

Christ the King, Dead and Buried

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[0 : 00] Well, how does one preach John 19? I thought about just reading it again and praying. Because in it is the essence of Christianity.

It's the central event of history. John 19 is the event that speaks to what is wrong with the world, death.

And in it we have a simultaneous pronouncement of what is most truly evil, death. And at the same time what is the most true good, the death of death in the Son of God.

It tells us the whole point of history. We look through the crucifixion to see the future, what's ahead of us. And we look through it again to look back and make sense of the past.

And so if you want to know what the essence of Christianity is, there's no better place to go than one of the first creeds of the early church, the Apostles Creed, the sixth article of the Creed says this, he suffered under Pontius Pilate.

[1 : 17] He died and he was buried. We call it Good Friday. It's upcoming Friday. We call it Good Friday.

But if you just read John 19, you would be hard pressed to find the good on the surface of the text. Beaten, despised, forsaken.

Where's the good in that? But Paul tells us to glory in the cross of Christ. He said, I want to know nothing else among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

The cross for Paul is the glory of Christ. Where is the glory in such horror? What is it to call that which is most evil at the same time the most good?

The verse just before our chapter begins at the end of chapter 18, Pilate comes out amongst the crowd and he brings out as was his custom two criminals, one Barabbas on the one hand and Jesus on the other.

[2 : 36] And he says to them, I've found this Jesus innocent and this Barabbas, the murderer. Who would you have?

And of course, you know, they say, Barabbas, give us Barabbas. What is this? What is it when the guilty go free and the innocent one goes condemned?

This is the gospel. This is the gospel. The guilty go free, the innocent one despised and rejected by men.

So I really want to let the text speak for itself this morning for just the next few minutes. I just want to open it up a little bit before your eyes by asking three questions of the text.

The first is this, who is this man? And I think we can best tell who this man is in the text by looking at the charges that were leveled against him. The second way we can address who is this man is by asking what was his punishment.

[3 : 48] So we'll look at how he was punished and then finally we'll ask what is John asking us all to see this morning in 2016 from this text.

So first, who is this man? Look at his charges. Every single time you come to the gospels, you come back to the gospels with the same question and that is, who is this man?

That's the question the gospels are always asking of you. They're making a demand upon you and that's for you to answer afresh anew. Every time, who is this man?

What is he asking of me? What is what the gospel writers are saying requiring of me to say, to speak, to confess about who this man Jesus is?

And there might not be a better place in the whole of the gospels to come than to the crucifixion event. In chapter 18, Jesus had been betrayed in the Garden of Gethsemane by Judas.

[4 : 48] Peter had denounced him three times and when Jesus was arrested, he was taken first before Anas, who was not the high priest. Anas was the former high priest.

He had been deposed about 15 years prior to this event for unnecessary brutality to his own people by the Roman government.

So he goes to see this man first and then Anas sends him to Caiaphas, the actual high priest. And in John 11, John tells us why Caiaphas wanted Jesus to die.

And the reason Caiaphas said he wanted Jesus to die is because it's better for one man to die for the nation than for the whole nation to suffer. In other words, Caiaphas is somewhat motivated by a political agenda.

We see this especially in our chapter when Pilate comes out and says, Jesus is innocent. I find no guilt in this man. And in a last ditch effort to make sure that he gets crucified, the scribes and Pharisees come to him from verse 12 and they say, hey, listen, if you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend.

[6 : 04] We have no king but Caesar. Remember Pilate? Who's your king? There's no king but Caesar. Caesar, Kyrgios, they would say. Caesar is Lord.

There's no king but Caesar. And so the first issue is this. Look, Pilate thinks Jesus is a king. And so the charge leveled against Jesus is treason.

Pilate had asked him in chapter 18 verse 37, are you a king? In the first two words Jesus responds with is my kingdom.

You see, Jesus has answered the question. Are you a king? He says, my kingdom is not of this world. It's not from this world. My kingdom. He's saying, I am a king. You have said it.

And then in our passage, Pilate comes to him once more and asks him, where are you from? And you see what he's doing there. He's trying to get a location of Christ's kingship.

[7 : 14] There's no king but Caesar in the Roman Empire. Where are you from? Where does your kingship hail from?

Is the question that he's asking him and Jesus is silent. Speak, explain your kingship. If you would explain it, I can release you.

