

John #52: Standing by Christ Crucified (John 19:16-30)

PRAY (may I glory only in the cross)

Our Scripture reading earlier said, “*Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*” (1 Cor. 1:23-24)

We preach Christ crucified... Something all believers and churches are called to do, all the time
So, fair warning: what is preached today may be a stumbling block or folly to you

You may misunderstand it... You may think it silly... You may even be offended by it

You may be confused why we’d choose to dwell on something so unpleasant or morbid

You may be affronted by the idea that we believe you actually *need* the cross today

But I pray that, rather, all of us would find, in Christ crucified, the power and wisdom of God

—Wisdom to devise a plan so glorious, and power that transforms our lives

An old hymn sings the question: *Were you there when they crucified my Lord?*

Of course, none of us were there in person on that original Good Friday

But we can listen to the eyewitnesses, like John, whose accounts are preserved for us

So let’s again behold the Lamb—setting our gaze on Christ crucified,

and see what that does in our own hearts: Whether it confounds us or captivates us

Whether it makes us mad or makes us marvel

Please join me in **TURNING** to John chapter 19... John 19 [page #905]

After Jesus was arrested and tried by the Jewish leaders, then dragged off to Pontius Pilate,

Pilate eventually gave in to their mob, sentencing Jesus to die

So the mood is getting pretty sombre... Look from v.14: **READ v.14b-16a¹**

Thus, we reach, in Christ’s death and rising, what I believe to be the centre of the whole Bible

This is the climax, the zenith, the whole point of it all... Without it, nothing else matters

It’s what everything before this leads up to, and what everything after points back to

[tr] **READ v.16b-22²**... I want to draw out four key truths about Christ’s crucifixion here

There will be implications for us... But as we saw recently, the main thing we need to do

is simply behold—to watch and observe what Christ has done for us... So first, see:

Christ crucified: his placement offensive (v.16-22)

[r] Christ was crucified, in an offensive, obscene, unfitting place

[r] See Christ crucified: his placement offensive

Notice how the opening paragraph here is all about *where* Jesus was killed

He was taken *away* from Pilate’s courts... He *went out* of the city of Jerusalem

Which is significant, as it parallels sacrifices burned outside the camp

Hebrews 13:12 explains: “*So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.*”

John continues with Jesus taken to “*the place called The Place of a Skull*” (Golgotha)

And look at v.18: “*There they crucified him*”

Such a matter-of-fact, discreet way to describe the agonies of crucifixion

Also, Jesus would die *placed* between two common criminals—a King among thieves

A sign with a mocking inscription would be placed on the cross with him
And v.20 highlights that many people were able to read the sign,
Because he was crucified near the city, right along a busy thoroughfare
It is so offensive that the holy King of kings was crucified at all!
But that he was crucified in these specific places is far more so

Imagine a really popular political figure—I know that might be hard to imagine, but try anyway
Imagine them suddenly arrested one day—and the next day, they’re shockingly killed
In broad daylight! After being dragged through the streets of the city,
They’re taken out to a place associated with death, say a graveyard
And they’re lined up next to a couple really despised criminal lowlifes
And then, in a scene worthy of an R-rated movie, they are savagely beaten up
And only after that, they are shot to death in a gruesome execution
But—this all happened while being livestreamed to the world on YouTube,
So everyone was watching it unfold live—including children, friends, family
And with a headline at the bottom of the screen: “Your would-be political saviour... Ha!”
That might give you a little sense of how offensive Jesus’ death was
He suffered, out in the open, for all to see, in injustice, disgrace, pain, and mockery

v.17 mentions that he bore his own cross out to Skull Hill

In a similar way to how Isaac, long ago, had carried the wood for his own sacrifice on his back
We know from elsewhere that at some point, Jesus was too weak to go any further
So the soldiers conscripted a passerby to carry the cross the rest of the way
John wants to highlight, though, how Jesus carried the load himself as far as he humanly could

