not impolite, the term distanced Jesus from the familial relationship he had with Mary. As Jesus asked Mary to accept "the beloved disciple" (most likely John) as her son, and as he asked "the beloved disciple" to accept Mary as his mother, Jesus redefines family relationships. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus has already redefined the identity of his mothers and brothers as those who "do the will of My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 12:46-50). We should note that the Christ cared for his mother as his last act of kindness.

Finished (19:28-30)

The Jesus of John's Gospel is powerfully divine, maintaining control even through his crucifixion. He knows that he has accomplished all the work his Father has given him (17:4; cf. 4:34; 5:36). Fulfilling Psalm 69:21, Jesus says, "I am thirsty." As Jesus asks for a drink, we are reminded of his earlier request to the Samaritan woman at the well (4:7), as well as his proclamation in 18:11: "The cup which the Father has given to Me, shall I not drink it?" The sour wine (v. 29) was the cheap, everyday version used to quench the thirst of soldiers.

It is interesting that "hyssop" was used to lift the sponge to the lips of our Lord. This word reminds us of the sprinkling of blood in the Old Testament (Leviticus 14:4-7; Numbers 19:18). More specifically, it reminds us of Exodus 12:22, where the blood of the Passover lamb was spread upon the doorpost using a hyssop branch. In the providence and planning of God, the Roman soldiers used the very type of branch that was used to spread the blood of the ancient Passover lambs to spread the blood of the true Passover lamb.

At last, Jesus makes his final declaration from the cross, which we hear most clearly in John's Gospel: "It is finished!" Most likely, Jesus is giving the indication that he had completed all the work that the Father had assigned to him. John uses a verb with a perfect tense, indicating that

what has been accomplished on the cross will continue forward forever. Rather than a sigh of resignation, this was a proclamation of victory. In fact, the other Gospel writers tell us that he uttered this as a loud cry (Matthew 27:50; Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46).

Conclusion

Jesus accomplished all that the Father required. The scene ends with the Christ still in control. His life was not taken from him; rather, bowing his head, he gave up his spirit.

Sources:

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