

The Gospel of John

Leon L. Combs, M.A., M.Div., Ph.D.

Chapter Nineteen

Good Thursday: The Crucifixion

I know that most readers call this day Good Friday but – as discussed earlier – this writer considers the crucifixion to be on Thursday with the resurrection on Sunday to fulfill the prophecy of Jesus being in the tomb three days and three nights. Please see the discussion on John 12:12-15 and the material at the end of that discussion of chapter 12 for details concerning this understanding of the time period of the crucifixion and resurrection.

John 19:1-5

*Pilate then took Jesus and scourged Him. (2) And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and put a purple robe on Him; (3) and they began to come up to Him and say, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and to give Him slaps in the face. (4) Pilate came out again and *said to them, "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you so that you may know that I find no guilt in Him." (5) Jesus then came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate *said to them, "Behold, the Man!"*

Being the political animal that he was, Pilate had to proceed with the punishment of Jesus. The scourging was severe enough to kill many prisoners. The Roman scourge was an awful instrument of punishment that was a wooden handle with several rawhide thongs attached. Each thong also contained small butterfly shaped pieces of metal or bone so that when the guard was used against someone the flesh from the person's back was stripped with each blow. Possibly Pilate hoped that this act would satisfy the mob so that they would not demand crucifixion also. The legionnaires were allowed considerable leeway in this phase of the punishment and they proceeded with a crude joke. Since Jesus was called "king of the Jews" they put a scarlet robe over His bleeding back and placed a crown of thorns on His head. They then proceeded to hit Him on the face as He struggled to stand under this punishment. Pilate then returned to the courtyard where the crowd waited and presented Jesus to them. Since he had not killed Him he could tell them that he found no guilt worthy of death. Jesus then was brought out wearing the crown of thorns and the robe and Pilate said: "Behold the Man!"

John 19:6-9

*So when the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they cried out saying, "Crucify, crucify!" Pilate *said to them, "Take Him yourselves and crucify Him, for I find no guilt in Him." (7) The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God." (8) Therefore when Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid; (9) and he entered into the Praetorian again and *said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer.*

However the crowd was not satisfied and demanded His crucifixion. Seeing Jesus displayed as a pantomime king was even more insulting to them than it was to Jesus. Pilate replied in a sarcastic

tone for he knew that they were not allowed to kill Him and, even if they had that authority, crucifixion was not an allowed execution by their laws. The Jewish priests cleverly changed their approach since they saw that this was not going to end as they desired. The governors of Judaea had the responsibility of enforcing Roman law and respecting Jewish religious law. It was a capital offence in Roman law to claim to be the king of the Jews and it was a capital offence in Jewish law for someone to claim to be the Son of God. The Jews were claiming the authority of their law to call for the death of Jesus: *“Moreover, the one who blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall certainly stone him. The alien as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death.”* (Lev 24:16) If someone claimed to be the Messiah this could be construed to be claiming to be king of the Jews and the Son of God and thus violating both laws.

So what frightened Pilate? Like most people of his era, he probably was very superstitious and believed in Greek gods. By pagan mythology the Olympian deities would consort with humans. By His claiming to be the Son of God, Pilate might have wondered if He had been sent by someone like Hercules. He certainly would not want to offend such a visitor! He then entered the Praetorian again to question Jesus about His origin. However Jesus did not answer him.

John 19:10-12

*So Pilate *said to Him, "You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?" (11) Jesus answered, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has the greater sin." (12) As a result of this Pilate made efforts to release Him, but the Jews cried out saying, "If you release this Man, you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out to be a king opposes Caesar."*

