

John: The Cross

John 19:16-42

By [Dr. Derek Thomas](#)

June 4, 2003

Turn with me if you would to the Gospel of John, and we are this evening in chapter 19. We begin at the sixteenth verse. John 19. We come to John's account of the crucifixion, verse 16. Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus.

17 Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). 18 Here they crucified him, and with him two others--one on each side and Jesus in the middle. 19 Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews. 20 Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. 21 The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, Do not write 'The King of the Jews', but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews. 22 Pilate answered, What I have written, I have written. 23 When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. 24 Let's not tear it, they said to one another. Let's decide by lot who will get it. This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled which said, They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.

So this is what the soldiers did.

25 Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing near by, he said to his mother, Dear woman, here is your son, 27 and to the disciple, Here is your mother. From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. 28 Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, I am thirsty. 29 A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. 30 When he had received the drink, Jesus said, It is finished. With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. 31 Now

it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. 32 The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. 33 But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. 34 Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. 35 The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. 36 These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: Not one of his bones will be broken, 37 and, as another scripture says, They will look on the one they have pierced. 38 Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. 39 He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. 40 Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. 41 At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. 42 Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was near by, they laid Jesus there.

Amen. May God bless to us the reading of His holy and inerrant word. Let's pray together.

Our Father, we perceive that we are on holy ground. As we think of the crucifixion of our blessed Lord, we pray, gracious God, as we realize that drops of grief can ne'er repay the depth of love I owe, here, Lord, I give myself away. 'Tis all that I can do. Bless it to us for Jesus' sake. Amen.

John's particular description of the crucifixion has a unique twist to it. John, I think, is aware of some, if not all of the other synoptic gospels. He most certainly would have been aware of what Mark, for example, had written about the crucifixion. And so, John doesn't necessarily repeat all of the details that you have in the other Gospel accounts. John, for example, says nothing about Simon of Cyrene, who, evidently at some point along what we sometimes refer to as the Via Dolorosa, took the beam that Jesus now bore to the place of execution.

It's a remarkable thing, isn't it, that somehow or another Christians glory in the cross? How can you glory in the cross? It seems on the face of it a very odd thing, doesn't it? Imagine if we were to carry around with us the emblem of a golden electric chair. Or a syringe. Or a hatchet. The very thought is repulsive. No! It's offensive! Weren't you a little offended by my suggesting that? I'm offended by it. I wondered whether I should say it.

And yet, as Christians, we don't hesitate to love and honor and cherish the cross of Christ. We can't help it. The language John uses about the crucifixion is language that John has been preparing us for. It's the language of exaltation. Do you remember all the way back in John chapter three, the encounter with Nicodemus? Nicodemus appears again here. *"Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up."* It's the language of exaltation. Later on, John records the words of Jesus: "If I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men and women from all parts of the world to myself—if I am lifted up." Yes! Lifted, hoisted onto a cross. But John loves the double-entendre. When you read John, look for those double meanings. Yes, hoisted up onto a cross, but in a very real way exalted, too. The whole discussion...do you remember in the preceding section with Pilate and Caiphas and Annas, what has John been singling out in that mockery of a trial? The very statement of Pilate: Behold the King.

John, having prepared us now, is going to describe the cross. Not in terms of the details of suffering, but actually he's describing what's happening here with the idea that actually Jesus is being exalted here. So that in verses 17 through 22 we have the trials of the cross, in the way in which the cross is seen as the King's enthronement. And then, in verses 23 and 24, the cross is seen as the King's—yes, the King's—disrobing. And in verses 25 through 27, the way the cross is seen as the King's last acts. And then in verses 28 to the end, the way the cross is seen as the King's royal burial.

Follow me through these acts of the King. Yes, behold the King as He goes to crucifixion and burial.

I. The way the cross is seen as the King's enthronement.

The whole section in verses 17 through 22 focuses on the sign, the traditional sign that would be placed on the cross of the one who is executed. John, however, focuses on something that the other gospels don't focus on. The others say that this plaque reads: "This is the King of the Jews." But John alone, John alone, notices something—that actually this plaque, this statement at the head of the cross, "This is Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews", and Pilate was insistent that this is what it should read. That it was in Hebrew, and Latin and Greek. Hebrew, representing the official language of Judea. Latin, representing the official Latin language of the Roman Empire. And Greek, street language.

John has set the scene—Passover. This crucifixion takes place on the main road out of and into Jerusalem. John doesn't mention Simon of Cyrene. Mark does in his gospel, alluding to two of his sons, Rufus and Alexander, which were evidently known to the church, perhaps to the church of Rome itself. Perhaps Simon of Cyrene, we don't know, was a believer, a disciple. Contrary to the

wishes of the Jews and out of spite against them, Pontius Pilate had placarded "This is Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews." And John is seeing fulfilled here, just as he had done in the previous section, just as he had done in the allusion of Caiphaz the high priest, that one man should die in place of the whole. John sees here, despite themselves, that actually, actually, prophecy is being fulfilled here. That this One was the appointed King, raised on behalf of the people.

