

## JESUS WAS CRUCIFIED

John 19:16b-42

Key Verse: 19:30

*When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*

Today's passage is John's eyewitness account of Jesus' crucifixion. The author John factually describes Jesus' crucifixion, death and burial to show that the Scripture concerning the Messiah was fulfilled. Jesus was crucified between two common criminals. But his death was no ordinary death. His death marked the beginning of a new era for humanity. His death fulfilled the redemptive purpose of God. His death has a real meaning to all of us, even after 2000 years later. Let us think about what it means to each of us that our Lord Jesus died on the cross!

### I. THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS (16b-27)

Jesus was sentenced to death by the Roman governor. Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent, but he didn't care. He gave in to the political pressure from the Jewish leaders in order to save his career. When the Jews cried out, "We have no king but Caesar," Pilate washed his hands before their eyes and handed Jesus over to them to be crucified. However, Jesus was ready for this moment. He had already decided to drink the cup of suffering, through his prayer struggle at Gethsemane. So he remained silent at the trial. The prophet Isaiah foresaw the Messiah's suffering in silence several hundred years before it happened. Isaiah 53:7 says, "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 her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth." Let us think about how Jesus was crucified and what the meaning of his cross is.

**First, "they crucified him."** Look at verses 16-18. *Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). Here they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle.* The soldiers took charge of Jesus. Now Jesus was in the hands of the cruel Roman soldiers to be treated as they pleased. Jesus had already been physically weakened by the all night trial and the flogging, but he had to carry a 40 pound beam of his own cross to the place of execution which was located outside the city wall. It was called the Place of the Skull, or Golgotha in Hebrew. There they crucified Jesus along with two criminals.

Look at verse 18 again. *Here they crucified him, ....* John does not describe the details of his crucifixion, but we know more about how our Lord was crucified. Crucifixion was a most cruel way of executing a person. Crucifixion involved hanging the victim by nailing his hands to a crossbeam, which was attached to a vertical stake. The feet were also nailed to the vertical stake. As the victim hung dangling by the arms, the blood could no longer circulate to his vital organs. The victim died of dehydration, although usually not for several days. To hasten death, the executioners sometimes

broke the victim's legs with a club. Then he could no longer support his body to keep blood circulating, and death followed. Usually bodies were left to rot or to be eaten by scavengers. Crucifixion was so cruel and inhumane that no Roman citizens were put to death by this method. And the Jews considered it a curse of God (Dt 21:23).

A medical doctor can better explain the pain and suffering of crucifixion. On the cross, as the victim slowly sags down with more weight on the nails in the wrists, excruciating pain shoots up the arms to explode in his brain. The nails in the wrists are putting pressure on the median nerves. As he pushes himself upward to avoid this stretching torment, he places the full weight on the nail through his feet. Again he feels the searing agony of the nail tearing through the nerves between the bones of his feet. As the arms fatigue, cramps sweep through his muscles, knotting them deep relentless, throbbing pain. With these cramps, he is unable to push himself upward to breathe. Air can be drawn into the lungs but not exhaled. He fights to raise himself in order to get even one small breath. Finally, carbon dioxide builds up in the lungs and in the blood stream, and the cramps partially subside. Sporadically, he is able to push himself upward to exhale and bring in a little oxygen. Hours of searing pain, cycles of twisting, and joint wrenching cramps continue as his back is also lacerated as he moves up and down against rough timber.

Then another agony begins—a crushing pain deep in the chest as the pericardium slowly fills with serum and begins to compress the heart. Now the loss of tissue fluids has reached a critical level. The compressed heart is struggling to pump thick, sluggish blood into the tissues. The tortured lungs are making frantic effort to gasp in small gulps of air. He can feel the chill of death creeping through his tissues. Finally, death arrives but not a moment too soon.

All these pain and suffering, the Bible records with the simple words, “and they crucified him.”

What had Jesus done to be crucified in this horrible way? He had no reason to suffer and die this way. In fact, he was the only one in the whole world who was without sin. So why did he suffer such pain and torture silently? Again the Prophet Isaiah says that he was crucified in our place, in order to take up our infirmities and carry our sorrows. On the cross, he was pierced for our transgressions. On the cross, he was crushed for our iniquities. By his punishment we have peace with God. By his wounds we are healed (Isa 53:4-5; 1Pe 2:24).

**Second, the King of the Jews.** Look at verses 19-20. *Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. 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.* The chief priests did not like the title in this sign, but Pilate refused to change it. Many of the Jews read this sign, which was written in Hebrew, Latin and Greek. Written in all major languages of the time, the sign declared Jesus' kingship to the world.

This is a fitting title for our Lord Jesus. While he was on earth Jesus was a suffering servant. No one recognized him as the King because he was so humble. He was born in a stable and was laid in a manger. Jesus was a good shepherd for his sheep. He took care of all kinds of people and served them to the end. He healed the sick. He opened the eyes of the blind. He was a true friend to Zacchaeus the tax collector and the lonely Samaritan woman.

