**THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS CHRIST**

John 19:16-37

The cross. It is the very symbol of our Christian faith. Just look around at all the Christian churches, including our own. They all display the cross. What Jesus did on the cross is the bridge from the Old Testament to the New Testament. A key theme in the Book of Hebrews is that thru Christ’s death on the cross we now have a new and a better covenant. “We have been sanctified thru the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” (Heb 10:10) In other words, there’s no further need for the O.T. sacrificial system. It’s been replaced. Jesus fulfilled the old covenant. Andrew MacLaren, a Christian theologian, puts it this way: “The cross is the center of the world’s history; the incarnation of Christ and the crucifixion of our Lord are the pivot round which all the events of the ages revolve.” The horrible events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus Christ are familiar to us. Death, pain, suffering, agony, blood flowing, etc – like the old black preacher said, “That was Friday, but Sunday’s coming!” So we Christians know that Jesus’ death isn’t the end of the story. But for a resurrection to take place you must first have a death. So that will be our focus this morning – the death of our Lord Jesus Christ on a Roman cross.

We’re going to look at this most significant event in history thru the eyes of the Apostle John. John’s eyewitness account is here retold some 50 years after Jesus’ death. His account is a lot different from Matthew, Mark and Luke’s because of his unique perspective as an eye-witness and his purpose in writing. Those other 3 gospels were written many years before and were widely known by the time John writes his gospel, so John doesn’t repeat what they’ve already said. Instead John offers his unique perspective as a living eye witness to what happened that day. He gives details that he recalls under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, details that are important to his overall purpose for writing. I’m going to reference the other accounts from time to time, but for the most part our focus is going to be on John’s recollection of events.

Our text this morning in John Ch 19 begins with these words, v 16, “So he (Pilate) delivered him (Jesus) over to them (the Roman executioners) to be crucified.” Remember John’s purpose in writing his Gospel is “so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” So what glory could there possibly be in Jesus’ execution on a Roman cross? John is going to show us the glory of Jesus on display, yes, even in His death.

So then, Jesus has been delivered over to be crucified as we pick up the narrative in v 17…

READ John 19:17-37.

In this passage John shows us in various details surrounding Jesus’ death how they fulfill OT scripture. He does so explicitly in v 24, 28 and 36. And we’ll look at these. But we see this also in a few other seemingly minor details which John includes. Let’s begin in v 17-18…

“So they took Jesus and He went out, bearing His own cross…” Jesus crucifixion was not unique. It was a common occurrence in that day. But unlike most of the other condemned criminals, we don’t see Jesus kicking and screaming and carrying on. We’re told simply, “He went out.” Mark and Luke say that “they led Him away.” Isaiah 53:7, a Messianic prophecy says, “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.” That’s what we see here with our Lord. We see the Lamb of God who is about to take away the sins of the world being led to the place where He will die. He follows the Roman executioners quietly and willingly. Like the Good Shepherd of John Ch 10 Jesus is about to lay down His life for His sheep. John says Jesus is “bearing His own cross.” Parallel between Jesus bearing His own cross to the place of His death and Isaac carrying the wood of the burnt offering to the place where he was to be sacrificed (Gen 22). Side note: Mount Moriah is very close in proximity to the place where Jesus is being led. In Isaac’s case God provided a ram as a substitute on that day. But today with Jesus there will be no substitute.

They walk down the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem and out the city gate to the site of the execution. John describes it as “the Place of a Skull.” The Aramaic word Golgotha simply means “skull.” This could have been any number of places. There is some speculation about where it happened. If you visit Jerusalem today there are a couple of places that they believe Jesus was crucified (Church of the Holy Sepulcher and Gordon’s Calvary). The truth is that we don’t know for certain where it was. Around Jerusalem at that time were many quarry locations where they were actively cutting out stones for Herod’s many building projects including the Temple. Any one of them could have been at a place resembling a human skull. But wherever it was we know that it was outside the city – v 20 says it was “near the city” – which is significant. In the OT sacrifices for sin were offered outside the camp. And here the Lamb of God is about to be offered once for all as the only sacrifice for sin outside the city.

