

## 38. Jesus Sentenced to be Crucified

John 19:1-16

The Gospel According to John

### The Scourging and Humiliation of Christ (John 19:1-5)

In our last study, we learned that Pilate pronounced Jesus not guilty, but the Jews would not accept it and persisted in demanding Jesus' crucifixion (John 18:38-39). Pilate then gave them a choice between Jesus and a notorious insurrectionist and murderer by the name of Barabbas. They chose Barabbas over Christ, and both John and Matthew record that, after the freeing of Barabbas, Pilate had Jesus flogged (Matthew 27:26).

<sup>1</sup>Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. <sup>2</sup>The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe <sup>3</sup>and went up to him again and again, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" And they slapped him in the face. <sup>4</sup>Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews gathered there, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him." <sup>5</sup>When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!" (John 19:1-5).

Luke wrote that Pilate's motive in having Jesus flogged was to appease the Jews. "Therefore, I will punish him and then release him" (Luke 23:16). Pilate hoped that the scourging of Christ's back would elicit some sympathy and mercy for this innocent Man and would satisfy the mob's bloodlust when they saw Jesus. Roman scourging was called "the halfway death" because it was supposed to stop just this side of death. It was not administered in addition to another punishment. The two "thieves" also to be crucified were not scourged. A Jewish law, the Mithah Arikhta, forbade prolonging death for condemned criminals and exempted those who were to die from the shame of also being scourged. Considering both Jewish and Roman law was disregarded in the matter of Christ's punishment, Jesus was treated worse than a common criminal.

Away from the Jewish crowd and inside the courtyard of the Roman barracks, how do you think the Roman soldiers treated the "King of the Jews?" Why would God allow His Son to go through scourging as well as the cross?

Flogging or scourging was a terrible way to inflict pain on a man. Jesus' back would have been stretched over a whipping post so that He could not move, while two men on either side would prepare themselves by choosing the implements of scourging. Scourging by the Romans took one of three forms. There was the *fustes*, a light beating with strips of leather administered as a warning, and then there was the *flagella*, a severe beating, and *verbera*, which was much more severe and delivered with a whip with several leather thongs with pieces of metal or bone tied on the ends. Chuck Smith, pastor, and author states that, with each stripe of the whip, the victim was expected to confess his crime.<sup>[1]</sup> If the victim shouted out one of his sins, the lictor (the one administering the scourging) would ease up on the punishment until, in the end, the implement used was just the leather strap. The easing up of the scourging didn't happen with Jesus, for He

had no sins to confess, and so as a sheep before its shearers is silent, the Lord did not open His mouth (Isaiah 53:7).

The silence of Christ and the lack of confession of any sin would have brought the lictor's to use the severest form of scourging, the *verbera*. This kind of scourging would tear pieces of skin off of His back and leave Him with bone and entrails exposed. The prophet, King David, saw this and wrote in the book of Psalms: "**All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me**" (Psalms 22:17). The Gospels do not tell us how many times they whipped Jesus, but the Apostle Paul had thirty-nine lashes on five different occasions (2 Corinthians 11:24). Tradition has it that this was so with Jesus as well.

The Law of Moses limited scourging to forty lashes (Deuteronomy 25:3), so if Jesus did receive thirty-nine lashes, then the Romans were falling short of the maximum Jewish sentence. There was no set number of lashes to be administered under Roman law. Under the Roman system, the scourging would continue until the victim was just on the verge of unconsciousness and close to death. According to a forensic pathologist, the scourging typically resulted in rib fractures, severe lung bruises, and lacerations with bleeding into the chest cavity and partial or complete pneumothorax (collapse of the lung).

Six hundred years before, the prophet Isaiah wrote of the suffering of the Messiah in these terms:

**<sup>4</sup>Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup>But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup>We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. <sup>7</sup>He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth (Isaiah 53:4-7 Emphasis mine).**

In the above prophetic Scripture, the Hebrew word, *chabbuwrah*, is translated by the New International Version (NIV) as "His wounds" (v. 5). This Hebrew word means a stripe or bruise, the mark or stripes on the skin. The King James Version of the English Bible translates the passage as "**by his stripes we are healed**" (Isaiah 53:5). Many people believe that the scourging at the hands of the Roman soldiers accomplished healing for our bodies. Others say that the wounds that heal us are indicative of His substitutionary death on the cross. Whatever your view, Jesus opened a fountain of healing by what He experienced on that day.

