

The Gospel According To John

The Crucifixion

John 19:17-42

Introduction

The death of Christ is the climax of the history of man. Redemptive history has reached its apex. The combination of the sinful, vile murder by men, and the divine purpose of God, comes together to bring redemption to the world.

The Sovereignty of God and the Responsibility of Man

Jesus is to be crucified by the hate of men and by the will of God. You must understand that these two go together. God uses the hate of men to accomplish His purposes. Keep this principle in mind: God works His purposes through holy men and sinful men. No sinful man can ever violate the plan of God. So, Jesus Christ moves to the cross in God's plan.

John 19:16 says, "Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified." Pilate "delivered" Jesus to be crucified. Romans 8:32 says, "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all...." Who delivered Jesus? It was not only the governor of Judea, but the Governor of the universe. "Does that mean Pilate and God were working together?" Exactly. In no way does the vileness, unbelief, cowardice, or sin of Pilate alter the plan of God. God's plans are on schedule, whether they operate through sinful men or holy men. God is the author of history. So, God delivered over Jesus, as well as Pilate. The Bible says that He "was delivered up because of our offenses" (Rom. 4:25a). What men mean for evil, God means for good; and He makes the wrath of men to praise Him (Ps. 76:10a). So many people have the mistaken idea that if you are a sinful man, you will foul up God's plans. Not in any way. God works through men, holy or sinful.

There was no more horrible death possible than death by crucifixion. Even the Romans regarded it as a horrible death. The Romans never employed it for a Roman citizen, no matter how vile his crime. It was the dreaded death brought upon foreign slaves and foreign criminals. So Jesus Christ died the death of a foreign slave or criminal.

The Fulfillment of Prophecy (v. 17-18)

In truth, it is not so much that Christ fulfills what the OT means; rather, Christ is the meaning for which everything in the OT existed. God planned and purposed history and events to foreshadow and picture that which Jesus would accomplish.

When Jesus bore His cross outside the gates to Golgotha, the reality of that which was only pictured in the sin offering came about (Exodus 29:14; Leviticus 4:12; Leviticus 16:27). The sin offerings in the Old Testament were taken outside of the camp. Jesus was executed outside the city to fulfill the significance of Old Testament types (Heb. 13:11-12).

Numbers 21:6-9 contains a very clear type of Christ's death (John 3:14-15). Jesus' death had to be a death in which He was lifted up (John 12:32-33). As a result, there was no way that Jesus could die by being stoned (see also Psalm 22:14-16). The only way anyone could die by being lifted up and nailed through the hands and feet would be crucifixion.

Isaiah 53:9 says, "And He made His grave with the wicked...." And Isaiah 53:12 says, "...and He was numbered with the transgressors...." Jesus was to die with evildoers. He was to die a criminal's death with other criminals. It is here that Jesus brings in His kingdom (Matt. 20:21-23; Mark 10:36-40). What a gracious blessing to have your last hours – being crucified ...next to Jesus! Jesus separates light from darkness (Luke 2:34).

The Superscription (v. 19-22)

The superscription is the sign that Pilate places over the head of Jesus Christ. On the placard was written the crime for which the individual was to be crucified. Since there was no crime for Pilate to put on the placard, he saw this as a marvelous opportunity to take a shot at the Jews, whom he despised and loathed for blackmailing him into crucifying Jesus. So he uses this opportunity to throw a cynical, sarcastic, bitter barb at the Jews. The sign was written in the three languages of the ancient world-- Hebrew, the language of religion; Greek, the language of culture; and Latin, the language of power – for all to see and read.

First, Pilate identified Jesus as from Nazareth. Nobody who meant anything ever came from that place. Secondly, to their horror, Pilate announces to the world and for all time that this is the king of the Jews, and they vehemently denied it. Yet, some, like the repentant thief, recognized that Jesus was indeed the King, "And he said to Jesus, 'Lord, remember me when You come into your kingdom'" (Lk. 23:42).

Jesus, the seed of David, was the King. God controlled the superscription. It said exactly what God wanted it to say. The royal title of Jesus is affixed on the cross for all the ages, and nobody can change it.

The Soldiers And The Garments (v. 23-24)

The Verbal Prophecy –

In Psalm 22:18, there is a very accurate prophecy that says that whoever was responsible for Jesus' death, would gamble for His clothes. The soldiers didn't know the Scripture, but God knew it. He knew every move, and He made every man make the move to fit the plan. Yet, in no way is guilt relieved from them. It is God's plan, but it is still man's responsibility.

Those who have eyes to see, recognize that Jesus lays aside his garments and does the ultimate cleansing – that which His foot washing pictured and anticipated.

Severing the Human Relationship (v. 25-27)

Not all the scenes around the cross involve cruelty and bitterness. Here we meet a little group of people standing at the foot of the cross. Jesus' own mother was there. Mary was told by Simeon some thirty years before that someday her own heart would be pierced through also (Lk. 2:35). It is interesting that three of them had the name Mary. Mary comes from the word which means "bitterness."