My kingdom is not from this world. You have no authority over me except that which is given to you from above.

Look, not even those who sought to humiliate and dehumanize him could do so without bowing the knee to his kingship.

What else could they do with thorns but mold them into a crown? You see, what else could they do but clothe his wounds with a purple robe?

[8 : 12] The color of kingship. What else could they write above his head but this is the king of the Jews? These things happen because Pilate knows. He knows he's the king.

And so he's committed treason. That's the first charge. The second charge you see in verse seven, the Jews answered him, they have a law and according to that law he ought to die because he had made himself the son of God.

The charge they're giving there is blasphemy. Jesus has proclaimed himself. He has made himself the son of God. Now, I want you to notice something that's a little bit veiled in the text.

That's really important and that's this. In verse four, it says this, Pilate went out again to say to them. Now notice the verb in the location.

Pilate went out, out of the Praetorium to speak to the Jewish priests. Now, his going out is really significant even though it's just such a short little phrase there.

[9 : 25] You see, in the previous chapter, in chapter 18 and verse 28, they, Caiaphas and the priests, lead Jesus to the governor's headquarter and it was the early morning but they themselves would not enter the governor's headquarters.

Why? Why does Pilate have to come out to show Jesus? Because they refused to enter it so they would not be defiled so they could eat the Passover meal.

You see, it's Passover week and the high priest in order to keep themselves according to their law and custom, ceremonially clean, will not enter the Roman Praetorium because this is the place of the Gentiles.

This is the place of filth. You step into the Roman realm and you've entered into a place that's ceremonially unclean. You become dirty like them.

You cannot enter the temple and off your lamb in Passover week if you've been defiled by the Roman court. You see, the priests are scrupulous about the ceremonial law.

[10:39] Is this not the summary of Jesus' entire message? He is the man that they used to whisper about. He eats with the Gentiles.

He takes up his seat at the table with the filth, the sinners. He makes himself dirty by touching the lepers.

And here at the pinnacle event of his life, where else can Jesus go but straight into the filth of the Roman Praetorium?

You see, those that sought to be to the highest end clean from sin and filth had murder on their hearts.

And the man who was most clean in the whole world becomes the most ceremonially dirty. He's throwing thorns, crucifixion, death, sin, yeah. But he passed over into the realm of the Gentile.

[11:51] At Passover, thousands of lambs in this week would have been taken to the slaughter. They would kill these lambs. They would remember the Exodus account that God had taken them out of Egypt across the Red Sea.

And the sacrifices at the temple included one particular event. When you would take your lamb and sacrifices to be slaughtered, one of the things that would happen is that the priest or you would put your hand on the head of the lamb.

And in doing so, you would pass from yourself symbolically the filth, the ceremonially uncleanness and the sin that you had acquired.

You would put your hand on the head of the lamb. And in doing so, when you send the lamb to the slaughter, you say, you have my sin now. You have my filth.

Now, isn't it something that the very thing that Jesus is charged with, treason and blasphemy, are the sins of Adam and Eve?

[13:03] We will not be citizens of your kingdom. So they said. We will be our own gods. Treason.

Blasphemy. Look, John told us in John 3.16 that God so loved the world that he gave, has only gotten some for the world.

When Jesus is charged with treason and blasphemy, it says if the sins that encapsulated exactly what was wrong with the world were stuck to his head, like the hand, our hands upon the lamb.

We put our hand on his head, you see, the priest. They put his hand on his head. And they said, treason, blasphemy.

You take it. You entered the filth of the Roman court. He stuck our hands on his head and we said, you, the innocent one, take my treason.

[14:12] Take my blasphemy. The king of the cosmos became the traitor. And the God who at that very same moment was upholding the universe that it might not fall into oblivion.

Became the blasphemer. For us.

For us, you see. What wondrous love is this, oh, my soul? Secondly, what was his suffering?

His punishment. Well, the first verse tells us Pilate took Jesus and he flogged him. There were three ways of flogging, three forms of flogging in the first century Roman Empire.

The first was called the Fustigatio. This was a not so severe beating, public drunkenness, hooliganism, just being ridiculous.

[15:20] This would get you the Fustigatio. You would remember it. You would not sleep well after, but it was not so severe. The second was the flagellatio.

It was a more severe beating. It was a beating that you would remember for the rest of your life. It was a beating that sometimes would end in broken bones, things like this. It was for a little bit more serious crimes, but not capital crimes.