When the scourging was over, the Roman soldiers were still not finished with Him. The hatred of the Romans for the Jews found expression by the rest of the soldiers in the Praetorium, the Roman barracks, for they took turns to beat Christ and humiliate Him. Mark records that the whole company (450-600 men) or cohort (Greek *speira*) took turns hitting Him on the head with a staff and spitting on Him before then mocking Him by bowing before Him as they would to Caesar:

**<sup>16</sup>The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. <sup>17</sup>They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a**

crown of thorns and set it on him. <sup>18</sup>And they began to call out to him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" <sup>19</sup>Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. <sup>20</sup>And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him (Mark 15:16-20).

They put a staff in His right hand and Herod's scarlet robe around His back over His gaping wounds. Then, they twisted a crown of thorns and pierced His head with it. The crown of thorns takes us back to the curse on the ground in the Garden of Eden. Christ bore the symbol of that curse, i.e., the thorns, taking it to the cross with Him.

**Cursed** is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. <sup>18</sup>It will produce **thorns** and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field (Genesis 3:17b-18).

In the Old Testament, more than five hundred years earlier, Isaiah, the prophet spoke of the Suffering Servant of God sent to Israel. He wrote:

I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting (Isaiah 50:6).

All of what happened to Christ was according to God's plan. On the Day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter said to the more than 3,000 Jews before him, "This man was handed over to you by **God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge**; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross" (Acts 2:23 emphasis mine). Under the sovereign hand of God, the Father gifted His Son to us to be our substitutionary sacrifice for sin, and Jews and Gentiles, i.e., all of humanity, in our wickedness expended our sinfulness on Him.

### **Jesus Found Not Guilty by Pilate a Second Time (John 19:6-12)**

<sup>6</sup>As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, "Crucify! Crucify!" But Pilate answered, "You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him" <sup>7</sup>The Jewish leaders insisted, "We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God." <sup>8</sup>When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, <sup>9</sup>and he went back inside the palace. "Where do you come from?" he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. <sup>10</sup>"Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?" <sup>11</sup>Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." <sup>12</sup>From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jewish leaders kept shouting, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar" (John 19:6-12).

When the soldiers finished their humiliation of Jesus, they returned Him to Pilate. I imagine that Pilate was shocked at the mess of the Man before him. The film, *Passion of the Christ* by Mel Gibson, vividly portrays this, although there is no Scriptural evidence of shock or pity by Pilate. Pilate felt sure that Christ's scourging would garner sympathy among the crowd of Jews in the courtyard, and by presenting Christ to them looking as He did, Pilate hoped that he would be

able to release Him. In all, Pilate made five attempts to free the Lord as we may learn from [Luke 23:4, 15, 20, 22](#); [John 19:4, 12, 13](#). This terrible scene of the scourged Lord Jesus before the crowd was prophesied about more than five hundred years previously by Isaiah:

Just as there were many who were appalled at him—his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness (Isaiah 52:14).

Christ was so severely beaten that His form was now disfigured to the degree that He hardly looked human anymore. Pilate presented Jesus to them, "Here is the man!" ([John 19:5b](#)). Before them all was the most perfect, loving, and compassionate Man the earth had ever witnessed. Here was God in the flesh, showing us what God is like in a way that we could understand, yet humanity rejected him. The Scriptures describe Jesus as rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief ([Isaiah 53:3](#)).

After the scourging, when Jesus was presented to the crowd, the chief priests, leaders, and officials allowed no time for the crowd to feel sympathy. They were the ones who immediately initiated the shouting, "Crucify! Crucify!" Imagine the feelings of His mother and brothers and the disciples if they had been in the crowd (we are not told), especially as they looked upon their beloved Christ after the company of soldiers did their worst. They must have been shocked and horrified to hear the crowd cry out, "Crucify! Crucify!" ([John 19:6a](#)).

We should not think that, if we had been there, it would have been any different. The same human nature and sin problem rest in our hearts as much as in theirs. We each see ourselves there in that courtyard. There was only one way of deliverance from our sinful nature. There had to be a substitute who would take our guilt upon Himself and do away with it. Thank God for Jesus. He is the perfect Lamb of God.

