

Lesson Twenty-Four

(John 19:1-42)

The angry mob had refused Pilate's offer of mercy to Jesus, demanding instead that a criminal named Barabbas be released. So Pilate then decided that the fickle Jewish leaders would probably be satisfied with seeing the man from Nazareth beaten to within an inch of his life. Indeed, everyone knew how vicious Roman punishment was. No man was ever the same after a Roman soldier had cut his back to pieces with a whip which had sharpened bits of metal and bone embedded in the leather strands.

Jesus is Condemned

(John 19:1-16)

¹Then Pilate took Jesus and had him whipped. ²The soldiers made a crown out of thorny branches and put it on his head; then they put a purple robe on him ³and came to him and said, "Long live the King of the Jews!" And they went up and slapped him.

⁴Pilate went back out once more and said to the crowd, "Look, I will bring him out here to you to let you see that I cannot find any reason to condemn him." ⁵So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Look! Here is the man!"

⁶When the chief priests and the temple guards saw him, they shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

Pilate said to them, "You take him, then, and crucify him." I find no reason to condemn him."

⁷The crowd answered back, "We have a law that says he ought to die, because he claimed to be the Son of God."

⁸When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid. ⁹He went back into the palace and asked Jesus, "Where do you come from?"

But Jesus did not answer. ¹⁰Pilate said to him, "You will not speak to me? Remember, I have the authority to set you free and also to have you crucified."

¹¹Jesus answered, "You have authority over me only because it was given to you by God. So the man who handed me over to you is guilty of a worse sin."

¹²When Pilate heard this, he tried to find a way to set Jesus free. But the crowd shouted back, "If you set him free, that means that you are not the Emperor's friend! Anyone who claims to be a king is a rebel against the Emperor!"

¹³When Pilate heard these words, he took Jesus outside and sat down on the judge's seat in the place called "The Stone Pavement." (In Hebrew the name is "Gabbatha.") ¹⁴It was then almost noon of the day before the Passover. Pilate said to the people, "Here is your king!"

¹⁵They shouted back, "Kill him! Kill him! Crucify him!"

Pilate asked them, "Do you want me to crucify your king?"

The chief priests answered, "The only king we have is the Emperor!"

¹⁶Then Pilate handed Jesus over to them to be crucified.

Paul Butler writes, "Scourging was a Roman method of extracting from condemned criminals confession of guilt or secrets. The scourge, or whip, consisted of a short wooden handle to which several leather thongs were attached. Fastened on the ends of these leather thongs were pieces of lead or brass or sharp pointed pieces of bone. The victim was usually tied to a post (Acts 22:25) and the blows were applied to the back and loins . . . The body was at times torn and lacerated to such an extent that the inner flesh was exposed and made to look like the raw meat of a butchered animal. At times even the entrails and inner organs of the victim were exposed. So hideous was the

punishment that the victim usually fainted and sometimes died from it" (*The Gospel of John*, II, 382).

In addition to the excruciating pain there were abusive insults heaped upon him by the Roman soldiers. As Jesus' blood poured from the torn capillaries and veins, the soldiers pressed a thorny "crown" down upon his scalp, causing even more loss of blood. Then they placed a purple robe around him and mockingly shouted, "King of the Jews!" And each of them took turns slapping him until Jesus' face was also bruised and bleeding.

Once more Pilate tried to reason with the crowd. But at the sight of the dazed, blood-splattered form of Jesus the Jewish authorities exploded in hatred: "Crucify him! Crucify him!" They would not be deterred from their evil mission, not even by Pilate's admission that he belied Jesus to be innocent (19:6). They even revealed their real reason for wanting Jesus killed: "He claimed to be the Son of God" (19:7).

Now that charge got Pilate's attention (19:8), so he went back into his palace and privately asked Jesus where he came from (19:9). And when to his surprise Jesus refused to answer his question, Pilate arrogantly reminds Jesus that he has the governmental authority to save or to take his life (19:10). But Jesus refutes that notion by saying that God is the one who really has the authority (19:11; Rom. 13), and that while Pilate was certainly not innocent the High Priest "is guilty of a worse sin" for violating his spiritual office in order to get Pilate to kill Jesus.

That was enough to cause Pilate to once more try "to find a way to set Jesus free" (19:12). But the Jews backed Pilate into a corner and delivered the final blow: "If you set him free, that means that you are not the Emperor's friend." That did it. Pilate knew these Jews would make that same assertion to his superiors in Rome if he did not condemn Jesus. So Pilate "handed Jesus over to them to be crucified" (19:16).

Jesus is Crucified

(John 19:16-30)

¹⁶So they took charge of Jesus. ¹⁷He went out, carrying his cross, and came to "The Place of the Skull," as it is called. (In Hebrew it is called "Golgotha.") ¹⁸There they crucified him; and they also crucified two other men, one on each side, with Jesus between them. ¹⁹Pilate wrote a notice and had it put on the cross. "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews," is what he wrote. ²⁰Many people read it, because the place where Jesus was crucified was not far from the city. The notice was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek.

