

THE GOSPEL OF BELIEF - Studies in John's Gospel - Part sixty-nine

Sunday, February 8th, 2015, 10:00 a.m.

Teaching #1783 - Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church

THE DAY JESUS DIED

John 19:16-30 - "...So they took Jesus, [17] and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. [18] There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. [19] Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." [20] Many 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. [21] So 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.'" [22] Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written." [23] When 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, [24] so 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, [25] but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. [26] When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" [27] Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. [28] After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." [29] A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. [30] When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."

It seems strange that the one disciple who, in all likely-hood, was the only disciple to give an eye-witness account of the crucifixion of Jesus says the least about it. John's account of the actual death of Jesus is by far the briefest of the gospel accounts. He seems almost hesitant to belabor the details of the nature of this painful, gruesome death. Like it or not, John clearly doesn't think those details are the important point.

Matthew and **Mark** record only *one* word from Jesus on the cross - "**My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?**" Jesus sputters out these disturbing words from **Psalm 22**. Significantly this is the only time in the New Testament where Jesus prays and *doesn't* call God "**Father**." The closeness of that relationship seems emotionally almost untethered as Jesus becomes so completely identified with everything Father God hates about our sin and rebellion. What blunt reality we're witnessing here!

Luke records *three* sayings from Jesus on the cross - "**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.**" Then, His promise to the penitent criminal - "**Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.**" And finally, "**Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.**"

Curiously, John records *three* additional and completely different sayings from Jesus on the cross. **First**, Jesus says, "**Woman, behold your son.**" Included in John's first saying, Jesus speaks to John the disciple, "**Behold your mother**" (26-27). **Second**, John includes the tiny phrase, "**I thirst**" (28). And finally, only John records those concluding, benediction-like words, "**It is finished**" (30).

These all seem so different - categorically different - from Matthew and Mark's tender *prayer words* - "**Father, into your hands I commit my spirit,**" and Luke's memorable *forgiveness words* - "**Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do,**" and, "**Today you will be with me in Paradise.**" What is on John's mind as he assembles material for his account? He knows *all* the words Jesus said (after all, he was *there* - Jesus *spoke* to him from the cross) and yet John chose these three strangely different statements from Jesus.

I want to consider each of those statements from Jesus' lips as John records them. And I want to try to offer insights from other details in John's recording of the day Jesus died.

1) **JOHN MEANS FOR US TO NOTICE JESUS' CROSS WAS PLACED DIRECTLY IN THE MIDDLE - BETWEEN TWO CRIMINALS**

John 19:17-18 - "...So they took Jesus, [17] and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. [18] There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them."

Verse 18 is actually quite labored writing. It's as though John can't say the same thing often enough. If Jesus is crucified with two others, there were three of them crucified. One would think it was enough just to do the arithmetic. But John

doesn't just want us to know Jesus wasn't crucified **alone**. He's deeply interested - fixated - on the **geography** of Jesus' cross. So he expands the details by telling us there was one criminal **"on either side"** of Jesus. OK. So now we have all the facts. If there was one criminal on either side of Jesus, and there were three all together, Jesus was in the middle. Figure it out.

Only John can't leave this alone quite yet. After telling us clearly that there was one criminal on either side of Jesus - and remember, there were only **three** crosses - John still has to grind his account into the ground by pointing out the painfully obvious. After telling us there were three crosses and there was one on each side of Jesus, John, for some strange reason, still feels the need to tell us Jesus was **"between them."** And you get the impression it's very important to John we get the picture that Jesus' cross was - yes, we've got it - right in the **middle** of these two criminals.

John's point is something of the invisible - theological - doctrine of the atonement was made **visible** the day Jesus died. And it is vitally, passionately precious to John that Jesus died **right in the middle of very guilty sinners**. John paints that painstakingly laborious account of the **three** crosses with Jesus in the **middle** so every time we read his gospel or see those crosses pictured on our church letterhead we will immediately call to mind the prophet Isaiah's words:

Isaiah 53:12 - "Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because 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."