Pilate was a very insecure person and such a personal affront was insulting to him. Considering the condition in which Pilate had left Him, it is surprising that He was even able to interact with Pilate. He certainly was aware of the political power that Pilate had and knew that he could do whatever pleased him. Of course Pilate did not know with Whom he was dealing and that Jesus had much more power than he had. Even after such an awful treatment as the scourging, Jesus was still determined to go forward with the plan of the Father. Pilate was only an instrument in the plan of God and He gave Pilate the authority to go forward with the plan. Jesus is referring to Caiaphas and the Jewish hierarchy for they are the ones who initiated the trial. By mentioning acquittal first, Pilate may be inferring that such is still his preference as noted in verse 12. Caiaphas acted outside of the authority of his office and He had previously stated that it was preferable for one person to die (John 11:49-50) so his political ambitions were foremost in his mind rather than any dedication to the Jewish priesthood. John does not elaborate on what efforts Pilate made to release Jesus but he must have been in considerable anguish over the situation since he saw no legal reason to execute Jesus. The Jews were very clever as they knew just how to respond to this insecure man. Pilate knew that if the word got back to Caesar that he was not supporting the rule of Caesar his career, and maybe his life, would be over.

John 19:13-16

Therefore when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out, and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. (14) Now it was

*the day of preparation for the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. And he *said to the Jews, "Behold, your King!" (15) So they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!" Pilate *said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." (16) So he then handed Him over to them to be crucified.*

Pilate acted in his role as a politician and a servant of Caesar so he brought Jesus out and officially sat in the judgment seat (*bema* in Greek). It is likely that The Pavement was in the Castle of Antonia in which the Roman garrison in Jerusalem was housed. The castle was on a rocky elevated area and so was called Gabbatha (meaning ridge or height in Hebrew, actually Aramaic). The time stated depends upon the system used to reckon time although most scholars agree that the time of day was reckoned from sunrise for all standards. If John means since sunrise then it would be about noon when Jesus was brought out to face His accusers. Most people think this Passover referred to Saturday but actually there were two Sabbaths with the Passover Sabbath being on Friday this year and the regular Sabbath being on Saturday. See the material in chapter 11 for dating but this had to be Thursday noon. Jesus would have looked almost unrecognizable as He had been scourged, beaten about the face and had a crown of thorns jammed upon His head. Pilate announced sarcastically that this man was their King. They then shouted for Pilate to crucify Him. When Pilate asked if they wanted him to crucify their King, they announced their total allegiance to Caesar. This statement was a terrible indictment on the Jewish priests and leaders that their spiritual decay had fallen to such an extent that they would betray their allegiance to God. This was a fitting advancement of their political ambition that John announced earlier (John 1:11).

Pilate was close to the Kingdom of God when he asked Jesus to define truth (18: 38). The incarnation of truth was standing before Pilate but he refused to acknowledge it and so was self-condemned. He then finally succumbed to his political ambition and handed Him over to the crowd to be crucified.

John 19:17-18

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.

Mark states that it was the third hour when they crucified Jesus so about three hours passed from the time Pilate brought Jesus out until the actual crucifixion. It was customary for the prisoner to carry the cross piece of the cross with the vertical part already at the location of the crucifixion. John is not contradicting the synoptic accounts of Simon relieving Jesus in the actual physical carrying of the cross (Matt 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26). John is continuing his account that Jesus was still in charge of this event and so the "bearing His own cross" simply means that He was still in control. The origin of the term "Place of a Skull" is unknown and the Hebrew (actually Aramaic) name has been replaced with the Latin equivalent of skull, *calvaria* or Calvary. The present Via Dolorosa is probably an accurate representation of the route to the crucifixion. Crucifixion was one of the most horrendous methods of killing a prisoner for he would suffer for a long time before dying. The hands and feet could be attached either by nails or by rope but John states later (20:25) that nails were used for Jesus. He would have been attached

to the cross piece, raised to attach it to the vertical piece, and then have His feet attached to the vertical piece. A seat was present on the vertical piece to cause the prisoner to take longer to die rather than for comfort. John does not give any details of the two men crucified with Jesus but Mark and Matthew call them 'bandits'. They were probably freedom fighters who had fought with Barabbas.

John 19:19-22

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."