And then the third, the verbaratio. This was the beating given before crucifixions. A leather whip would be taken and that measured about three feet in length with various strands inserted into the bits of leather would be bones, usually from a lamb.

Shards of bone that have been cut to make them more sharp and then also pieces of metal. And what they would do is they would beat the victim sometimes to death.

They would be tied to a pole with their hands above their head and they would be whipped until their back was opened and the flesh was so exposed that sometimes the organs would be visible.

[16:40] And this was for a reason because crucifixion can take days. And so you would beat the victim until their organs were exposed so that they would be weak and they would die faster.

You would not stand around across your days. Well, the flogging that we see in 19, the first couple of verses, actually is before Jesus gets sentenced to crucifixion.

So this is probably the flagiolatio, the most minor beating. Jesus is probably beaten in a minor way, put on a crown of thorns, given a purple robe and taken back out to the crowd.

And Pilate does this because he finds no guilt in him. So instead of crucifying him, he wants to beat him and then take him back out to the crowd in order that the crowd would have sympathy and would say, okay, he's gotten his beating, he's been humiliated, now it's time to go home.

But that doesn't happen. They say crucify him. And so at that point, according to Mark's account, we know that there was actually a second flogging.

[17 : 54] We know what that one was. It was the verberatio. His flesh was exposed and who knows until his organs began to appear perhaps.

And he was taken to the cross and the reason for this was that to survive on the cross, you would push from the foot, which had a nail inserted through it, up through the knee until you were forced to stand up to get your breath.

And in getting, you needed to stand up to get your breath, otherwise your lungs would be filled with fluid and you would die. Hence when they stab him in his side at the end of the passage, water, fluid comes out because his lungs had filled up and it basically gives you a heart attack.

They would beat you to the inch of your life and expose your back because if you need to press from your knee to standing with your back so exposed that one can even see inside of the person, you can imagine that the back would press naked against the splintered wood every time you would try to take a breath.

This is what Jesus went through on the cross. What do I say to this? What do I add?

[19 : 27] The text speaks. Maybe just this. In this scene we have what looks like the moment of greatest weakness.

He cries out to his father, he's forsaken me, he's broken in every way, physically, spiritually, emotionally. We see passivity, don't we?

We see helplessness. But don't be fooled. The oppression that we see him going under is not absolute weakness.

He gave them permission. You do not do this to me except my father lets you.

The man who's most absolutely weak in this moment is at the same time the man who is in most control of all things.

[20 : 36] It looks like an absolute passivity is the king of the universe showing the true love of the king for his people by becoming everything they were.

Blasphemous, treason, sinners bruised and broken by the fall. Everything we are the worst.

At the very same time he was the only one they could never be on the cross, the holy one of Israel, the spotless lamb, the incorruptible one.

What do we say to these things? Paul would ask. 1 Corinthians 15 maybe? Jesus Christ died for our sins.

For us. For our treason, for our blasphemy. Thirdly and finally, what is John asking us to think, to see here in this text, to do?

[21 : 55] What is John asking us to do when we look at the king who underwent the Verberatio for us? Well, he tells us literally directly in 1935, if you have a look down at that text.

He who saw it, John himself, has borne witness. His testimony is true and he knows that he is telling the truth. That you may believe that's the first thing.

Secondly, for these things took place that the scriptures might be fulfilled. You see, John tells us why he's giving you this account. He's told you what he wants you to know, what he wants you to see.

Two things. We'll take them in a reverse order. That the scriptures might be fulfilled first and second, that you might believe. First, that the scriptures might be fulfilled and this is our last brief thing.

I want to revisit two images that were present in his suffering that we just looked at. One is the crown of thorns and the second is the cross. The Old Testament gives us two ways, at least, that it means to be cursed.

[23 : 08] What it means to be cursed. If you remember back into Genesis 1-3 and the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve, they break God's command in the garden and the curse that is placed upon Adam, the curse of mankind, is this.

That the ground that you come to work will bear thorns. You see. The first image that we're given of what kind of suffering this God man went under in his passion is that they inserted thorns into his head.

Why? Why thorns? It's not just because they're sharp. It's because Jesus was literally bearing on himself the very curse that was given to Adam.