John tells us that Jesus is crucified between “two others,” one on either side, Jesus in the middle. From the other gospel accounts we know that these were 2 robbers, criminals; bad guys very similar to Barabbas or perhaps even close associates of Barabbas. Isaiah 53:12 says, “He poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.” So again this is a fulfillment of prophecy as Jesus is crucified between two thieves. Luke’s account tells us that Jesus intercedes for them saying, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

V 19-22 talk about the inscription that Pontius Pilatehe had put on the cross. Whenever the Romans led a person away to be crucified they had someone out in front of the condemned criminal carrying a sign. This sign identified their offense. This was supposed to be a deterrent for anyone who would dare defy Roman law. They would then place that sign above the condemned criminal’s head when they crucified him. And so Pilate makes this sign for Jesus which will to be placed above Him on the cross. But Pilate who knows Jesus is an innocent man mentions no crime. The sign simply reads, in 3 languages, in triplicate, so that everyone can understand, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” This is an act of vengeance by Pilate against the Jewish leaders. Earlier in Ch 19 the Jews had insisted that Jesus must die because He claimed to be a king, thus He was a threat to Caesar. So Pilate fearing for his own life gave in to their pressure and he allowed Jesus to be crucified. So his inscription is a jab at the Jewish leaders. “You say Jesus is a king, well OK, here is your king!” In his folly, in his ignorance, completely clueless, Pilate declares the absolute truth, which is, Jesus is Israel’s King. He is their Messiah.

There’s so much irony here. After all, the Jews had outright rejected Jesus as their king. So even here in their so-called moment of victory, having been successful in getting Jesus crucified, the Jews are forced to read these words written by Pilate – words that infuriate them. They try to get Pilate to change the sign, but he refuses – “What I have written I have written.”

It’s interesting that the chief priests of the Jews claim that Jesus said, “I am the King of the Jews.” That was their argument with Pilate. But Jesus never actually said that. He did talk about His kingdom. But it was others who said Jesus was a king. The angel that visited Mary said that her son would be a king and reign over the house of David forever. The wise men had recognized Jesus as a king and worshipped Him. Nathanael back in John Ch 1 said to Jesus, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” The crowd of people that Jesus fed, the 5000 men, back in John Ch 6 tried to force Jesus to be their king but He withdrew from them. In John Ch 12 the throng of people welcoming Jesus at His triumphal entry into Jerusalem had shouted, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” Pilate had concluded that Jesus was a king although he didn’t fully understand what kind of king He was. In John Ch 18, he said, “So you are a king?” But Jesus Himself never actually made the claim to be a king. Instead He He answers Pilate, “you say that I am a king.” So the Bible never records that Jesus ever saying, “I am King of the Jews.” Yet we know that He is. And we know that He is coming back some day as the King of kings and Lord of lords. So in a providential twist, this wicked, pagan, godless, ignorant man named Pilate actually declares the truth about Jesus – He IS the King of the Jews.

In v 23-24 John tells us that there are 4 Roman soldiers who have been assigned to the crucifixion detail. These 4 soldiers are casting lots for Jesus’ garments, which fulfills scripture – Ps 22:18, and which John quotes in v 24. John also mentions Jesus’ seamless tunic. He doesn’t spell out the significance of this but let me point something very interesting out to you. In the instructions given to Moses in Exo Ch 28 God directs that the robe of the high priest be uniquely woven, “a seamless garment so that it may not tear.” So even Jesus’ tunic, seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, points to the fact that He is a high priest. He is our great High Priest described in Hebrews 4:14: “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.”

All around the cross there is this frenzy of commotion. People shouting, hurling obscenities, cursing at Jesus – the worst behavior of mankind on display. The religious leaders are there. The Roman soldiers are there. Many people who have come to Jerusalem for the Passover are standing around on the periphery witnessing this terrible scene. It’s at this point that John focuses our attention on five individuals who are standing by the cross of Jesus, v 25-27. Only two of them are named here, though we know from the other gospel accounts who they are: (1) Jesus’ mother, Mary; (2) Jesus’ mother’s sister, Jesus’ aunt, Salome from Mark 15:40, she is the mother of 2 of Jesus’ disciples, James and John; (3) Mary the wife of Clopas; (4) Mary Magdalene a devoted disciple from Galilee (from the village of Magdala) out of whom Jesus had cast 7 demons; the Apostle John (the disciple whom Jesus loved). John is the only one of Jesus’ 12 disciples who is present at the cross. Judas is dead at this point and the others are in hiding, even the brave sword-wielding Peter. For these 5 to be standing there is both a courageous act as well as an act of love and devotion for Jesus.