Jesus gave Mary a new son. From the moment of His death, He would cease to be the earthly son of Mary, so He replaced Himself in Mary's life with John. In so doing Jesus brings the two people who loved Him the most together to strengthen each other. Now, when Jesus said, "Woman...," He was not being discourteous. He had already given her a preview of their future relationship in Mark 3:31-35. The point is this: When Jesus began His ministry and moved toward the cross, all human relationships with Jesus were severed, and everyone became related on the basis of being a disciple--one who needed to be redeemed. Mary was in the same situation. 2 Cor. 5:16 makes it clear that after the resurrection, a fleshly relationship no longer mattered, but a spiritual one.

Proclaiming The Final Victory (v. 28-30)

The soldiers put the vinegar (a cheap sore wine) on hyssop. Hyssop is very significant to all Jews because it takes them back to the scene of Exodus 12:22. The angel of death was going to pass over Israel, and God said to the people of Israel, "Take hyssop, dip it in blood, and strike the blood on the doorposts and the lintel." How fitting that hyssop should be a tool at this sacrifice of the final and greatest Passover Lamb. (See also Psalm 69:21).

When Jesus declared ‘It is finished,’ He was proclaiming the work of redemption was done. All things had been done which the law of God required; all things fulfilled which prophecy predicted; all things brought to pass which the types foretold; all things accomplished which the Father had given Jesus to do; all things performed that were necessary for redemption. Everything was done, nothing was left. The ransom was paid, the conflict was endured, the wages of sin were paid, and divine justice was satisfied.

Jesus died in total control of His own death; He was no victim. He is death’s Master. For everyone else, death comes usually before we are ready. It is the great interrupter. But not for Jesus! Praise be to God that there is a Champion who overcame death and removed its sting for all those who believe in Christ!

The Piercing of Jesus’ Side (v. 31-37)

The Jews did not want to leave His body on the cross on a Sabbath. In order to make sure that He would be removed, as well as the other thieves, they went to Pilate. It was the custom that if someone was dying of crucifixion but very slowly, they could speed up the death by breaking the victim’s legs.

The soldiers broke the legs of the two thieves. A large mallet was used to shatter the legs completely. The tremendous pain associated with the breaking of the bones, in addition to the elimination of the only support that held the individual up on the cross, resulted in suffocation. So the Jews, not wanting the bodies hanging on the crosses on the Sabbath, asked Pilate to send his soldiers to smash their legs. The soldiers responded by crushing the legs of the thieves.

When they came to Jesus, however, there was no need to break His legs because He was already dead. This was unnatural. Pilate was shocked (Mark 15:44). It had to be this way for Numbers 9:12 stated that the Passover lamb that was given as a sacrifice was not to have any bone broken. Who is the perfect Passover Lamb? Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 5:7). In order to be the perfect Passover Lamb, He could not have a single bone broken. Also Psalm 34:20 foretold that not one of His bones would be broken. Jesus had to die before the soldiers arrived with the mallet to crush His legs in order to fulfill prophecy. Jesus controlled His death down to the very minutest detail so that every tiny piece of prophecy was fulfilled. He sandwiched His death between the prophecy of the soldiers giving Him vinegar to drink and the next prophecy of the soldiers not smashing His bones. If His death had occurred at any other time, then the chain of God’s prophetic truth would have been broken. (Compare also Ps. 34:20 with Luke 23:47).

It is also important to note that these Roman executioners were trained men. They knew who was dead and they knew who was alive. They made certain of it by plunging a spear into His side. This served two purposes. One, it showed without a doubt Jesus was really dead. Secondly, it fulfilled Zech. 12:10 (follow the context to 13:1)!

“... strike the rock, and water will come out of it that the people may drink” (Ex. 17:6)

The Burial of Jesus (v. 38-42)

It’s one thing to control your death, it’s another thing to control your burial. The prophecy in Isaiah 53:9 stated that the Christ would die with wicked men and yet be with a rich man in His death. Now that created a problem because there weren’t any rich disciples. How in the world was Jesus going to be buried with the rich? In addition, if the Jewish leaders got hold of His body, they were certainly not going to put Him in a rich man’s grave. The Romans tossed the bodies of criminals into Gehenna, the city dump. How was Isaiah’s prophecy going to be fulfilled?

Joseph of Arimathea, a rich member of the Sanhedrin, is emboldened to request the body of Jesus. The tomb was close, which was crucial if Jesus was to be in the grave before sundown in order to fulfill being in the tomb for three days. (As a disciple who kept it secret, you’d think now that Jesus was dead, he’d say, “I’m glad I wasn’t found out. He’s dead; He’s obviously not the Messiah.” He was joined by Nicodemus. This man who once came by night, now appears to have come into the light!