You see. You sinned, Adam. And for that reason, the ground will bear the thorn. And it's no coincidence that in his suffering, the first thing that's placed upon him is the thorn.

You see. What this tells us is that Jesus' death is the death of death for sin, for us. But it's even more.

[24 : 28] It's the death of death for the cursed ground. The cosmos, you see. The whole of it.

Work, toil, sweat. The thorns that each plant produces in the world. He died to end it.

The death of death is a death for the cosmos. The curse extends to the ends of the universe. And his grace is sufficient to the end of the cosmos.

The second way that we see the man that was cursed here is through the image of the cross.

The cross is a tree. It's a tree that's been cut down. And really interesting in Deuteronomy 21, God tells Moses that if a man has committed a crime, punishable by death, then he is put to death and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on that tree.

[25 : 41] You shall bury him the same day for it is cursed for a man to hang upon a tree. Now the question is why? Why does God say that it's cursed for a man to hang on a tree?

You could be stoned. You could die in all sorts of other ways. The curse is the tree. Well, again, if you remember back to the garden, there are two trees.

There is the tree of the knowledge of evil and there is the tree of life. And at the eating of the tree of the knowledge of evil, Adam and Eve, lest they eat of the tree of life, God says in Genesis 322, lest they eat of it and make their cursed nature forever, he bars them from the garden.

You remember he kicks them out. They go east of Eden. The gate is closed. The cherubim is put there with a flaming sword.

Lest they eat of the tree of life in the garden and live forever in their cursed condition. From the eating of the tree of the knowledge of evil, the tree is cursed.

[27 : 01] And it's no coincidence that cursed is the man Jesus who hangs from the tree of Adam.

Even in the moment of the symbols of curse, the thorns themselves could not help but weave themselves into a crown.

And the tree could not help but bear the sign that said King of the Jews. There's one last image that I want to briefly point out to you that brings the point all together.

And that's in John 1941. You notice how John in this passage writes 1941 almost as if it's happenstance.

It's just mere coincidence. Now in the place where he was crucified, where he happened to be crucified, there was a garden.

And in the garden a new tomb in which no one yet had been laid. It's no coincidence that the man who was hung on the tree of the knowledge of evil, the tree of Adam, the very next move that his body makes is to break open the gate of the garden next to him.

[28 : 24] The tree of life was enclosed in this garden. And because we've eaten of the tree of the knowledge of evil, we cannot enter back into it and take from the fruit of the tree of life.

But the man who hung on the tree of Adam and the tree of Adam could not hold him down, breaks open the gate of his burial in the garden.

You see, he's opened the way for us to step back into Eden to partake of that second tree, the tree that never knew curse.

And so with Christ's entrance into the garden, we enter into our intermission for this week. His body will lay there three days as measured according to the clock of the first century.

We will wait one week till we read John 20 together. The death of death and the death of Christ is the breaking down of the mighty gates surrounding the tree of eternal life in the garden of God.

[29 : 35] Will you come and take and eat? That's what John's asking you. That's why he says his second point is that you may believe.

Lastly, very briefly, he's asking you to situate yourself in this scene. You see, take your stand in the crowd.

Where are you? Are you a soldier? Are you a priest? Are you Peter hiding away in some dark corner ashamed of yourself?

Are you an onlooker? Are you John, the beloved son, the new son of Mary? Perhaps all of them at different times in your life?

Perhaps all of them at different times this week? But I think if there is one place we can identify ourselves in this whole scenario, it's actually that we are Barabbas.

[30 : 35] The guilty ones standing on the judgment seat right next to the innocent man.

Give us Barabbas, they said. And in that moment, the guilty goes free into the world. And the innocent stands condemned in his place.

You see, we long to be Barabbas, the guilty ones, the treacherous, the blasphemers, the people who can't stop lusting and getting angry at their wives and husbands, who can't break free of sin, let go free to roam in the world because the innocent one was made guilty for us.

For us. What wondrous love is this? Well, until the resurrection. Let's pray. Lord and God, we thank you that you have given us an eyewitness account of the crucifixion.

And we long to see Christ, the glory of Christ crucified, which is our glory, crucified with him, which is the glory of the cosmos, sin put to rest, death of death in the cross.

[32 : 10] So now I just simply ask that you would help us all to believe it. Would we not but believe in him, on him, and love him? And so we ask that you would do this in us by the Holy Spirit.

In Jesus' name, amen.