With all the noise and activity going on John mentions a dialogue that takes place between Jesus and His mother. Jesus addresses His mother as “Woman.” Three years earlier at the wedding of Cana, John Ch 2, Jesus had referred to His mother as “woman.” When Jesus’ began His ministry His normal familial relationships ended. In Mark 3:31 when Jesus was told that his mother and his brothers were standing outside looking for Him He replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” Then pointing to the people sitting around Him Jesus said, “Here are my mother and my brothers.” But yet here at the cross in the midst of His agony and suffering as He is dying Jesus demonstrates sympathy and mercy toward His mother. She needs cared for. Joseph His earthly father is probably dead. At this point none of Jesus’ brothers are believers in Him. They all pretty much think Jesus is crazy. So Jesus assigns the beloved disciple John with the task of looking out for His mother’s needs. V 27 says that “from that hour the disciple (John) took her (Mary) to his own home. Even while Jesus is dying we see the very heart of God on display. Only John records this tender moment.

In v 28 Jesus says, “I thirst.” And John is quick to point out why Jesus says this – to fulfill the Scriptures. By doing this Jesus fulfills Ps 69:21 “for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.” And that’s what John quotes in v 29. John says they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to Jesus’ mouth. Where have we seen hyssop mentioned before in the Bible? In Exo Ch 12 hyssop is a part of the Passover. It is what the people were instructed by God to apply the blood of the lamb on their doorposts with. Again here we see with thru the imagery of hyssop the connection of Jesus as the true Passover lamb.

And after this scripture is fulfilled Jesus says, “It is finished.” Mark’s account says that Jesus uttered these last words with a loud cry. Then Jesus willed Himself to die. He gave up His spirit. Luke records that Jesus said, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit!” This harkens back to what Jesus said in John 10:17-18: “I lay down my life that I may take it up again (pointing forward to the resurrection). No one takes it from Me but I lay it down of my own accord…”

“It is finished.” Jesus’ mission, His entire work of redemption has been completed. The perfect sacrifice, the Lamb without spot or blemish, the Son of God has Himself borne the sins of the world. Jesus experienced the full wrath of God upon these sins. As terrible as the physical pain must have been for Jesus to endure, I believe that even worse had to be the emotional trauma of being forsaken, being completely separated, cut off, from His Father. The other gospel accounts tell us that Jesus shouted, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” Yes, this was a direct quotation from Psalm 22, but it perfectly reflects how Jesus felt at that moment in time. Think about it. For the first time in all of eternity the Father and the Son are separated. We can’t even imagine what that was like for Jesus. The loneliness, the utter abandonment that He felt.

Soon after Jesus dies John witnesses two events, v 31-37. These two events fulfill scripture – one by what happens to Jesus and one by what doesn’t happen. The Roman soldiers pierce Jesus’ side with a spear. This was no gentle prodding! If there was any question about whether Jesus was dead or not it was put to rest when a Roman spear is thrust deep into Him. This fulfills Zech 12:10, “They will look on Him whom they have pierced.” The Roman soldiers, however, don’t break Jesus’ legs because they can see that He’s already dead. The whole purpose for breaking the criminals’ legs was to expedite their deaths, but Jesus is already dead. This fulfills one of the requirements for the Passover lamb in Exo 12:46, “not one of His bones will be broken.”

So many of the details surrounding Jesus’ death that John includes drive home even further what John already knows and what he wants his readers to believe, that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. John sees the glory of Jesus on display, even here at the cross.

The Apostle John isn’t the only one who recognizes this. The thief on the cross sees and hears Jesus. He perceives the truth, fears God, confesses his own sinfulness, recognizes who Jesus is and asks Jesus to forgive Him. The Roman centurion witnesses Jesus dying and proclaims “Truly this was the Son of God!” There’s a large contingent of Jewish spectators who after witnessing Jesus’ crucifixion return home, Luke 23:48 says, “beating their breast,” a sign of remorse and anguish. These same Jews no doubt were among those who a couple of months later will hear Peter’s sermon preached to them in Jerusalem, Acts Ch 2, and they will be convicted, cut to the heart, and say to Peter, “what shall we do?” And Peter will reply to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins…” And 3000 of them will be saved.

The glory of Jesus is on full display at the cross and there are many witnesses. In Jesus’ tragic death John shows us the glory of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. This is John’s focus and so his account is a little less graphic than the other gospel accounts and it includes a few different details.

One of the most asked question by people, kids and adults, who are being told the story of Jesus for the very first time is, “Why did God do that to His Son? Why did Jesus have to die?” And that’s the application for this lesson and that will be for next time. I am going to spend an entire lesson on what the death of Jesus means to us. So come back for Part 2 in 2 weeks.

Sing one of my favorite hymns about the cross – “Jesus Paid It All”