But Jesus is the King of kings and the Lord of lords because he is the Son of God (Isa 9:6). The angel Gabriel told Mary about the birth of Jesus, “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end” (Lk 1:32-33). Of course, Jesus was not a political king (Jn 18:36). He is the King who rules our hearts with peace and justice. He is the King who is now sitting on the throne of God. Jesus is the King who will come as the Judge of the living and the dead. Everyone shall appear before him and bow down on their knees to be judged by him. Let us ask ourselves, “Is Jesus the king of my life?”

**Third, he was crucified to bear our shame.** Look at verse 18 again. *“Here they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle.”* The two others were robbers. They crucified our Lord between two common criminals, to maximize his shame. Indeed, crucifixion was a symbol of shame. The victim’s naked body was displayed publicly before the eyes of his family, relatives, and friends. God created us in his image so that we may have a sense of honor and dignity. So it is our nature to seek recognition and honor. No one wants to be exposed to shame. Even criminals cover their faces in front of TV cameras because they don’t want to reveal their shameful faces. But Jesus, the Son of God, was exposed publicly on the cross as a most shameful man. The sinless Christ was crucified along with two robbers. Even passers-by shook their heads and hurled insults at him (Mk 15:29). Jesus bore all our shame on the cross. He bore all the shame of our sins.

I praise the Lord who took away my shame and guilt. I committed many sins before men and before God. Before meeting Jesus, I did not know what to do with my lustful desires. And I thought that there was nothing wrong with my selfish life. But Jesus forgave me for all my sins. He called me to campus mission to share his gospel with young students.

Look at what the soldiers did to our Lord as they crucified him (23-24). They divided his clothes into four shares and each took his share. Then they decided not to cut up his undergarment which was seamless and was more valuable as one piece. Then they said to each other, “Let’s not tear it up. Let’s throw dice to see who gets it.” They were indifferent to our Lord Jesus who was suffering unbearable pain on the cross. They were merciless and heartless. They were only interested in small material gain. They were so petty and disgusting. But this kind of behavior and way of thinking is not uncommon in our pragmatic society today. We must repent our pragmatic ways of thinking and become men and women of faith and compassion. But even their heartless action fulfilled the Scripture concerning the Messiah, which said, “They divided my garments

among them and cast lots for my clothing” (Ps 22:18). This means that God was not a mere spectator of these events; he was actively involved.

**Fourth, Jesus bore all our sorrows on the cross.** Look at verses 25-27. *Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Dear woman, here is your son,” and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.* What a poignant scene! We can imagine how sorrowful the mother of Jesus must have been watching her son’s crucifixion. When Mary looked at her son on that cross, her pain must have been like a sword piercing her soul. This is just what Simeon had prophesied to her when Jesus was still a baby (Lk 2:35).

Look at verse 26 again. *When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Dear woman, here is your son...”* Jesus was on the cross in great anguish and suffering, his blood dripping to the ground. But he did not think of himself; he thought of his mother. Jesus knew that his crucifixion tore his mother’s heart. On the cross he cared for his mother who was crying beneath the cross. He asked John to take care of her.

In his great sorrow Jesus said, “Here is your son.” In order to obey God’s will, Jesus had to take up his cross. It was a painful moment to his mother. Jesus understood her sorrow. It was painful for him to watch her suffer. Perhaps this pain in his heart was greater than the physical pain of his crucifixion. But this is not just a story about Jesus and his mother; it applies to each of us. Everyone has a sorrow problem because we live in a cursed world. Jesus bore sorrow on the cross, not for himself, but for all our sorrows. The Prophet Isaiah says that Jesus became a man of sorrows for us (Isa 53:3).

## II. “IT IS FINISHED” (28-37)

Let’s read verse 28. *Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.”* Jesus said he was thirsty. This reveals that Jesus was fully human. The pain was real to him as it would be real to us. But in order to obey the will of God to be the Lamb of God, he fought the battle until he was completely dehydrated. In this way Jesus completed the redemptive work of God.

Look at verses 29-30. *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. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.”* With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. The last words of Jesus on the cross were unique. He said, “It is finished.” On the cross, Jesus completed his mission to obey God’s redemptive plan. “It is finished”—this short sentence sums up the life and mission of Jesus. The first words of Jesus recorded in the Bible are “Why were you searching for me? Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” (Lk 2:49) From beginning to end, his life was focused on doing the will of God.

“It is finished!” As Jesus was dying on the cross, he declared that his life fulfilled God’s redemptive purpose. His mission was completed. In human eyes, his death at the age of 33 seemed to be tragic. But in God’s eyes, his death changed the course of human history forever. His death completed God’s long-term redemptive plan. “It is finished”—these are wonderful words for each of us. With his death on the cross, Jesus paid the price for all our sins. We are no longer condemned. Jesus won our salvation. There is nothing left for us to do except believe in him. Martin Luther was so happy to know the meaning of this. As a catholic monk, he was troubled because he had no assurance of salvation, even as he climbed the stone steps on his bloody knees. Then it hit him. He could never earn his own salvation, because Jesus had already finished it on the cross. Then he began to preach the truth that the righteous will live by faith (Ro 1:17).

