

Gospel of John #26
“The Cross”
John 19

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We are headed to the runway as we finish up the Gospel of John and the crucifixion. In the modern world, however, we are divorced from the violence and the gruesomeness and suffocation and messiness of these last chapters. We might think the point of the cross is its gruesomeness...however, we miss that 3 million other people died this way. We now carry around crosses: why would we want to wear one of these? ***It's the significance of the person who died on this cross brings us hope.*** I would like to walk through a meditation on the cross based on John 19.

First, we have to ask “**Why did Jesus have to die?**” If we had time, we could systematically go back to Genesis and work through the whole Bible to answer this question. But we also should be able to find individual's answers to this question within each of the Gospels. Here are some answers found within John:

- **Our sin** **1:19** Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders^[a] in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was.
- **Love** **3:16** For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.
- **Redemption Plan** **12:23-27** Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. **24** Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. **25** Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. **26** Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. **27** “Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.
- **Victory** (over Satan) **12: 31-37** Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. **32** And I, when I am lifted up^[a] from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” **33** He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. **34** The crowd spoke up, “We have heard from the Law that the Messiah will remain forever, so how can you say, ‘The Son of Man must be lifted up’? Who is this ‘Son of Man’?” **35** Then Jesus told them, “You are going

to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where they are going. **36** Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light.” When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.**37** Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him.

- **Truth** (understanding what is real) **18:37** “You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”
- **Glorification** (For his lifting up) **John 17:1** After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.

John’s thesis has two main parts:

Part I: SIN

John 1:29: The next day John (the baptist) saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

“**LOOK**” really means “**BEHOLD**”...a much better translation. When John says the Lamb of God, it’s like a hyperlink back to the OT because His listeners would have recalled and understood references to the lamb from Exodus and Isaiah 40. Another reference:

Isa 53:7b 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.

The imagery of the Lamb of God taking away the sin is of someone bending down and taking something away.

Sin means to miss the mark: literally, I could throw a rock and miss my target. Philosophically, it means your line of thinking lands you in the wrong place, not necessarily moral. Hebrew listeners would have heard sin as doing something against the law. Sin, then, is something broken at the essence of who I am that is unfixable.

The NT writers would have understood “Look, the Lamb of God...” referencing the corruption they could do nothing about. This lamb takes away all that is broken with the zombie-like self who is unable to choose righteously. Jesus’s death is to take away the brokenness and give us the freedom to choose.

Part 2: LOVE

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

The lamb is motivated by love and his quest to have an eternal relationship with us.

With this understanding of why Jesus had to die, let’s continue to **John 19**. Let’s meditate on the process of the crucifixion and what it’s inviting us into.

Note: We aren’t going to cover the testimony of the Roman soldier at the end who says this was really Jesus. We also will not cover the fulfilled prophecies mentioned in this chapter.

Identity:

This is a familiar question which will be answered by Pilate:

John 8:25 “Who are you?” they asked. “Just what I have been telling you from the beginning,” Jesus replied

Jesus, Pilate, and the Chief Priests (Jewish officials) are the only players here.

John 19:1 Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. **2** The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe **3** and went up to him again and again, saying, “Hail, king of the Jews!” And they slapped him in the face.

Jesus, the lamb of God, has an identity: he is the King of the Jews. This comes out in a mocking way. The subtext is that we as listeners also need to wrestle with the possibility that Jesus is king.

“Here is your king,” Pilate said to the Jews. **15** 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.

The cross invites us to question whether Jesus is OUR king.

I am often in the place of Pilate and the chief priests: Jesus is intrusive in my life all the time. Sometimes, I like to push this off on other people: I don’t want the implications and I just want it all to be better. This happens in obvious and subtle ways. Also, I find myself in the chief priests’ place: I don’t have Jesus as my king. I have to reckon with this question: what am I actually living for?

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.”

I love this: it’s a Holy-Spirit inspired moment: Jesus is who he is and Pilate says “I’m not backing down.” This is written to us, too. The lamb of god who died for us who is the king of Jesus.

Power is interesting in how it plays out: Let’s go back to John 10:17:

8 When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, **9** and he went back inside the palace. “Where do you come from?” he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. **10** “Do you refuse to speak to me?” Pilate said. “Don’t you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?”

No one can take the life of Jesus! When he says “ I am,” everyone falls back. We need to be people of the cross who medicate on the cross:

11 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.”

Jesus is really kind to Pilate in his response: Pilate only has power because Jesus gave it to him. Think about how the Jewish officials use power through manipulation. John sees these people as thugs (not the Pharisees but the chief priests). Pilate is continually in conflict with them in Jerusalem: Pilate had to rob the temple treasury because the leaders wouldn't take care of the people. They are used to manipulating people to get what they want. The world also uses power like Pilate has. But Jesus says both of these powers are limited. We also misuse power: We are to serve, not lord it over people.

So how DO we use power? Maybe we aren't thugs or beating people up but we all use power to rule and manipulate: our tone of voice, withdrawal from conflict; we use it subtly to get what we want. We are just like the people in this story: the process here is to rattle us a bit.

28 Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that 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.

Jesus gave up his spirit: he had the power to let go. No one "killed" him: the cross is the ultimate sharing of this power. That is why we hold onto crosses and have them in our churches.

Vulnerability The quality or state of being exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally. This is for the sake of someone else.

Jesus puts himself forward in vulnerability for our sakes:

4 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." **5** When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!"

This was a moment of great exposure: his identity was being mocked.

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** There they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle.

At that time in Roman history, people saw crucifixion all the time: Pilate put “King of the Jews” so everyone could look at Jesus. This was incredibly vulnerable: imagine everyone looking at you while you are in pain, trying to catch your breath, dying. It’s our sin that puts him in this position.

6 As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, “Crucify! Crucify!”

This is just the beginning of his vulnerability.

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.

To be in a place where people are casting lots for your underwear, this is very vulnerable and exposing.

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 nearby, he said to her, “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.

When you are in this degree of pain, you don’t notice other people. This is my favorite moment of the cross: here is Jesus dying and in pain and yet still caring for his mother from the cross. John writes it like it’s a play and uses the word, “woman” but Jesus is speaking to his mother. Our sin put Jesus in this place .

John 3:16: For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Jesus walks through this process so we don't perish and we can have eternal life: we can step into the light and make choices to follow God. The trinity holds us because of what Jesus has done.

The word believe is like BEHOLD: We are people of the cross. To be a disciple, we must keep our eyes on the cross. Belief is to understand Jesus in his vulnerability but we also must BEHOLD the cross. We are forgiven for our sins and this place invites us to wrestle with the cross.

Questions to ponder:

What would CHANGE in my life if Jesus were my king? You need to ask “what should I do?” There is so much in our lives, from money to prestige, where we look at other people, what we do, and what we accomplish, places where we don’t look at the cross.

What would change if you shared in his power? The cross is an invitation to have the power of the Gospel. We can speak the story of the resurrection and have power. The cross, though, confronts the way we use power: the systems we encounter in our families and workplaces that abuse power. We have to call to account for these misuses but we cannot do this *until we confront our own misuses*.

What changes would happen if you offer yourself for others? Jesus invites us in the Gospel to take up our cross and follow him. He knows he will die: this is an invitation to vulnerability. He walks through pain for us to be in a relationship. What changes will happen when we walk like Jesus walked? This is vulnerable: sometimes it’s just sitting with people who are weeping when you are happy. And vice versa. It means I offer myself for your sake even if I’m uncomfortable.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to you today?