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Crucified John 19:16-22

Intro: In [ch18](#), Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, in the evening, and was immediately taken to trial. As we have seen, the trial of Jesus Christ was a double trial: a Jewish trial and a Roman trial. In the Jewish trial, Jesus was examined on the charge of blasphemy. Now, if Jesus were only a man, this charge and the guilty verdict it produced were justified because Jesus had made this claim. But the trial itself was actually unjust; as the laws governing Jewish trials were repeatedly violated, and no defense was allowed in support of His claim. In the Roman trial, Jesus was examined on the charge of insurrection and treason because He made Himself a king. Unlike the Jewish trial, this trial was legally exact. But the result was murder, because, after acquitting Jesus of all guilt; Pilate still gave Him over to be crucified.

Well, so much for human justice. Now, we're about to see the divine justice of God revealed in His punishment of humanity's sin in Jesus Christ, so that, on the basis of the death of the innocent Christ, God's divine love might now be extended to call, embrace and fully save all those who trust in Jesus. The events of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ are horrific but they are not just horrific; they are also necessary. The Apostle Paul lays this out for us beautifully in [Rom 3:25-26](#). Jesus, by His death, was offered up as a substitute sacrifice (propitiation) for us. As Jesus was judged in our place, the Father could 1) demonstrate His righteousness in judging man's sin while at the same time; 2) spare those who deserved the judgment. Thus, at the cross, God revealed His righteousness by offering sinful man justification (not guilty) while remaining completely just in accordance with His divine holiness.

As we will see in John's account, these events were not only controlled by God, they were actually prophesied by Him centuries before the method of crucifixion was ever invented, even down to the smallest, almost insignificant details. The OT is littered with references that had their fulfillment in the events leading up to the arrest, trial and execution of Jesus as well as His subsequent resurrection and ascension. One theologian has stated that there are no less than 20 OT predictions relating to events

surrounding the death of Christ that were fulfilled with precision within a 24-hour period at the time of His crucifixion. All of this points to the obvious truth that the Scriptures are simply God's Word to us about His Son Jesus. John begins to draw attention to these fulfilled Scripture to show (1) that God was in charge of these events, (2) that the Scriptures do not fail, and (3) that Jesus is the Messiah.

16-18 – Like the other Gospel writers, John doesn't dwell on the details of crucifixion. He refrains for 2 good reasons: 1) his 1st century audience was well informed as to the horrible cruelty of the practice and 2) he had other things to emphasize such as the fulfillment of OT prophecy; Jesus' words uttered from the cross and the company He died in. But, we don't have first hand knowledge of the practice of crucifixion so it at least bears mentioning. Let it suffice to say that there was no more terrible death a person could die than crucifixion. The Romans themselves considered it with a shudder of horror. Cicero called it a "most cruel and horrifying death.' Tacitus said it was a 'despicable death'.

Crucifixion was invented by the Persians as a method of execution. It may have been used because the earth was sacred to the Persians and to avoid defiling it with the body of a criminal, they nailed him to a cross and left him to die there and let the vultures and crows finish off the job. The Carthaginians adopted the practice from the Persians; and the Romans learned it from them. Crucifixion was never used as a method of execution in Italy; it was only used in the provinces, and only for slaves. It was unthinkable for a Roman citizen to die by such a death. It was precisely that death, the most dreaded death in the ancient world, the death of slaves and criminals; by which Jesus died.

After sentenced was passed on the victim, they would be scourged to soften them up and get the blood flowing. Then, before the Romans put a man on a cross, they put the cross on the man. Often it would be just the horizontal cross bar that was placed on his raw, torn shoulder. They were then led to the place of execution by a centurion and 4 soldiers with a placard listing his crimes on display before him.

