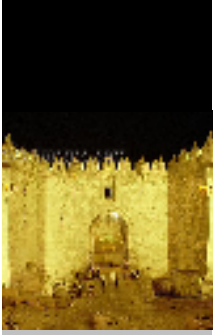


No One Takes My Life From Me

PART 20 - CRUCIFIXION

TEXT: JOHN 19:16-27 (ESV)



Rev. Russ Ramsey
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Oak Hills
Presbyterian Church,
Overland Park,
Kansas

What John Saw

The trials before the Sanhedrin and Pilate are over and the verdict has been handed down—Jesus would be crucified. The walk from Pilate's palace is over and Jesus is nailed to the cross where He'll remain for six hours until He is dead. Never before or since has more been lost and gained at the same time as at Jesus' crucifixion. The world gained the atoning sacrifice of Christ. But for those present, either the significance of the moment was lost on them or their hearts broke because the One they believed to be the Savior of the world was dying at the hands of Rome, and they couldn't stop it and they didn't

realize it was for them. They hoped in Him, and though He'd told them He'd suffer many things and rise three days later, ^(Mk 8:31) how could they've possibly known this was what He meant?

There is something about loss that awakens the soul to truth. Once as a boy, I came in from playing outside to find dad on the phone. He hung up and began to sob. A family friend, Billy, had died. I remember Billy always had a big wad of tobacco in his cheek, and that he was the youngest of the brothers who farmed our land. But the memory stuck in my head from that day is the image of my dad weeping. I can see it. I remember how his body shook as waves of confusion and grief swept over him in his chair next to his big basket of magazines, trying to catch his breath. This was my introduction to the pain of loss.

This tragic memory shaped me—revealing a side of my father I needed to see. He showed me my first picture of real grief over loss. It was like he was about to break apart when all I'd ever known from him was strength. I was eye-witness to something formative as my dad's tears drew me into a world I hadn't yet known—one where men sometimes despair of life leaving their friends to grieve the decisions they make in their darkest hours.

Each of us have witnessed moments we'll never forget. So it is for the Apostle John—likely the only Gospel writer to witness to Jesus' crucifixion. As such, John offers details the other writers don't. He's the one who tells us Jesus set out to Calvary carrying His own cross—only later did Simon of Cyrene help. It was John who noted Jesus was crucified *between* two thieves, or that a soldier pierced Jesus' side, and from the wound blood and water flowed. John tells us that from the cross, Jesus said, "It is finished." Today we study John's account of the crucifixion.

Jesus' crucifixion itself, as we'll see next week, was horrible. But John paints a contrast of brutality and beauty; of cruelty and tenderness. The late Henri Nouwen wrote, "In the context of a compassionate embrace, our brokenness may appear beautiful. But our brokenness has no other beauty but the beauty that comes from the compassion that surrounds it." Just as there is nothing beautiful about brokenness itself, there is no beauty in Roman crucifixion either. It was an appalling by-product of the corruption in this world. But John saw, and in fact *experienced*, beauty in Christ's crucifixion because amid the brokenness, Christ spoke comfort over His broken-hearted friends who were watching Him die.

John remembers people, and what they did and said as though this day was etched into his memory. He remembers the religious leaders arguing with Pilate over the wording of a sign. He remembers soldiers shooting dice for Jesus' tunic. And he remembers what Jesus said to him, and how in the hour of His death, Jesus embraced John's brokenness and made what seemed empty and hopeless beautiful. He makes all things new.

John 19:16-27

¹⁶So he delivered him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus, ¹⁷and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called *The Place of a Skull*, which in Aramaic is called *Golgotha*. ¹⁸There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them.

¹⁹Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." ²⁰Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. ²¹So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" ²²Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

²³When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, ²⁴so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture which says,

*"They divided my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots."*

So the soldiers did these things, ²⁵but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" ²⁷Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

Losing a War of Words (19-22)

Although this moment was profoundly meaningful to John, it was utterly lost on many others witnessing the same thing. Earlier in Jesus' trial, the Chief Priests had manipulated Pilate to hand Jesus over to be crucified. To Pilate, this was a religious matter, and an issue of envy. ^(Mk 15:10) But when the Chief Priests began to question Pilate's loyalty to Caesar if he released this man they said claimed to be King of the Jews, Pilate gave in. However, when it came time to inscribe the sign which would pronounce Jesus' crime, Pilate told his men to write, "JESUS OF NAZARETH, KING OF THE JEWS." I imagine that this was a detail John could close his eyes and see in perfect definition. He alone says it was written in Latin, Greek and Aramaic (a Hebrew dialect)—the dominant languages of the world. This sign declared to all Jesus was King of the Jews. Ironically, though it wasn't known by His accusers, in the providence of God this sign was correct.

But as it read, the words implied no disgrace and the Chief Priests wanted that changed. They argued it should read “**He claimed to be King of the Jews,**” not that He **was** the King of the Jews. They wanted the sign to clearly reflect that they were in no way associated with Jesus. They never regarded Him as their King. But Pilate was so irritated with the Chief Priests by now that this was an opportunity to spite them and embarrass them even as they crucified Jesus—and he meant to take it. So as they protested over the wording, Pilate said with a satisfied shrug, “*What I have written, I have written—it says what it says.*”

It’s not hard to imagine religious leaders focused on precision and wording. But they’re guilty of a complete collapse in their call to love. All they see is the sign and what it reads. They don’t see Jesus because their focus is on the words chosen to describe Him. They’re so sure they know all there is to know that they never entertain the plausibility of Jesus’ true identity.