Notice another feature of John’s account: He doesn’t dwell much on Jesus’ physical agony
Crucifixion was completely brutal... Full of shame, horror, and excruciating pain
People would be beaten to a pulp, stripped naked, and impaled through wrists and ankles
Then hung up by those nails, to bake in the hot sun, for hours or even days on end
In that position, in order to keep your chest cavity open enough to breathe,
You had to push yourself up by your crushed ankles and wrists
Death would come when you could no longer push yourself up, and you’d suffocate
John doesn’t give us any of this... Maybe he found it distasteful to dwell on things so macabre
Maybe it was too painful to remember his Lord in such horrible anguish
But this was nonetheless all entailed in the simple line “*There they crucified him...*”

And we’re still left with the overwhelming feeling: This is where Jesus should never have been
He didn’t deserve any of this... He’d just been found innocent, repeatedly
He shouldn’t have been ‘numbered with the transgressors’—or associated with criminals
The reality is: This is all where *we should have been*
It may be offensive to our pride, but it should’ve been *us* there on the cross, not him
We are guilty of treason against God’s throne, disregarding his ways, disowning him as Lord
And ‘*the wages of sin is death*’, my friends
Yet the flipside is that ‘*the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*’
So don’t look away from the offensiveness of the cross
It’s right there that you can find true life, in God’s mercy and grace

The way Pilate gets the final word over the Jewish authorities can seem amusing
They're super offended that he just won't stop calling Jesus their king
'He's not our king! Drop it already... Write the sign differently!'
And Pilate's like, 'No. I already wrote it. I'm not changing it.'... It's all quite petty
He's getting revenge, trying to humiliate those who humiliated him
The inscription was written in all three main languages used in that area
As the Romans wanted to be sure to publicize the nature of people's crimes
To warn and deter others away from following in their footsteps
It's telling, though, that Pilate's sign didn't list charges, but merely stated, 'the King of the Jews'

While Pilate may not actually have believed that what he wrote was true, he was 100% right:
Jesus of Nazareth *was* indeed the long-awaited Messianic King of the Jews
Like we saw in the last passage, this was, ironically, his coronation day
The cross would prove to be the means of his glorification

So again, Pilate was unwittingly acting like a prophet or herald of the King he was killing³
As scholar F.F. Bruce put it: "*The Crucified One is the true king, the kingliest king of all; [as he] is stretched on the cross, he turns an obscene instrument of torture into a throne of glory and reigns from the tree.*"

So I ask yet again: Is he your King? Is his kingdom set up within your heart?

The Jews' rejection of Christ as their king is truly tragic—even to this day
Last summer, I had the privilege of attending a summit in Toronto on antisemitism
With a number of Christian and Jewish leaders, to combat modern Jew hate
There was much good to be spoken of there... But there was one thing that broke my heart:
One Jewish rabbi explained why most Jews won't even enter a church building
She said it's specifically because of the crosses and crucifixes they may encounter
In her words, the cross is a symbol of Jewish suffering—a Jew dying a horrible death
I was so sad that she found something we find so precious offensive—it *was* a stumbling block!
But I was also so sad that she was so close and yet missed the entire point:
Yes, the cross symbolizes a Jew suffering... And yes, it can truthfully be offensive
But we believe this was the perfect Jew, suffering in the place of all other Jews
He is their Creator, their Messiah, and their rightful King... Lord, open their eyes!