Pilate had not finished with his interaction with the Jewish leaders. It was customary to have a placard either placed around the prisoner's neck or above his head that stated the crime for which he had been crucified. The title used by Pilate was mainly intended as an insult to the Jews as it stated that Rome had crucified the King of the Jews. The crucifixion was very public near the city so that all going in or leaving would see the event. Pilate had the title written in the three most popular languages of the area (Hebrew or Aramaic for the Jews, Latin for the soldiers, and Greek that was the official language of the eastern area of the Roman Empire). The chief priests complained to Pilate about the title but he refused to acquiesce to their demands. Neither of those parties could understand the significance of the title and the event. Jesus made it plain for any who had ears to hear Pilate about the significance of His Kingdom when He discussed His Kingship with (John 18:34-37).

John 19:23-27

*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.*

The people being crucified were usually put there naked to amplify the shame of the event. Apparently there were four soldiers who accompanied Jesus to His crucifixion as they divided His outer garments into four parts. They did not want to destroy the tunic so they cast lots to determine to whom it would belong. John quotes Psa 22:18 when he writes that a Scripture had been fulfilled by the actions of the soldiers. One cannot determine by the Greek sentence structure if John is referring to three or four women. Mary the wife of Clopas could also be the sister of the mother of Jesus or a separate woman. Correlating this account with that of Mark 15:40 and Matthew 27:55, we would say that there were four women. The sister was then

Simone who was the mother of the sons of Zebedee and Mary the wife of Clopas was Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses (Joseph). In none of his writings does John refer to the mother of Jesus as Mary, possibly because of confusion with other women named Mary. Historians state that Clopas was the brother of Joseph the carpenter and father of the Simone who became the leader of the church at Jerusalem after the stoning of James the Just.

Jesus was still able to look around and to talk so, when He saw His mother standing in the crowd, He took the occasion to place His mother in the care of John who then took her to his own home to care for her. Apparently His brothers were not yet His disciples and so could not be entrusted to care for His mother or they may not have been in the area. There would not have been time for John to have taken Mary to his home in Jerusalem and return before the end of the crucifixion. Thus John is not present for some of the events toward the end such as Jesus talking to the other men being crucified. There is an astounding change in the attitude of the brothers of Jesus six months before His death (John 7:5) and their being with His mother and the apostles after His ascension (Acts 1:14). A reason for this change can be seen from a writing of Paul when he reports that the Lord appeared to James (1 Cor 15:7).

John 19:28-30

*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.*

It should be mentioned that events occurring to fulfill Scripture does not involve someone specifically doing something so that some prophecy would be fulfilled. Rather events occur because they had been prophesied and the person or persons doing the act were acting without regard to fulfilling some prophecy. John just adds that the Scripture had been fulfilled. Apparently Jesus stating about His thirst was realized by John to fulfill Psa 69:21. The sour wine was probably the wine that was available for the soldiers attending the crucifixion. This is not the same as the wine mingled with Myrrh that Mark reports Jesus refusing (Mark 15:23). The wine with myrrh would act as a sedative and dull the senses of people being crucified. Jesus wanted a clear mind to deal with the ordeal. It is not known precisely what the branch of hyssop was and why it was used. It may have just been growing nearby and the bodies would not have been raised much from the ground so the branch could have been pulled and easily support the sponge put to His mouth. Some have speculated that they used a javelin but that is not likely.

Jesus then realized that His task was finished. He had fulfilled all of the requirements of the Father for the salvation of His people. He then declared *tetelestai*, or it is finished. John uses the perfect tense meaning that such is finished for all time. Certainly John's intent is that this is a cry of victory by His Lord. Jesus remained in full control of Himself up to the very end as He purposely bowed His head and gave up His spirit. It is important to note that John was not present for the critical part of the mission of Jesus in taking the wrath of the sin of His people

- *Matt 27:45-47 NASB Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour. (46) About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" that is, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU*

FORSAKEN ME?" (47) And some of those who were standing there, when they heard it, began saying, "This man is calling for Elijah."

- *Mar 15:33-35 NASB When the sixth hour came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour. (34) At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "ELOI, ELOI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" which is translated, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" (35) When some of the bystanders heard it, they began saying, "Behold, He is calling for Elijah."*

According to Matthew and Mark, this happened just before He was given the sour wine so that must have been the time when John returned from taking Mary to his home.