Again, Pilate responded to the crowd a second time when he found Jesus not guilty, saying, "You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him" ([John 19:6b](#)). Why didn't Pilate close the proceedings at that point? If Jesus was pronounced not guilty, why listen any longer to these manipulative men? <sup>7</sup>The Jewish leaders insisted, "'We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God.' <sup>8</sup>When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid" ([John 19:7-8a](#)).

When told by the Jewish leaders that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, why did that thought make Pilate even more afraid?

The depth of evil and hatred in the Jewish leaders knew no bounds. In their warped minds, they were expecting a Messiah that would deliver them from Roman occupation. They did not need a deliverer from sin; they were looking for a Messiah more like themselves.

Occasionally, I have run across people who have said to me that Jesus never claimed to be the Son of God. I don't know what Bible they read, but here in this passage, even the enemies of Jesus were saying that He said that He was the Son of God (v. 7). They did not believe Him, but do you? The Jews now appealed to Pilate from the Law of Moses, which states: "Anyone who blasphemes the name of the LORD must be put to death" ([Leviticus 24:16](#)). As we said in the previous study, they didn't want Him stoned, i.e., the typical Jewish way of execution. They were

trying to influence Pilate to put a curse on Him by hanging Him on a wooden pole (Deuteronomy 21:23, the cross was seen as a wooden pole).

### **Power and Accountability (John 19:9-11)**

For the first time in this encounter, Pilate was now moved by fear. The Romans were ruled by the fear of their pantheon of different gods. It was one thing to have to answer to Caesar, but the Roman gods as well? Now, that was scary! Perhaps, Pilate noticed that there seemed no fear in Jesus, i.e., that He had regally stood up to the torture of the scourging without confession. Christ's demeanor brought the possibility home to him that, maybe this Man was the Son of God. Perhaps, he also recalled his wife's comment not to have anything to do with that innocent man (Matthew 27:19). Pilate now took Jesus into his residence again to talk with Him privately. "Where do you come from?" he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer" (John 19:9). Even though He was a bloody mess with blood dripping on Pilate's floor, Jesus was regal in His silence and entirely in control. It was Pilate who was the one on trial. There was no pleading for a way out by Jesus. He was fully committed to the plan of the Father. Pilate threatened Him to talk by commanding Him, "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?" "Jesus answered, 'You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin'" (vv. 10-11).

What was Jesus saying in verse 11? Who is the One in power?

Jesus said that Caiaphas, the one who handed Christ over to Pilate, is guilty of a greater sin. Are there different levels of sin, and what do you think makes one man more liable than another?

Pilate saw himself as the only one who could now help Christ. From his point of view, Jesus did not have a friend in the world. If you are a Christian, never believe that lie of the enemy. God is watching over you, and your King is ever near. Everything that happens on the physical plane is taken note of; nothing escapes the watchful eye of heaven (2 Chronicles 16:9). The Lord will allow painful things to be experienced by His people, but every act will be brought into judgment. People will be held accountable for every word that issues from their mouths: "But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken" (Matthew 12:36). In another place it is written, "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13).

Pilate thought that he had power, but the Lord Jesus was the One who was really in control. Pilate was accountable and will one day appear before the judgment seat of Christ: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10). In that day, if a man is without Christ, there will be different levels of guilt and punishment. It is one thing to corrupt ourselves by our actions, but it is entirely another thing to influence others to sin. Leaders are held to a higher level of accountability because of their level of influence (James 3:1). For all those who have trusted Christ, they will not enter into judgment concerning their sin; the judgment was paid for by Jesus at the cross of Christ (John 5:22-24). Pilate will be judged for his handling of this injustice, but the high priests and ruling leaders will experience the greater guilt for their part in the rejection of the Messiah (Christ).

Pilate again tried to set Jesus free (v. 12), but the Jews were insistent. They had one manipulative card still up their sleeve, and after Pilate's last intimate conversation with Jesus and the third declaration to them of his belief in Christ's innocence, the Jews turned up their ace card, shouting, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar" (v. 12).

What threat were the Jews making to Pilate in verse 12?