[tr] As John continues telling the story, he actually turns his attention over to a sideshow
Which is unexpected... We would think he'd want us to stay fixated on Jesus
But there's a reason he does so, and in a roundabout way, it *is* to keep us fixed on Jesus,
And to be amazed at what was happening behind the scenes as he died... Which was:

Christ crucified: his Word fulfilled (v.23-24, 28)

[r] As Christ was crucified, God's Word was repeatedly being fulfilled
[r] Christ crucified: his Word fulfilled

John keeps showing us how one thing after another happened in order to fulfill Scripture
This is why he suddenly starts talking about soldiers and clothes: **READ v.23-24⁴**
That comes from Psalm 22:18... A song King David wrote while in great distress
You'd recognize other most-famous words from that song:

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” ... Jesus directly quoted that
But in the middle of Psalm 22, David talks about his enemies
taking his clothes and divvying them up... As if they were dividing spoils of war
For some reason—maybe he’s injured, captured, restrained, or left for dead—
He can only watch as the clothes are literally taken from his back
It reminds me of the story of Samson, when he lost a foolish bet with some Philistines
And he had to pay them 30 sets of clothes... So in a dark twist,
he goes and kills 30 other Philistines, taking their clothes to pay off his lost wager
David found himself—and now David’s greater Son found himself—on the other end of this
Their clothes—a valuable possession—were plundered... It was a sign that they’d lost

People of the day commonly wore 5 items of clothing:
an outer robe, an inner tunic, a belt, a head covering, and sandals
So likely, after each soldier got one item each, the fifth item (the tunic) was left over
It was a particularly valuable or beautiful item, being woven in one piece
So they thought, ‘It’d be a shame to tear this apart... Let’s play a game for it!’
They apparently cared more about not tearing a tunic than not tearing bodies apart
This scene definitely hints again at the indignity and humiliation of the cross,
In that if they divided his clothes amongst them, what was Jesus wearing now? Nothing
His nakedness was displayed, and his body left completely exposed

But while all of this was implied here, John’s main point is something else:
“*This was to fulfill (or maybe better, to complete) the Scripture*”
It was nothing less than a direct fulfillment of a prophecy from centuries before
It not only echoed David’s situation, that was a foreshadowing of this moment
When David’s words would find their ultimate fulfillment in the Son of David
This means, for one: God’s Word can be trusted... What he says will come to pass, guaranteed
The sheer amount of ancient prophecies that Jesus fulfilled is staggering
Scholars agree that he fulfilled at least 25-30 on these few days alone

This also means: God’s invisible sovereignty was at work behind the scenes of Jesus’ death
This was no accident—no horrible miscalculation on God’s part... It was not bad luck
This was foreseen for hundreds of years
It may’ve looked like Jesus was the loser here—the defeated victim... But he was not
He appeared dying and helpless... But he was actually winning and in control
Every part of Jesus’ death was part of God’s plan, and a result of Christ’s love and power
As part of God-breathed Scripture, Psalm 22 was just as much his Word as anyone’s
So see Christ crucified, and marvel at how his Word was fulfilled
Truly, as Paul later put it: “*Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures*”

v.28 adds to this a little while later... Just skip ahead for a moment: **READ v.28-29⁵**
That could point to another moment from Psalm 22, where David describes being beyond thirsty
Or, more likely, it alludes to Psalm 69, where David sings of his throat being parched,
And then moans, “*...for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.*” [69:21]
Whatever the original context was, this exactly happened to Jesus!
While others may’ve unwittingly played a part, Jesus did not... He knew what was going down

Extreme thirst and dehydration were a natural part of the torture of crucifixion
But even in these miserable moments, his mind was so steeped in God's Word,
That what flowed out of the wellspring of his heart was Scripture
And he was well aware that David's songs were ultimately pointing to him... Amazing!

[tr] In the same moments when the soldiers were greedily gambling beneath the cross,
There was another group of people standing by Christ's cross, in direct contrast to them:

READ v.24c-25⁶... They must've been weeping... They didn't understand all God was doing
But it's then that we get an incredibly tender word from Jesus: **READ v.26-27⁷**

(By the way, calling her 'woman' wasn't rude.... It was like 'dear woman' or 'ma'am')
But this is the first of three sayings from the cross that John records, in rapid-fire succession

Two years ago, I did a whole series on Jesus' seven total sayings from the cross

So if this flyover isn't deep enough, you can go look up entire sermons on each line