John 19:31-34

Then the Jews, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. (32) So the soldiers came, and broke the legs of the first man and of the other who was crucified with Him; (33) but coming to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. (34) But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.

The Passover Sabbath was the next day (Friday) followed by the regular Saturday Sabbath, the Jews asked Pilate to hasten the death of Jesus so that the body of a Jew would not be on the cross during that day which would begin at sunset. The day of preparation would then have been on Thursday with the Sabbath Passover starting at sunset Thursday and lasting until sunset on Friday. Thus Jesus dying on Thursday and resurrected on Sunday would fulfill the “three days and three nights” of His prophecy (Matt 12:40; Mark 10:34; John 2:19). Breaking the legs was a technique used by the soldiers so that the man being crucified could not use his legs to help breath and death would quickly occur. The soldiers came to break the legs of all the prisoners but they saw that Jesus was already dead. One of the soldiers used a spear to pierce His side and blood and water gushed out indicating that He was dead.

John 19:35-37

And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe. (36) For these things came to pass to fulfill the Scripture, "NOT A BONE OF HIM SHALL BE BROKEN." (37) And again another Scripture says, "THEY SHALL LOOK ON HIM WHOM THEY PIERCED."

John testifies that his witness is true of all the events he witnessed. He also quotes Scriptures that were fulfilled: Ezek 12:46, Psa 34:20, and Zech 12:10. He continues to use the third person when referring to things that he has experienced.

John 19:38-42

After these things Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate granted permission. So he came and took away His body. (39) Nicodemus, who had first come to Him by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight. (40) So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen wrappings with the

spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. (41) Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. (42) Therefore because of the Jewish day of preparation, since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

If people had not interfered, the body of Jesus would probably have been thrown into a pit with the bodies of the other two victims. Jesus had no earthly estate and neither did His relatives but a disciple of Jesus could afford a place of burial. Joseph of Arimathea is mentioned in all four gospels (Matt 27:57-60; Mark 15:4-46; Luke 23:50-56). Matthew reports that he was very wealthy, Mark states that he was a member of the Sanhedrin and “waiting for the Kingdom of God”, and Luke states that he did not agree with the council to condemn Jesus. He had been a secret follower of Jesus since he feared that the Jews would act against him. However John only reports that Joseph went to Pilate to request the body and not to the Jews. This action of Joseph was an open admission of his association with Jesus. Since Pilate just gave his permission, this act of Joseph evidently infers that Pilate indeed did not take the actions of Jesus to be those of treason. The tomb was most certainly a rock-hewn tomb as made clear in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 27:60; Mark 15:46; Luke 21:53).

Nicodemus was also a distinguished member of the Jewish aristocracy and he assumed some responsibility for the burial of Jesus. Only John mentions Nicodemus but he mentions the activities of Nicodemus three times: one at his critical interaction with Jesus on being born again (chapter 3), the defense of Jesus before the council (7:45-52), and then at the burial of Jesus. Their names do not appear in any historical Jewish records perhaps because they were determined to be enemies of the Jewish hierarchy. Nicodemus provided a huge quantity of spices. Using myrrh and aloes as a mixture was to be a drying agent and to counteract the odor of decaying flesh. The burial had to be completed before sundown and the process is not accurately known. They probably used the gummy spices in the folds of the cloth to provide a rigid casting for the body. The Jews did not practice the mummification process of the Egyptians of first removing various internal organs before filling the cavities with sweet spices. His burial place was a private garden that would allow the women to visit the tomb. Because of the large quantity of spices used, Joseph and Nicodemus probably viewed the burial complete although they would have had to rush the process. John does not mention if they had some assistance in the process although since Joseph and Nicodemus were very wealthy they probably had some help from their slaves, particularly since there was such a large quantity of spices involved.

But this is not the end of Jesus! The next chapter of John explains why Christianity exists today.