When they arrived, the victim was stripped of his clothing, his arms were nailed to the crossbar through the wrists and it was raised up on the vertical pole. The feet were then affixed to the cross, sometimes with rope but other

times they would put the legs together, turn them to one side and drive a spike through both heels. Needless to say, after hours or days of this torture, the victim would die of shock, exposure, loss of blood or suffocation. Crucifixion was designed to make the victim die publically, slowly, with great pain and humiliation. This was the form of death that God had ordained Jesus to die. This was the death Jesus humbly submitted to in the will of God.

While John exercises great restraint in recording the death of Jesus, he does mention one aspect of the crucifixion that appears in all 4 Gospels: the fact that Jesus didn't die alone. He was accompanied in death by 2 thieves. We already know that 3 people were scheduled to die that day but we only know the name of 1 of them: Barabbas. It was his cross that was laid on Jesus, his place that was taken by Jesus on that day. The other 2 malefactors are unnamed in any of the Gospels, probably because, just like Barabbas, they actually represent all of humanity and the critical choice that all humanity is faced with in Jesus; as well as the 2 destinations that all humanity will go to 1 day.

We also don't know what their specific crimes were but we do know that as Jesus was nailed to the cross, so were they. As He was lifted up, so were they. The pain they experienced was excruciating and being filled with anguish and despair, these 2 robbers must have cried out intensely cursing God, the Romans, the Jews, their own parents who gave them birth. They also would have heard the Jewish leaders hurling insults at Jesus and as they listened, they turned their attention from themselves to Jesus and began to join in the jeering and insulting with gusto.

But, something wonderful happened in those long, painful hours before Jesus died. God began to work in the heart of one of those thieves and his cursing fell silent as he began to think on and consider the character of the Man hanging next to him. He finally began to comprehend the real truth about himself and Jesus. Luke records one of the most amazing conversion experiences in the Bible in [23:40-43](#). Earlier, he had been cursing but now he rebukes his companion for his wicked speech ([40-41](#)). Then he turns to Jesus and gave voice to his new found faith ([42](#)). What was Jesus' response? "Too late Bub; you should have thought about that before you committed the crime?" Or, "I don't know, we'll have to wait and see if your good deeds out-weigh your bad ones." Or, "Why you looking at Me seeing we're both in the same boat?" No, Jesus' response was one of quiet

confidence and loud grace (43).

This thief was saved, there's no other way to see this. He was saved by grace alone in Christ alone but there were 3 specific steps he had to take to get to this glorious position. 1) He recognized his own need; his spiritual need, not his physical need. His physical needs were plentiful: he needed deliverance, medical attention, drugs, sympathy! But this is not what he recognized and confessed openly. What he did take note of and confess was that he was a sinner and needed a Savior (40b-41a). 2) He recognized that Jesus was that Savior (41b). He may not have been able to explain the doctrine of justification but he knew Jesus was the innocent Son of God and the Savior. 3) He committed himself to Jesus personally (42). He said, "remember me" and Jesus not only remembered him, He accepted him right then and promised that they would be together in paradise that very day!

19-22 – There's nothing unusual in John's mention of the title Pilate had placed upon the cross. This was standard procedure for crucifixions. This fact is actually mentioned by each Gospel writer but John alone tells us that the title was written in 3 languages. John provides this detail to reiterate once again that Jesus, though dying as a Jewish King, still had a relationship to the world beyond Israel. Hebrew, Greek, and Latin were the major languages of the then known world. John is declaring that Jesus is a King for everyone. He's not just a Jewish Savior, though He is that. He's the Savior of the Greeks and of the Romans too. In fact, He's the Savior of the whole world.

This truth has been established in John's Gospel from the very beginning (1:9-12) and we have seen it again (1:29) and again (3:16-17) and again (4:42; 6:48-51 "bread of life...life for the world"; 8:12 "light of the world"). It would be hard to imagine how the universal scope of Christ's death could be more fully or more consistently presented than what John has done in his Gospel. We should be glad John takes such pains to present this truth because it's his way of saying that God is no respecter of persons and he presents it in a practical way. John shows that God offers salvation to the Greek and Roman as well as the Jew. He saves the thief on the cross as well as the centurion who commanded the execution party. God extends His grace to the high and the low, rich and poor, the intellectual and the ignorant, or any of the countless other categories we could impose on the human race. Jesus can save them all.