On the first pair, '*Woman, behold your Son*' and '*Behold your mother*', here's the significance:

Christ crucified: his family formed (v.25-27)

[r] Christ deliberately looked out for his earthly family, and began forming his heavenly family

[r] See Christ crucified and his family formed

On the one hand, this was Jesus being the truest, most perfect Son of Man—and son of Mary

He was fulfilling the law to honour his father and mother

Making sure his affairs were in order, and that his family was taken care of

Even in the throes of his deepest suffering,

He had compassion on one who was in deep grief herself

Simeon had prophesied to Mary, when Jesus was a tiny baby, "*Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also)...*" (Luke 2:34-35)

That sword was piercing her soul right now

Only a bereaved mother knows this kind of grief—as some of you do

Therefore, Jesus did some familial match-making from the cross

Telling his mother to find comfort and support from John in the times ahead

And instructing John, one of his closest friends, to take care of his mom

He wanted them to treat each other as if they really were mother and son

On a deeper level, however, Jesus was symbolically starting to form his bigger family

Bringing together people from different families who would regard each other as family

It's no coincidence that Christ reconstituted his family in these moments

What he did with them was a first instance of what he would do with all of us

Jesus was redefining family bonds,

Implying that spiritual ties between believers would be stronger than blood

We are spiritual family members, and we need each other

As **Robert Nash** comments: "*We need the comfort found in a spiritual community made possible through Christ's death and echoed in Jesus' gift to Mary and John.*"

Think of things from John's perspective... The last time we saw John, he wasn't exactly shining

He lurked on the periphery of Jesus' trial as Peter denied Christ

Before that, he'd failed to stay awake to pray with Jesus, and deserted him with all the rest

This is the only recorded interaction between Jesus and John
Between John's abandoning Christ and Christ's death... So this is pure mercy from Jesus
In those moments, John must've been grieving deeply and in shock, like Mary
Confusion, despair, and guilt would all be mixed in as well
So imagine his amazement when Jesus looked down at him, and didn't condemn him,
But loved him and bestowed an incredibly high honour upon him:
He essentially wanted John to take over his personal place in his own family!

Brothers and sisters (notice what I called you): Are you amazed by the love of God for you?
That Christ would die for you, and through his death adopt you into his family?
John himself later marveled: *"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are."* (1 John 3:1)
Whether you have a good earthly family, a bad earthly family, or no family at all,
You are invited to have God as your Father and Christ as your Brother
To point to chapter 1 again: *"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."* (John 1:12-13)
That can be you, today... Behold, believe, and receive

Then, are we amazed at the grand, messy, precious, eternal family we're now a part of?
You have so many mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, sons, and daughters!
I love what Sam Allberry says: *"When God draws people to himself, he draws them to one another as well... Following Christ means an abundance of spiritual family. Nature may have given us only one mother and one father; the gospel gives us far more."*

The blood of Christ indeed runs thicker than the blood of kin
Which means that there are Johns around you today whom you can lean on for support
And there are also Marys around you today whom need your love and care
Christ has formed us together... He has bound us together by his blood
Let's never forget this, or take it for granted—even (or especially) when tears are in our eyes
He has strategically placed us in each other's lives, right here and right now
So who might he direct your attention to notice today? *Behold your family*

[tr] So see Christ crucified: his placement offensive, his word fulfilled, and his family formed
In response to this, you may be tempted to want to repay Jesus for what he's done
Working harder than ever to try to make him happy with you
It's good to be inspired by the cross... But we've got to be careful, or we'll miss the whole point
More than just working harder, I think the cross would simply tell us to worship
Because all the most necessary work has now been done
Jesus makes this point with some of his last words before death... Thus we need to see:

Christ crucified: his work finished (v.28-30)

[r] As Christ was crucified, he completed his mission on earth, once and for all
[r] He accomplished our salvation... Christ crucified means his work was finished

John first brought up this truth in v.28: **READ v.28⁸**... Divine knowledge and human suffering
It'd been hours on the cross by now... Jesus knew things were quickly coming to an end
Yet he still suffered, and he expressed this... As a man, he was parched—bone dry

But the beautiful irony in Jesus' confession of thirst is that his destiny was to quench our thirst
Do you remember much earlier in John, when Jesus met the woman at the well?

