

The Final Days of Jesus  
**THEY CRUCIFIED HIM**

Wednesday, April 1  
Reading: John 19:12-22

**John 19:18** *There they crucified Him, and with Him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle. 19 Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.*

The Jewish leaders have one more card to play in their battle with Pilate over the fate of Jesus. The term “friend of Caesar” was a political title given to Roman governors and rulers by the emperor. This was an open threat by the religious leaders that if Pilate released Jesus, they would report him to Caesar as being soft on treason. This threat finally broke Pilate. His final presentation of Jesus as their “king” brought a shocking reaction from the Jewish crowd. When the Romans had first conquered Israel it had caused a rebellion as the Jews declared that God alone was their King. To declare “We have no king but Caesar” was to deny everything they believed in. So much was their hatred for Christ. From his judgment seat, Pilate passes the sentence that they wanted.

Crucifixion was designed by Rome to be very public and humiliating. It was their ultimate statement that “Crime doesn’t pay!” The condemned was forced to carry their own crossbeam to the place of execution. Once there, they were nailed through the wrists and feet and left hanging naked for all to see. Death came slowly through blood loss, fatigue, and eventually suffocation. In Jerusalem, the execution site was called “the place of the skull” (Golgotha in Aramaic/Hebrew; Calvary in Latin).

Pilate’s final stab at the Jewish leaders was the sign placed on Jesus’ cross announcing His ‘crime’ – “King of the Jews.” He had it written in the three major languages of Israel – Aramaic, Greek, and Latin. Anyone who walked by could read this sign. The chief priests were upset and tried to get Pilate to change the sign to read that Jesus only claimed to be King of the Jews. But Pilate refuses to budge. Having lost the battle of wits to free Jesus, he would at least have the last laugh, even if it was a small one. The other gospels record that the chief priests taunted Jesus at the cross (Matthew 27:41-43). Normally a religious leader would not be present at an execution, especially during a feast week. Perhaps their presence was an attempt to counteract the message of Pilate’s sign.

**LESSON ONE:** “We Have No King but Caesar.” By shouting this, the Jewish leaders and mob rejected their one true King. In truth, the only king they had left to serve was Caesar. There are only two choices. When people reject Christ as their Lord and Savior, they are really saying that they are servants of Satan, who is the prince of this world. Which king do you serve? If you claim Christ as Lord, can others see it by how you live?

**LESSON TWO:** “They Crucified Him.” The gospels do not give us the gory details for the first-century readers had all seen crucifixions many times before. However, there may be another reason for this absence. While we know Jesus’ physical suffering was excruciating (we get this English word from the Greek for ‘out of the cross’). The message of the cross is not about the pain, torture, and humiliation of Christ. It is about His dying for your sins and mine (see 2 Corinthians 5:21). Take time today to thank the Lord for His sacrifice which paid the debt for your sins. Then think about someone you can share this “good news” with.