Of course, this is the only logical path open to us to approach a God of perfect justice – the one He has made for us Himself. There can only be one method of salvation because there is only one problem – sin; and only one solution – the death of Jesus Christ. God doesn't look at what we have been, how low we have sunken into sin or how badly we have failed to live up to our own standards. God doesn't notice what we call sin no more than He notices what we call goodness. He just brings us to the gate and counts us all as equals – equally bankrupt of any virtue, spiritual or otherwise. Though we may have plenty of characteristics that appeal to others, we have none that appeal to God but faith. He does everything for us. He puts righteousness on our account as a free gift without respect of persons.

The placard Pilate had placed upon the cross over Jesus was there to announce His supposed crime. While we are considering this, we must also remember that there was another placard on His cross, an invisible placard that was just as real as Pilate's but it had a completely different message. Paul tells us about it in [Col 2:13-14](#). Paul uses the image of the placard placed over the cross of a dying criminal to say that although we have violated the holy law of God given at Mt. Sinai and deserve to die for it, we don't have to die. Jesus, the innocent One, took our place and died for our trespass. His cross bore the placard of our crime. In Him our violation of God's just law was punished, and God can now reach out to justify the one who trusts in Him, regardless of their nationality, race, or position.

Hebrew is the language of religious faith; the language of the OT, which was the only faithful representation of God and way of salvation that was given to the ancient world. Greek is the language of science, culture and philosophy. Latin is the language of law and good government. Pilate put his inscription on the cross primarily to irritate the leaders and it did just that. It irritated them so much that they came back to him and requested that the wording be changed. Pilate finally grows a backbone and tells them to go take a hike. What Pilate failed to realize is that he actually wrote the first "Gospel tract" when he had this title written on this placard. By it, one of the thieves that hung out with Jesus discovered that He was a King and he humbly asked to be granted entrance into His kingdom.

From a human point of view everything was against this dying thief. Yet, he called upon Jesus, and Jesus, in what was His last interview on earth, heard

him, received him, and promised him an entrance into paradise. But how was this possible? How was this justified in the sight of God according to His righteous justice and divine holiness?

Picture Golgotha in your mind: a hill with three crosses on top of it. On the left and right cross hangs 2 thieves; under each of them you can write “sin in” because both had sin inside of them. Under Jesus’ cross you must write “No sin in” because He was sinless. Now, over each cross you can write “sin on.” What’s the difference? If you’ve ever broken the law by running a stop sign or exceeding the speed limit, both of those are moving violations even if you weren’t caught in the act by the police. That sin is still in you. But, if you are stopped and ticketed, that sin is now on you (penalty of sin) as well as in you. All of us have sin in us. We are all guilty. All of us also have sin on us. We are under God’s judgment. The 1st thief had sin in him and sin on him. The 2nd thief had sin in him and sin on him. They were exactly alike.

Jesus also had sin on Him. But He didn’t have sin in Him. The sin that was on Him wasn’t His sin; it was my sin—it was the sin of this thief. So, you can erase the word “on” over the cross of the believing thief and draw an arrow over to the cross of Jesus. God justified this thief by putting all the guilt of his sin over there on Jesus Christ.

Christianity is simply this. The perfect Christ came and died on the cross. There are now 2 types of people, both are represented by these two thieves. Both are alike. Both have sin in them. Both have had sin on them. But in one case, the sin that was on him is now on Jesus. I’m like this thief. My sin was on me, but now it’s on Christ. You are either like the 1st thief or like the 2nd. Sin is in you and me, and it’s either on you or it’s on Jesus Christ. God says that Christ came to take away your sins. Which are you like?” 😊