²¹The chief priests said to Pilate, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am the King of the Jews.' "

²²Pilate answered, "What I have written stays written."

²³After the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier. They also took the robe, which was made of one piece of woven cloth without any seams in it. ²⁴The soldiers said to one another, "Let's not tear it; let's throw dice to see who will get it." This happened in order to make the scripture come true: "They divided my clothes among themselves and gambled for my robe." And this is what the soldiers did.

²⁵Standing close to Jesus' cross were his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶Jesus saw his mother and the disciple he loved standing there; so he said to his mother, "He is your son."

²⁷Then he said to the disciple, "She is your mother." From that time the disciple took her to live in his home.

²⁸Jesus knew that by now everything had been completed; and in order to make the scripture come true, he said, "I am thirsty."

²⁹A bowl was there, full of cheap wine; so a sponge was soaked in the wine, put on a stalk of hyssop, and lifted up to his lips.

³⁰Jesus drank the wine and said, "It is finished!"

Then he bowed his head and died.

Scholars are divided as to whether Jesus was crucified on a Thursday or a Friday. While the answer is not vital to our salvation, it is an interesting historical study. Those who wish to pursue it should read the arguments for a Friday crucifixion in Paul Butler's *The Gospel of John* (Vol. II, 388, 405-08). The arguments for a Thursday crucifixion are well-stated by Cecil C. Ralston in the April 15, 22 and 29th issues of *Christian Standard* for 1973, and by Roger Rusk in the March 29, 1974 issue of *Christianity Today*. (Rusk argues rather persuasively that Jesus was crucified on Thursday, April 6th, in 30 A.D.)

After Pilate's order to execute Jesus was pronounced, the Roman soldiers placed a cross (probably just the cross-beam) on Jesus' lacerated back and made him try to carry it some 650 yards through the streets to the place of execution. But Jesus was too weak from the savage beating and the loss of blood, so a North African named Simon was forced to carry it the rest of the way (Luke 23:26).

When they reached "the Place of the Skull" (Hebrew, "Golgotha"; Latin, "Calvary"), the soldiers placed the cross on the ground and held Jesus against it. Swiftly and expertly, the

executioner probed for the slight depression at the front of each wrist. Then in four or five solid strokes, he drove a square, five-inch wrought-iron spike through the overlapped feet of Jesus. The soldiers lifted the cross, with Jesus nailed to it, and put it into position.

There were two other executions that day. Both of the other men were criminals. One of them mocked and insulted Jesus (Luke 23:39). But the other believed in him and said, "Remember me, Jesus, when you come as King!" And Jesus answered, "I promise you that today you will be in Paradise with me." And no doubt he was saved. But this example should not be misused, as some people do, to argue that baptism is unnecessary for us today. We must realize that the New Covenant (including the command to be immersed) had not gone into effect at this time because Jesus had not yet died (Hebrews 9). Therefore, Jesus could offer salvation at this time on whatever terms he wanted. But when the apostles began to preach about Jesus on Pentecost in 30 A.D. they were bound to follow Jesus' instructions to immerse those who believe in him (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38).

Crucifixion was a death reserved for hardened criminals and traitors (Deut. 21:23), but the death of Jesus changed the cross from a symbol of shame to one of hope (Gal. 3:13; Isaiah 53:12; 2 Cor. 5:14-19). But Jesus had to endure physical hell in order to do it.

As the cross was erected and the weight of his body tore at the holes in his wrists, the pain shot along his arms and through his entire nervous system. So he tried to push himself upward to relieve that pain, only to receive the same agonizing torment from the wounds in his feet.

After this process had been repeated several times, Jesus experienced severe cramps in the muscles of his arms, shoulders, and legs. The cramps restricted his ability to push himself upward. And as he hung by his wrists, his pectoral and inter-costal muscles became nearly paralyzed. He discovered that while he could draw air into his lungs, he could not exhale in that position. So he had to force himself upward enough to release the carbon dioxide trapped in his lungs. Time and time again this painful process was repeated. And yet, looking down at his executioner and his enemies, he was able to pray, "Forgive them, Father! They don't know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

Near the base of the cross the soldiers gambled to decide who would get Jesus' seamless robe (19:23-24; Psalm 22:18). Also standing nearby were four women who deeply loved Jesus: his mother, Mary; his aunt, Salome (Mark 15:40; Matt. 27:56); Clopa's wife, also named Mary; and the woman from whom Jesus had expelled seven demons, Mary from the village of Magdala (Mark 16:2; Luke 8:2).

It is to his mother and to the "disciple he loved" (probably the apostle John) that Jesus directs his third phrase while upon the cross (19:26-27), thus insuring that his mother would receive care and protection. Then he cried out, "I am thirsty" (19:28), as his loss of body fluid reached a critical stage.