### Rejection of King Jesus (John 19:13-16)

<sup>13</sup>When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha). <sup>14</sup>It was the day of Preparation of the Passover; it was about noon. "Here is your king," Pilate said to the Jews. <sup>15</sup>But they shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!" "Shall I crucify your king?" Pilate asked. "We have no king but Caesar," the chief priests answered. <sup>16</sup>Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified (John 19:13-16).

Pilate was placed in a difficult situation, for he had to decide which kingdom he would serve. To render a verdict of "not guilty" almost certainly would have ruined his political career. Rome may have punished him for not sentencing someone who openly challenged the authority of Caesar. Pilate was comfortable in his role as governor and would rather condemn an innocent man than have Caesar hear of his poor leadership. In exasperation, he gave in. Instead of submitting to the kingdom of God, Pilate set aside truth for power, worldly success, and short-term comfort.

<sup>24</sup>When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!" <sup>25</sup>All the people answered, "His blood is on us and on our children!" (Matthew 27:24-25).

Do you think that Pilate reconsidered or regretted his action after Jesus was crucified? Do you think he was plagued by guilt afterward?

I wish that guilt and accountability for our sin could be taken away by the washing of the hands. If only it were as easy as that! There is only one thing that takes away sin: the shed blood of Christ on the cross in full payment for sin. It was a tragic utterance by the people on that day: "His blood is on us and on our children!" (Matthew 27:25). For nearly two thousand years, i.e., from 70 A.D. until the year 1948, the Jewish people were banished from their land. It is a distinct possibility that God has disciplined them as a nation but, at the same time, used those early Jewish believers to export the Gospel to the Gentiles.

John wrote that Pilate, out of disgust for the Jewish leadership who denied Jesus as their King, stated: "'Here is **your king**,' Pilate said to the Jews. <sup>15</sup>But they shouted, 'Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!' 'Shall I crucify your king?' Pilate asked. 'We have no king but Caesar,' the chief priests answered. <sup>16</sup>Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified" (John 19:15-16). What blasphemy the leaders uttered at this point. The Bible says that out of the mouth, the heart speaks (Matthew 15:18). It is incredible to think that the Jews claimed Caesar as their king at this point. God's people saw themselves as separate and holy, not to be ruled by another king,

but the leaders of Israel were saying that they were willing to be ruled by Caesar as their king rather than by the man Jesus, whom they thought of as a heretic.

What happened to Pilate later on? Eusebius, a Roman historian and a scholar of the biblical canon, quoted early apocryphal accounts and stated that Pilate suffered a misfortune in the reign of Caligula (A.D. 37–41), was exiled to Gaul, and eventually committed suicide there in Vienne. The 10th century historian, Agapius of Hierapolis, in his *Universal History*, says that Pilate committed suicide during the first year of Caligula's reign in AD 37/38.

There may have been those who, convinced of Jesus' innocence, still felt that they could do nothing to stop what took place and did not want to risk public scrutiny amid an angry mob. While many people in the crowd were probably followers of Jesus, many were shouting for Barabbas. Their attitude was one that has been found continuously over the past twenty centuries: "We don't want this man to rule over us!" That is the most basic way of deciding who is a true Christian and who is not.

When Jesus talked about the Kingdom of God, He had in mind the reign and rule of the King. Jesus is that King and His demand is for His rightful place in every human heart as King and Lord. If He is not, then self is. We either let Him be the boss of everything, or we make ourselves the boss of everything. It is that simple and that fundamental. Two thousand years ago, the masses rejected His rule and reign. Today, it is the same story. Most people reject Jesus for the simple reason that they love worshipping self, they love their sin, and they refuse to bow down to anyone else. They do not want Jesus because that means saying no to ourselves and yes to Him. It is a radical change of allegiance. The road we travel forks more than once. Our initial decision to trust in Jesus Christ is the most crucial choice we will make, but it is the first of many. Each day, we must choose which kingdom we will serve. Will you submit to the truth or succumb to power?

Thank God for Jesus, the perfect Lamb of God. He was the only One Who could pay our price in full, i.e., being a perfect, sinless sacrifice, just like the Passover Lamb. Thank God that death does not have any hold over us because of His sacrifice of love.

Prayer: Father, Thank You for the sacrifice of Your perfect son, Jesus. I ask that Your Holy Spirit keep me from evil, open up Your Word to my understanding, and give me the strength to choose Your truth, Your will, and Your kingdom. Yours is the glory forever. Amen!

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