

John 19:17-24

Teaching Points

Jesus was Crucified: A Horrific and Humiliating Death

According to Roman custom Jesus carried His cross from the place of sentencing to the place of crucifixion, **the Place of a Skull**. Before the Romans put a man on a cross, they put the cross on the man, forcing him to carry it in a public procession intended to draw attention to the condemned, his crime, and his fate.

F.F. Bruce writes, "It was normally the cross-piece (*patibulum*), and not the complete gibbet, that the condemned man carried into the place of execution; the upright stakes were probably standing there already."

They crucified Him: The Persians invented crucifixion, but one could say that the Romans perfected it and made it an institution. It was the form of execution reserved for the worst criminals and the lowest classes. Crucifixion was designed to make the victim die publicly, slowly, with great pain and humiliation. This was the form of death God ordained for Jesus to die, and the death that He submitted to in the will of God.

Crucifixion was so awful and degrading that polite Romans wouldn't talk about it in public. The Roman statesman Cicero said of crucifixion: "It is a crime to bind a Roman citizen; to scourge him is an act of wickedness; to execute him is almost murder: What shall I say of crucifying him? An act so abominable it is impossible to find any word adequately to express." The Roman historian Tacitus called crucifixion "A torture fit only for slaves."

Two others with Him: Jesus was in the center of two criminals. Jesus took on flesh and blood and was tempted in all ways like us, but without sin. Yet He chose to identify with sinners as He lay down His life for sinners. His humiliation involved hanging on a Roman cross giving the appearance that He was nothing more than another criminal deserving of death.

Discussion Questions: Reflect on the title Pilate put on the cross over Jesus. That sign was put there to identify His "crime." Why do you think he wrote those words? Why do you think he had it written in three languages? What connection can you make between this "charge" against Jesus and the words of Caiaphas back in 11:49-50?

Thoughts: *There has been a testy back-and-forth between Pilate and the Jewish leaders. He has no sympathy for their cause and he's aggravated at this whole mess they've brought to him. It seems this sign is a "dig" at them. Pilate identifies the tortured rabbi hanging on the cross: "Here's your King." Much like the unwitting prophecy of Caiaphas back in chapter 11, Pilate's words are true. He has no idea how true they are! Check out 11:51-52. Caiaphas prophesied it and now Pilate identifies it: Jesus, the King, is dying for His people. That's what the sign says...in three languages. Jesus of Nazareth is dying for Jews and Gentiles.*

John 19:17-24

Jesus is (Once Again) Fulfilling Prophecy

The Lord is stripped and hanging on the cross, most likely unrecognizable because of the beating He has endured. The Lord of glory is between two criminals with a sign over His head meant for mockery. The picture is pathetic. He is soundly defeated. Or is He? He is not! He's doing exactly what He said He would do and He's fulfilling Old Testament prophecy. He's fulfilling a number of prophecies, but we'll end this study with just one... the one John details in verses 23-24: The soldiers took His clothes and gambled for them (for one piece of them). These words are taken from Psalm 22 which is loaded with Messianic prophecies. Turn to Psalm 22 and read verses 1 and 12-18.

Discussion Questions: How would you respond to someone who scoffs at fulfilled prophecy by saying that Jesus knew the Old Testament so He intentionally did things to "fulfill" prophecy? Some claim that is manipulation, not prophecy. How would you respond?

Thoughts: *Here's how the late R.C. Sproul responded to that suggestion: "John does not say that the Roman soldiers got together and said, 'We should gamble for His garments because it says in the Jewish Scriptures that someone is going to cast lots for His clothes and we want to make sure that the Scriptures are fulfilled down to the last detail.' No, this is John's editorial comment, pointing out that the soldiers, when they went through this act of gambling for the garments of the Christ, unknowingly and involuntarily were fulfilling the precise details of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the death of the Messiah. John is zealous to help his reader understand that what happened on the cross was not an accident of history, but it came to pass through the invisible hand of a sovereign Providence" (Sproul's Expository Commentary on John, 367).*

Take time tonight to praise the Lord for His sovereign providence. The One on the middle cross, who appeared to be an absolute defeated failure, was fulfilling detailed prophecy as the King of kings and Lord of lords. In doing so, He was securing the salvation for His people as our substitutionary atonement. What wondrous love is this!