It was all beginning to happen as the nails were being hammered into His hands, and into His feet, and John wants you to see, as you are moved by that event, that here is the beginning of the exaltation and the enthronement of Jesus. Jesus is the King! This is the King.

II. The King's disrobing.

And then, in verses 23 and 24, he describes how the soldiers, as they share out these clothes...they'd drawn lots, the other gospel writers say...His headgear, His outer cloak, His waistband, sandals—both of them. And then, there's this tunic. This seamless robe, this perfectly woven robe, this tunic. And rather than destroy it, they draw their lots to see who would come into possession of this garment. And John says in verse 24 they were fulfilling Scripture, two Scriptures, in fact. They were fulfilling Scripture. Our great King, nowhere more cleanly displays the significance of His kingship than the way in which, in His final hours, in His final moments, He is disrobed. He is disrobed, as He makes His way to the cross!

Do you remember in John 13, in the upper room, when the disciples were arguing as to who would be the greatest? Jesus removed His outer garment, the garment now that the soldiers had cast lots for, and He took a slave's towel and wrapped it around Himself, and He washed the disciples' feet as a symbol of what He was going to do on the cross. And now, He takes the last step down in His humiliation. The King, in His humiliation...the soldiers don't understand that. The Jews don't see it. But Jesus' last garment is being stripped from Him. And yes, appalling as it is to think of it, He was probably crucified naked. Appalling as that is to think...having nothing to cover His shame, which may well be what Isaiah means when he says that *we avert our gaze from Him*, in Isaiah 53.

Do you remember the last thing that the Bible says before the description of mankind's fall? What's the last thing that is said in the description of the fall? That Adam and Eve were naked, and they were not ashamed. And they were not ashamed. They had nothing to be embarrassed about. Clothing comes after the fall. It's deeply significant. And John is saying, as he brings all of these strands of biblical teaching together, that Jesus on the cross is going back to the beginning. He's going back to where Adam was. He's going to the cross having fulfilled all righteousness, having obeyed the covenant of works that Adam had broken. And

He's going there as naked as Adam was in the Garden of Eden. But unlike Adam, He's covered with sin. He's covered with sin. And bearing Adam's shame, and bearing Adam's guilt, and meeting the judgment of God. The unmitigated judgment of God.

You know, when Paul says in Romans 1, *the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of me,*” you understand that that wrath is mitigated. It's not the full wrath of God, or the world would be consumed. It's a mitigated wrath. It's a wrath that holds back, but on the cross that wrath doesn't hold back. Do you remember how Paul puts it, in the same epistle? *“He that spared not His own Son.”* You know the instinct that lies within you as a father to spare your children, even to spare them punishment, spare them pain, spare them suffering. And He spared not His own Son. He didn't spare, but freely delivered Him up for us all. And so Jesus, on the cross, is disrobed and exposed in all of His nakedness for the purposes of our redemption.

III. The King's final acts

And then, in verses 25 and following, and this deserves more time than I have—it deserves a whole series of sermons, but let me just allude to some of them. Because one of the first things that He does is to begin a new family. He does this extraordinary thing, and points to John, the writer, the gospel writer, the one who's telling this story—Jesus points to him and says, *“Behold your mother.”*

And He points to His own mother, and notice now, it's not “Mother.” Disrespectful as it may appear to you Southerners, it's not that disrespectful, but it's *woman* now. With no disrespect. But He's not speaking to her now as her son: He's speaking to her as the King. As the divine Lord, in His mediatorial office, distancing Himself from that highly personal relationship that He had with His own mother. He says, *“Woman, behold your son.”*

Do you remember back in Mark's gospel in chapter three, He asks the question, *“Who is My mother?”* He answers the question, “Who is My mother,” and He answers that question by saying *“These are My mother, and My brothers and My sisters.”* These are the family of God. And the one who believes in Me belongs to this new family of Mine. And it's a beautiful thing. From the heights of the cross, lifted up from the ground as He now was, He gives just a little clue, just a little cameo, of what His redemptive work has all been about. It's the creation of a new family. It's the creation of the church. It's the creation of the family of God.

But also, He's completing the tasks of His ministry. He utters two words that John alludes to. The first is, *“I am thirsty.”* We'll come back to that in a minute. But the second is, *teleo*, “It is finished.” It is finished. That all is completed. That all is done. That every demand that had been made of the covenant mediator has

been fulfilled. The law has been upheld. Righteousness has been maintained. He's offered Himself as the substitute of His people, and it is finished. Amazing sense that through all of this suffering, through all of this suffering, He has this consciousness that He is about His Father's business and that He has completed it, that the task is done, and that the work is over.