They want to win the battle over words. They want to be right. We should have a passion to “*get it right*” when speaking about Jesus. But when our quest for theological precision leaves us more eager to win an argument than to love our brother or sister well, we must ask if the reason we’re failing to love is because we’d rather be right. How do we maintain theological precision and still love our neighbor? We focus on the man on the cross remembering He was there precisely because we are just sinful enough to use even our theology—when wielded as an extension of our pride—to hurt others, not realizing when we do, we are blind to what God truly wants from our lives.

John is telling us what he saw and heard. Here’s his focus is on men who are obviously unwilling to consider that their opinion about the world, God and how we know Him are perilously unfounded. They will not look at Christ because He does not fit into the world they know. Meanwhile He is in the process of permanently changing that world. How sure are you that your view of God is accurate? On what basis have you formed your view of eternity? What you’d like to believe and what is true might be separated by the chasm of eternity. This is not a game.

Losing a New Tunic (vs. 23-24)

John next turned to soldiers who prized Jesus’ robe higher than Jesus Himself. How sad it must’ve been to see soldiers dividing Jesus’ clothes as He hung before them. John tells us Jesus’ tunic was made of a solid piece of fabric and would have to be torn to be divided. Rather than ruining it, the soldiers cast lots to see who’d “win” it. How many times had John handed that tunic to Jesus over the years? Could he pick Jesus’ tunic out of the pile of the other dozen their band of men possessed? Consider the loss. There is something final about giving away a man’s clothes.

Was this an unforgivable sin? When we fear we’ve done the unforgivable, it is often because we think we’ve done something even God didn’t expect from us—as though God says, “*I never thought you’d do that.*” But John says in vs. 24 that this petty act of dividing Jesus’ garments was known to God before it ever crossed the minds of the soldiers. Way before it occurred to these soldiers to gamble for Jesus’ clothes, God said this would happen. (Ps 22:18) But later, one soldier—maybe even the winner of Jesus’ tunic—would awaken from his folly and confess, “*Surely this was the son of God.*” (Mk 15:39) I believe upon this confession he was forgiven of his sin and made right with God.

So far, John has given us Jesus from Israel’s point of view—and all they saw was the sign. And we’ve seen Jesus from Rome’s point of view—the Man was as good as dead, but His clothes might be nice. Next, John shifts to his own point of view.

Losing a Friend & Son (vs. 25-27)

The Chief priests focused on the sign, Pilate on the Priests’ displeasure, and the soldiers on a tunic needing an owner. Their interests were relegated to what was going on around Jesus. But there are others there—those who weren’t looking to gain a new tunic or lose a war of words, but a friend, mentor, even a son. John himself was among them. So was Mary, Jesus’ mother. These two, perhaps, knew greater loss than anyone else there.

Mary’s grief transcended this moment. Her life as Jesus’ mother was filled with grief. When He was born, there was no room in the inn so she had to put her newborn baby boy to bed in an animal’s feeding trough. After that, because of Herod’s paranoid attempt to kill Jesus by killing all male children under two, they had to flee and live in Egypt for a couple years. And she had to live with the weight of the knowledge of countless other mothers grieving the loss of their own sons because of hers.

When she later presented Jesus in the temple, according to the Law, the old cleric Simeon blessed the boy and then told Mary; “*This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.*” (Lk 2:34-35) Her son would be scoffed at and plotted against. No mother could see this without it piercing her soul. Now at the foot of the cross, Mary was watching her boy die.

As for John, Jesus had melted his heart. Jesus nicknamed John and his brother James the “Sons of Thunder,” due to their “bull in a china shop” approach to problems. But later John came to be known as the disciple of love. Still, on this day he was among those who fled from Jesus at His arrest. (Mk 14:50) But by John’s own pen, we read of his reinstatement by Jesus. It comes in the first words Jesus says to him since John fled Gethsemane. John watched the agony of his teacher, unable to help. Mary too. And John, the eye-witness, tells us Jesus lifted His head, looked into their eyes, and said, “*Dear woman, here is your son.*” Then to John, “*Here is your mother.*” As they felt they were losing Jesus, He was giving them to each other—entrusting John with the honor of caring for His mother—which he did from then on.

Graciously Given All Things

In the Book of Revelation, also written by John, long after the beatings, the cross, His burial and resurrection, we read of Jesus enthroned in Glory as the King of All saying, “*Behold I make everything new.*” (Rev 21:5) On the cross, He renewed Mary’s relationship to John by giving her to him that he might care for her. Jesus honored His mother and His friend in this way.

John’s life and Mary’s life both changed and joined to each other in Him until they, like the thief next to Jesus, joined Him in Glory. He is with us to the end of the age, (Mt 28:20) but here and now He gives us to each other as well. Some of you are in the most faith-testing, painful place you’ve ever known. You do not stand alone, nor are you called to walk alone. Christ joins our lives together in Him. Oh, that we’d fix our eyes on Jesus.

May we see past bad reports or missed opportunities to what God has given on the Cross: Christ’s life for ours. Jesus will come again. Until then, He joins His people together in His Spirit. Don’t ignore Jesus Christ. He knows what you need better than you do. And only He can give it. “*He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*” (Rom 8:32) Part of what Christ has given you is help from those around you. More than that, He has given you Himself. May you look to Him and see Him.