Think of those blasphemous sounding words. Jesus **"was numbered with the transgressors."** You can't get more **"numbered with"** than being **right in the middle of**. **"Numbered with."** Those old words mean when you would **count** all the wicked transgressors you could find being executed that Passover day, you would **include** Jesus in the count. You would **number** him **with** the worst people. Not the best people.

Number the transgressors. Count them. One. Two. Three. Four. Murderers. Thieves. Rapists. Traitors. Oh yea, and Jesus. That makes five.

Why is this so important to John? And to you and me? When your own sin and shame cause you to shun His presence remember He was actually numbered **with** you. Not in some distant group. You don't have to **bring** Jesus on to your side. He was numbered **with** you so you need never be **alienated** from Him because you're a sinner. He doesn't **move away** from repentant transgressors. He makes His camp **in the middle of them** - **"numbered with the transgressors."**

2) **PILATE'S MOCKING INSCRIPTION AND WHY IT'S SO IMPORTANT**

John 19:19-22 - "Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, **"Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."** [20] Many 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.** [21] So 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.'" [22] Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

For years I had the mistaken impression that this was merely a sign that was tacked up on Jesus' cross as He hung on it. The truth is all criminals wore a sign **around their necks** as they trudged along, dragging their cross, so the passers-by would know the crime for which these poor souls were being condemned. Then, at the very end, that sign would be nailed up on the cross where the guilty died.

So Jesus was tagged **"King of the Jews"** long before His body hung on that cross. Everyone who saw Jesus as He dragged His beaten body, scrunched up under the weight of His own cross, saw that sign - "O yea, there goes that guy - that King of the Jews."

The significance of that sign - and the preciousness of it - extend far beyond Pilate's intended mockery. We need to turn back the page to Jesus' words to Pilate in **John 18:36** - "Jesus answered, **"My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world."**

Earthly kingdoms manifest themselves in might - in the squashing of opposition. Earthly kingdoms push back against rebellion. They can't abide resistance. And Jesus says His kingdom bears no present resemblance to that. He submits to His

accusers. Outside of impulsive Peter there are no royal guards coming to His defence.

And here's why. And it all ties in with that silly sign hanging over His bloody head. He is a king *in His dying*. His *death* is how He accomplishes His reign. This mocked, spat-upon, dying king is fulfilling all the Jewish prophecies about Him *as He died*. His atoning death is the *coronation* of His Messianic kingdom.

Please think about this. The news today is full of a religion whose only response to mockers is to attack and kill them. That's because such desperate response is the only tool left in their tool-belt. Their prophet's reputation is all they have.

But look at that sign above Jesus' drooping head. His death is the *establishment* of His kingdom, not the *end* of it. And the reason John highlights the detail of those words written in the three dominant languages of earth at that time - *Latin, Aramaic, Greek* - is John's way of showing this King was dying for the *whole world*. This was not a parochial kingdom. *Everyone* must acknowledge the mighty redeeming death of God the Son.

3) THE SOLDIERS' DICE AND THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

John 19:23-24 - "When 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, [24] so 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...."

John means for us to notice the exact details of the fulfillment of **Psalm 22:19**. The prophetic prediction extends to more than a general concept. The Psalmist writes of *both* the *dividing of the other garments* and the *gambling for the one piece, seamless robe*.

If fact, *three times* John will specifically point to the fulfillment of the Scriptures in our account:

John 19:24 - "....so 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."

John 19:28 - "After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst."

John 19:35-37 - "He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe. [36] For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken." [37] And again another Scripture says, "They will look on him whom they have pierced."

Back to the soldiers. Remember, as John paints this picture, they kneel in the dirt and joke and ignorantly throw their dice right under that tri-lingual sign - *"King of the Jews"* - just the way the Spirit of God said they would.

4) WHY DIDN'T JESUS CALL MARY "MOTHER"?

John 19:25-27 - "....but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. [26] When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!"[27] Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home."

We'll never know what was in Mary's heart as she watched her son die. I've often wondered if Simeon's words spoken at Jesus' birth suddenly flooded her mind with the impact of an avalanche - Luke 2:34-35 - "And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed [35] (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

I'm sure Mary felt "run through" with that sword as she watched the life spill away from her son on that cross. And then we encounter this strange text where Jesus *won't* call Mary His mother but will tell *John* she is *his* mother. What's going on here? It's not the first time we've seen this in Jesus. The truth is He *never* calls Mary *"mother"* in John's account.