The physical agony of the cross and the even greater load of sin upon him caused Jesus to cry out, "My God, my God, why did you abandon me?" (Matt. 27:46). Jesus knew the answer to his rhetorical question: "The Father loves me because I am willing to give up my life, in order that I may receive it back again" (10:17). The agony and the loneliness of this hour would soon pass.

Then Jesus said in a loud voice, "It is finished!" (19:30). His work of personally teaching and preaching was done. His obedience to God the Father was completed. The Law of Moses was abolished (Col. 2:14), and that is why the veil of the Temple split (Matt. 27:51). His life as a human being was over. "It is finished!" was a shout of triumph. And his last words were: "Father! In your hands I place my spirit!" (Luke 23:46). Then he died.

The Burial of Jesus

(John 19:31-42)

³¹Then the Jewish authorities asked Pilate to allow them to break the legs of the men who had been crucified, and to take the bodies down from the crosses. They requested this because it was Friday, and they did not want the bodies to stay on the crosses on the Sabbath, since the coming Sabbath was especially holy. ³²So the soldiers went and broke the legs of the first man and then of the other man who had been crucified with Jesus. ³³But when they came to Jesus, they saw that he was already dead, so they did not break his legs. ³⁴One of the soldiers, however, plunged his spear into Jesus' side, and at once blood and water poured out. (³⁵The one who saw this happen has spoken of it, so that you also may believe. What he said is true, and he knows that he speaks the truth.) ³⁶This was done to make the scripture come true: "Not one

of his bones will be broken." ³⁷And there is another scripture that says, "People will look at him whom they pierced."

³⁸After this, Joseph, who was from the town of Arimathea, asked Pilate if he could take Jesus' body. (Joseph was a follower of Jesus, but in secret, because he was afraid of the Jewish authorities.) Pilate told him he could have the body, so Joseph went and took it away. ³⁹Nicodemus, who at first had gone to see Jesus at night, went with Joseph, taking with him about one hundred pounds of spices, a mixture of myrrh and aloes. ⁴⁰The two men took Jesus' body and wrapped it in linen cloths with the spices according to the Jewish custom of preparing a body for burial. ⁴¹There was a garden in the place where Jesus had been put to death, and in it there was a new tomb where no one had ever been buried. ⁴²Since it was the day before the Sabbath and because the tomb was close by, they placed Jesus' body there.

The Roman soldiers used an iron mallet, something like a sledge hammer, to break the legs of the crucified criminals. This hastened their death by preventing them from being able to push themselves upward to exhale and by intensifying their state of shock. It was not done to Jesus because these experienced executioners recognized that he was dead. But as a final indignity, a soldier plunged his spear through the fifth interspace between the ribs and upward through the pericardium right into his heart. Immediately the fluid from the sac around the heart and the blood from the inside of the heart poured out (19:34). This gives medical proof that Jesus did not suffocate, as other crucifixion victims did. Instead, Jesus died of heart failure due to severe shock and to the construction of the heart by fluid in the pericardium.

The death of Jesus fulfilled numerous prophecies made hundreds of years before. Psalm 22 said that the Messiah would be nailed to a tree or cross (22:16), abandoned by God (22:1), mocked (22:7-8), and have his persecutors divide his clothing among themselves (22:18). The prophet Isaiah said that the Messiah would die and be buried among the rich, that he would be numbered with sinners and yet make intercession for his killers (Isaiah 53:9-12; Mark 15:27-28; Matt. 27:57-60). Other Old Testament writers said that he would be given sour wine to drink (Psalm 69:21), that his body would be pierced (Zechariah 12:10), but not a bone would be broken (Exodus 12:46; Psalm 34:20).

Jesus probably died after 3:00 p.m., so Joseph and Nicodemus had to work very fast to give him even a minimal preparation for

burial because they had to be done before the Sabbath observance began at sunset. They did not embalm Jesus. They simply anointed his body, wrapped it in fine linen, and placed spices and aloe in the folds in the linen. Then they left.

Thought Stimulators on John 19:1-42

1. Who were the leaders who demanded that Jesus be crucified?
2. What was the real reason why the Jewish authorities wanted Jesus killed?
3. Pilate's authority as governor had been given to him by whom?
4. What was the final and most convincing argument that the Jews gave to Pilate?
5. Name the place where Jesus was crucified.
6. Who were the women who stood by the cross?
7. Name the man who carried Jesus' cross.
8. Since the one crucified criminal was saved by faith without being baptized, why should a believer today be baptized?
9. Why did the soldiers break the legs of the two criminals?
10. Name the two people who came to get Jesus' body.
11. What do you think Paul meant when he wrote, "I have been put to death with Christ on his cross, so that it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. This life that I live now, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave his life for me" (Gal. 2:19-20).
12. What does Jesus' death mean to you, personally?