What else did Jesus say on the cross? According to other gospels, on the cross he said, “*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*”—which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46) Jesus had suffered all his public life. But he knew that God was always with him. For example, Mark 1:11 says, “And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’” But for the moment he was cursed on the cross shouldering all our sins, he was forsaken by God. To Jesus, this momentary abandonment from God was more painful than the physical pain.

Max Lucado did not like this verse. So he prayed to God, “Lord, I don’t like this verse. It doesn’t sound like you; it doesn’t sound like something you would say.” Then he realized that it was because of his own sin that Christ had to feel alone on the cross. He remembered the days of his sinful life. So he prayed again, “I was lonely. I was afraid. I felt so confused. So desolate. Sin will do that to you. Sin leaves you shipwrecked, orphaned, adrift, abandoned... Oh, My, goodness, God. Is that what happened? You mean sin did the same to you that it did to me? You really were alone. Just like I was. Only, I deserved it. You didn’t.” (from *The Final Week of Jesus*, 1994)

According to Luke, Jesus said on the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk 23:34). Jesus prayed for those who were mocking and insulting him, that God might forgive their sin. Jesus prayed even for his executioners that God would forgive their sins. This is amazing. And this gives hope to all sinners like us. We nailed our Lord Jesus to the cross when we sinned before God. But Jesus forgives our sins when we come to him confessing our sins, no matter what terrible sin we might have committed.

Jesus had been hung on the cross since 9:00 o’clock that morning. At 3:00 in the afternoon, after 6 hours of suffering on the cross, he finally died. Look at verses 31-35. The Jews wanted to enjoy the holiday weekend. So they asked Pilate to have legs of those on the crosses broken to hasten their deaths. The soldiers broke the two criminals’ legs. But when the soldiers came to Jesus, they found that he was already dead. So they did not break his legs. One of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, and blood and water flowed from his side.

The author John says that he recorded these things in order to give a conclusive proof to the fact that Jesus died indeed (35). He testified to Jesus’ death so that we

might believe that Jesus died for us. He recorded these events to show that all these things happened according to the Scriptures (36-37).

### III. JOSEPH AND NICODEMUS (38-42)

So Jesus died. Because the Sabbath was near, he had to be buried quickly. But the friends of Jesus were poor and could not give him a proper burial. Two men came forward to offer their services. They were Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. They were both prominent members of the Sanhedrin. They were both rich. Joseph offered his new tomb. Nicodemus offered 75 pounds of spices. So Jesus was buried by the two prominent members of the Jewish ruling council.

Joseph was a man of standing. He loved Jesus, but because of his concern for career, he had remained a secret disciple of Jesus. He had been a closet Christian. But when he saw the death of Jesus, something happened in his heart. He was no longer fearful. His career did not seem as important any more. As the fruit of his repentance, he boldly went to Pilate to ask for Jesus' body.

Nicodemus also was a man of standing and wealth. He was the one who visited Jesus at night earlier. Jesus had told him that he had to be born again to see the kingdom of God. He knew that Jesus was the Son of God, but he also loved the world. He wanted to protect his fame and material wealth. So he lived a double life. But now, the power of the cross touched his heart. His fear left. He was ready to do something for Jesus, publicly this time. He brought all the spices he had saved for himself and offered it to Jesus for his burial. He no longer wavered between the world and Christ. After witnessing Jesus on the cross, Nicodemus became a new person.

Jesus' death on the cross did not discourage his followers. Instead, the two secret disciples declared publicly their Christian identity after witnessing the crucifixion. And this has been the case for countless more people who looked up the cross of Jesus. The cross of Jesus has been the source of power to many people throughout history. St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:18: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

There was an important spiritual leader in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Germany by the name of Nikolaus Zinzendorf (1700-1760). From Dresden, Saxony, he led the German Pietism movement and became a leader of the Moravian church that sent many missionaries to all over the world. Once when he was a small boy, he came across a painting of Jesus' crucifixion. At the bottom of the painting was the inscription, "All this for thee; how much for me?" The cross of Jesus touched Zinzendorf's heart and he was full of world mission vision by the time he was 9 years old. May the cross of Jesus touch our hearts!

In conclusion, let us remember why Jesus had to suffer and die on the cross. It was for our sins. He was offered as a guilt offering for the sins we committed. Because of our sins, we were doomed to eternal death and punishment. But the Son of God died for our sins so that we might be saved. Isaiah 53:5 reads, "... he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace

was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.” John the Baptist was deeply touched by this grace of Jesus. So when he saw Jesus coming toward him, he said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (1:29) Let us praise Jesus for his saving grace and serve him for the rest of our lives!