That was the first time in John that Jesus asked for a drink

But then, he offered her living water, saying, *"Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again."* (John 4:13-14)

With these words, he was offering to satisfy our souls' truest thirst forever
Now on the cross, the Giver of living water was dying of thirst!

But he was doing so, in order to satisfy the thirst of us sinfully-parched people
In his life and death, he did everything we needed a Saviour to do... All was now accomplished

And after he received a cruel joke of a drink in v.29, he made this explicitly clear: **READ v.30**
"It! Is! Finished!" It's done... It's accomplished... It's complete... Jesus' earthly work was over

This was no cry of defeat; it was a victory cry: He had done it!

His life's mission and purpose culminated in this one moment

"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"... That was finished

"The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost"... That was finished

"The Son of Man came to... serve and to give his life as a ransom for many"... That was finished

In John 10, he says he came that we *"may have life and have it abundantly"*... That was finished

He'd just told Pilate he came *"to bear witness to the truth"*... That was finished

John later says Jesus appeared *"to destroy the works of the devil"*... That was finished

And he'd once told his friends, *"My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work."* (John 4:34)... That was his most satisfying work... And his most difficult work...

The hardest thing the Father asked him to do was to go to the cross

Even then, Jesus said, *"Yet not my will, but yours be done."*... And now, that was finished

Jesus had endured the cross, despising its shame

And now the only thing left in store was new life, exaltation, and eternal glory

But do you grasp what this means for us?

Jesus finished his life's mission and work, *freeing us from the burden of needing to*

Make no mistake: If Jesus didn't finish the job, we would have to

And that burden would absolutely crush us and ultimately destroy us

I can't take away my own sins... I can't ever be good enough

I can't magically come up with atonement that makes up for my dark sides

Deep down, I know I can't cut it... And so do you... We can't get the job done

But praise God, there is nothing you need to add to Christ's sacrifice

Nothing you need to now do to make God happy with you... Christ did it all!

Are you trying to add to the finished work of Christ today, through your own religious efforts?

If so, stop! It is finished... Rest in the grace of God

Follow him and obey him out of gratitude and love, not obligation

Fleming Rutledge says: *"There is no aspect of Christian faith more difficult for us to believe. It is in the nature of the human being to think that Christ's work could not possibly be finished, that we have to do more, we have to add to it, we have to earn it."*

It's so difficult to believe, but I'm telling you: We *have to* believe it!

The author and *finisher* of our faith has, once and for all, *finished it all*

So may we all ever grow in awe, thankfulness, and praise for what he has (all-caps) DONE

CONCLUSION

After all was said and done—literally—John says: **READ v.30b¹⁰**

He entrusted his spirit to his Father, as he bowed his head and died

No one took his life from him... He laid it down of his own accord

Now, Jesus did all of this on his own... He finished the work we never could have

However, the Bible says believers have been united to him in his death—we died with him

So brother and sister: Were you there when they crucified our Lord? Actually, yes!

You were there, with him, on that day, being crucified with Christ

So now, all that he won is applied to you... Hallelujah

So, like his friends and family stood by the cross then,

May we stand by this truth, now and always: We preach Christ crucified

PRAY

LORD'S SUPPER

Benediction: prayer, 5min,

¹ He said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" They cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." So he delivered him over to them to be crucified.

² So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." 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. 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.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

³ HT Carson

⁴ 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, 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."

⁵ After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." 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.

⁶ So the soldiers did these things, but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

⁷ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

⁸ After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst."

⁹ When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

¹⁰ he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.