And His bones are not broken. And why is that significant? Why is that significant, that His bones weren't broken? Because John says it fulfills Scripture, for one thing. And the significance lies in the laws that were associated with the Passover. He is the Passover Lamb! And one of the requirements for the Passover lambs was that they were perfect. You couldn't come to Passover and offer a lamb which had only one ear, or three legs. It had to be perfect. It had to be perfect, and here on the cross is the Passover Lamb whose blood delivers the people of God from the angel of death. Jesus is the true Passover Lamb, and on the cross he is standing before the angel of judgment.

And then there's this reference to the spear that thrust His side. And John says—it's so full of meaning for John—that out of His side flows blood and water. Mr. Moore gave me an article just a couple of weeks ago from a medical point of view, and it was one of the most fascinating things I've ever read. But with all due respect, with all due respect, now, that's not John's interest here. However medically you explain that out of this spear in His side—and all of you doctors can tell me afterwards what that means from a medical point of view, that blood and some watery looking fluid emerges—John's interest is not medical.

John's interest, you remember, goes all the way back to John chapter seven. You remember, at the Feast of Tabernacles, and how John had said when the priests had carried those golden pitchers from the Pool of Siloam water to the people, and on that seventh day, when that water was poured, Jesus suddenly shouts out in the midst of the temple, *"If any man thirsts...if any man thirsts, let him come to Me."* And John made an allusion there in John chapter seven, that what Jesus was saying on that occasion was that out of His side, that is, out of the side of Jesus, will flow rivers of living water. It was a reference to the Holy Spirit. It was a reference, I think, to Pentecost. And I think for John, in this strange way, the fact that out of His side flows blood and water, was yet another fulfillment of that promise that Jesus had made, that as a consequence of His dying and rising, the Holy Spirit would descend on the Day of Pentecost.

And for John, that's deeply significant. You see why, then, Jesus says, *"I thirst"*? Do you see why Jesus says, *I thirst*? Because back in John chapter seven, at the promise of the Holy Spirit, what had Jesus said? *"If any man thirst, let him come to Me."* Let him come to Me, and out of My side will flow rivers of living water for you. And Jesus is thirsty so that our thirst may be quenched. Jesus bears the curse of thirst in order that our thirst may be fully quenched in Him, and by His Spirit.

There's more and more, and much more there that I have time for. But even from the cross, do you see the King in His final acts, His ruling and reigning and pointing to the future, the outpouring of the Spirit and the emerging church of the New Testament?

IV. The King's death.

But there's a final thing, a fourth thing. And that is, the King's death. Two men ask Pontius Pilate's permission to bury the body of Jesus. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. And the point that John draws attention to is the amount of spices that they bring. A hundred pounds, in *The New American Standard*. Whatever the exact amount was, it was the amount that was fit for a King. That's the point. This was far more than was required for any ordinary burial. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, these two secret, by-night disciples! Oh! There are sermons on that! There are lots of sermons on that. But bless their hearts—don't we want to say that?—they understood now. They emerge from the shadows now. They come out of Shadowlands now. And in this moment they declare such courage and such determination, because they see it now. Whatever had held them back before, they're not holding back anymore. Because now there's a King here that needs to be buried. They take their stand with the King. They take their stand! Do you see? With a dead corpse! They take their stand with a dead corpse because they realize that He is the King. He is the King! And is worthy of a King's burial. "Drops of grief"—we just sang it—"Drops of grief can ne'er repay the debt of love I owe. Here, Lord, I give myself away. 'Tis all that I can do."

And that's what this passage is calling for, isn't it? That's what John is doing here. He writes this in order that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that believing we might have everlasting life. That you align yourself, and join yourself with Him, the King. The King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He has gone to the cross and died, and is taken into a tomb.

I can't remember—Sunday night, I think—we'll come out of the tomb. We'll talk about the resurrection and the glories of it. But now He lies in a tomb for the likes of you and me. That's how much He loves us. That's how much He loves us. That's how great His heart is for us. Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for Your word, we thank You for this remarkable story of the crucifixion. We know it so well, and we pray, Lord, Holy Spirit, make it new and fresh to us and break our hearts, and quash that ugly sense of pride and sin, and help us to fall at Jesus' feet and crown Him, crown Him Lord of all. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

Please stand and receive the Lord's benediction. Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

©2013 First Presbyterian Church.

This transcribed message has been lightly edited and formatted for the Web site. No attempt has been made, however, to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript conforming to an established style template.

Should there be questions regarding grammar or theological content, the reader should presume any website error to be with the webmaster/transcriber/editor rather than with the original speaker. For full copyright, reproduction and permission information, please visit the First Presbyterian Church Copyright, Reproduction & Permission statement.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine*

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).