Think back to our study of John 2:3-4 - "When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' [4] **And Jesus said to her, Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.**"

There is it again. "**Woman, what does this have to do with me?**" Not even, "**Mother, what does this have to do with me?**" What kind of response is that to Mary's question?

And the answer to the **first** part of verse 4 comes from the **last** part of verse 4 - "**And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.**" Those words speak of a sense of **calling** and **mission** in Jesus' life. It's vitally important to Jesus that everyone understand He isn't here doing His own thing. He's the "**Lamb of God....**" - **not just the son of Mary**. Make no mistake, Mary, your son is **God's** Lamb.

And - think about this - quite naturally, the people who would have the hardest time appreciating the **abnormality** of such a divine calling would be those who **most naturally** had the right to assume to control Jesus' life - His earthly parents.

So it's precisely **because** Mary is Jesus' mother that He **must**, for the salvation of mankind, openly display His understanding of the primary authority and mission of His earthly glory and work. This **first** sign of who He is and what He can do isn't up to anyone but the Father in heaven. And it's ultimately most loving and beneficial for **Mary** in the long run if Jesus makes this clear.

Now back to our text at the **end** of Jesus' life. Just as at the very **beginning** of Jesus' mission on earth as God the Son His work couldn't be limited by immediate family connections, so now, at the **conclusion** of His mission on earth the new fellowship His work created couldn't be limited to family relationships.

A **bigger family** was created through His completed redemptive work than could be contained by genetic blood lines. This is illustrated by the way Jesus doesn't just call John the **care-giver** of Jesus' mother. John is now - **they** are now - the first proto-types of the new family of God. The first offspring of Jesus' freshly shed blood.

Suddenly strange things begin happening in the New Testament age. Paul calls Timothy his "**son**." Slave owners call runaway slaves "**brothers**." And a whole group of totally unrelated, but collected individuals in what appears nothing more than a hodge-podge clump starts calling themselves the "**family of God**."

It all seems crazy. We're **brothers** and **sisters**. What's going on here? Well, this text means we're not making it up. We're speaking out a reality purchased and bound into an actual new creation by the death of our Lord. He **said so**. This is not a **pretend** relationship. It's not some kind of **secret club lingo**. It's not just the way churches address people before they get to know their names. This **new family** is as real, authentic, and blood bought as the **forgiveness of your sins** and the **resurrected body of our Lord** that ate fish with His disciples.

5) THE FINAL MOMENT AND THE FINISHED WORK

John 19:28-30 - "After this, Jesus, **knowing that all was now finished**, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." [29] A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. [30] **When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "it is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.**"

John traces a **sequence** in these verses. He tells us Jesus **knew** His work was finished in **verse 28**. Then Jesus **announces** His work was finished in **verse 30**. And between those moments Jesus asks for a drink. And John actually - strangely - says Jesus asked for the drink "**to fulfill the Scripture**" (28).

So Jesus knows there is nothing left to accomplish to bring about the **forgiveness of sins** and the **creation of the family of God** but still pauses - as though just holding back death for another minute - just so we will have one more piece of evidence that He is dying on that cross **according to divine plan**. This last "**thirst detail**" needs to be taken care of before He allows death its due.

Then John says Jesus "**gave up his spirit**" (30). His will is involved in His death. His spirit didn't just **escape** Him. Jesus "**gave it up**." Remember His earlier words, "**No one takes my life from me....**"

You've probably attended funerals where it was said someone "**died too young**," or, "**died too soon**." And we know what

those words mean.

But that didn't happen to Jesus. Though He died at 33 years of age, He didn't die *too young* or *too soon*. He died right on time. He died after all the Scriptures were fulfilled. He died right as those Passover lambs were being prepared and sacrificed.

Jesus takes care of every detail. His finished work means He dots all the i's and crosses all the t's. There is no remaining reason to extend His life. His mission is finished. His kingdom is *established* in His dying. And the power of His work has been delivering people from the finality of death and the condemnation of sin ever since.