

Glimpses of Jesus

John 18:1-19:37

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In John's gospel, Jesus speaks of the cross in terms of *fulfillment*. Jesus' hour would come when he would finish the work the Father sent him to do.

As in the other gospels, John's record of Jesus' suffering and death is a more detailed account than that of any other event in his life. Also, as in the other gospels, there are clues to the meaning of the cross throughout John's gospel. Let's look briefly at these and then look more closely at John's story of Jesus' suffering and death.

1:29, 36 Twice John the Baptist introduces Jesus as *the lamb of God*. "Behold the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" The people then would have connected a lamb who takes away sin with the sacrifices God had commanded them to offer. Jesus' sacrificial death was able to *take away* the sins of the world.

3:14-16 Jesus refers to an incident in Israel's forty years of wandering in the desert. The people were being bitten by snakes and dying. God told Moses to make a bronze serpent and put it on a pole. Everyone who was bitten who looked at the bronze serpent would live.

Jesus says that in the same way, the Son of Man must be lifted up—that is, on the cross—so that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. God's love moves Jesus to come into the world and give his life.

6:51 Speaking about the Bread of Life, Jesus says that he himself is that bread. "This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." Jesus gives his life in order to give life to the world.

10:11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." In contrast to the hired hand who runs away when the wolf attacks, the good shepherd defends his sheep, even laying down his life for them. Jesus goes on to say that he chooses to lay down his life and that he has authority to take it up again.

11:50 While the leaders schemed about how to kill Jesus, Caiaphas the High Priest spoke more truth than he knew when he said that one man must die for the people rather than the whole nation perishing.

12:20-33 Some Greeks came wanting to see Jesus. The hour has come for Jesus' glorification which is the cross. A kernel of wheat dies to produce many grains. The world is judged and the prince of the world is driven out. "I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

Once when we attended an Easter pageant at another church we had to sit in the balcony. I had to look around people and spotlights and through a railing. I thought once of how I was only getting glimpses of the action.

Reading through these chapters in John, we see several scenes in the drama of Jesus' suffering and death. Let's look at a few of those scenes and get some glimpses of Jesus through this story. Maybe we'll see something we haven't noticed before. Maybe we'll see some new way of living out what we already know.

Most of us don't need to be convinced that these events are real. But we do need to see what they mean for us and how they impact our lives.

Let's look first at Jesus' arrest (18:1-11). We see the sovereign majesty of Jesus in a difficult situation. With confusion and chaos all around, Jesus shows that he is in control. Judas the betrayer leads a crowd to the garden where Jesus has been praying. Jesus goes out to them and asks whom they are looking for. They say they are looking for Jesus of Nazareth.

"I am he," Jesus replies. He is doing more than simply identifying himself. This is the "I AM" phrase that is filled with the authority and power of God's self-disclosure.

Jesus speaks with that authority. He is revealing God. The power he shows causes the crowd of soldiers to fall back to the ground. This demonstration of power shows that Jesus is not a helpless victim but a willing sacrifice. Though he could have overwhelmed them with power, he willingly gives himself up to them. Salvation doesn't come through grand displays of power, but through sacrifice.

What a reminder this is for us. In the chaos of our lives, Jesus comes with his calmness, power and authority. We can trust him.

There's another interesting aspect of this arrest scene. Peter tries to defend Jesus. He pulls a sword and starts swinging it in that crowd. How foolish and absurd. Jesus doesn't need protecting. He has already shown that he has power to deal with the situation and he is going the way he has chosen.

The clumsiness of Peter's action is seen as he cuts off the right ear of a man named Malchus—purely by chance. Jesus puts a stop to Peter's swordplay. Then, according to Luke, Jesus' heals Malchus' ear. Then the disciples escape.

It's interesting that we know Malchus' name. It's also interesting that he was the servant of the high priest. Imagine Malchus and the others going back to Caiaphas the high priest to report on the arrest of Jesus.

Caiaphas asks, "How did it go?"

"Fine. We got him."

"Did you have any problems?"

"Well, Malchus had some trouble."

"What happened?"

"One of the followers of that man you sent us to arrest started swinging a sword and cut off my ear."

"But you've got both your ears now!"

"That's the problem! That man you sent us to arrest healed my ear." Malchus may have been wondering, "Do you think we arrested the right man?"

Now think about this—every day after the crucifixion when Caiaphas saw his servants, he saw Malchus and he saw that right ear and was reminded of Jesus. That healed ear was an unexpected and inescapable witness.

Dennis Kinlaw says that in every person's life, somewhere, there is a "Malchus' ear." Somewhere in your life there are obvious and inescapable reminders of God. It's very difficult to escape the witness of God. If we never yield to Christ we'll have to face that witness in the last judgment.

Let's move on. While Jesus is interrogated by the high priest and the Council, Peter is out in the courtyard warming himself by a charcoal fire and denying that he knows Jesus. He's doing what Jesus said he would, despite his protests that he would lay down his life for Jesus. On his own, Peter was unable to keep his brash promises.

What do we do when the pressure is on? Do we keep our promises to God or do we look for ways around them? Do we trust our own ability to keep our commitment or do we rely on the power of God's Spirit?

Then the Jewish leaders take Jesus to Pilate, the Roman Governor. They need him to pass the death sentence because the Jews at this time don't have authority to execute criminals.

After much questioning and debate, Pilate nervously gives in to the Jewish leaders' argument that Jesus is dangerous to Roman rule and he hands Jesus over to some soldiers for execution.

The Roman method of execution was crucifixion. The victim was fastened to a wooden cross with nails driven through the wrists and feet. Then the cross was lifted up and the person was left to die from exposure, blood loss and suffocation.

Let's get a glimpse of Jesus on the cross (19:19-24). The sign on the cross declared the charge against Jesus. But it spoke more truth than Pilate or the others realized. Jesus really is King. He rules from a cross.

John records the soldiers' gambling for Jesus' clothes as a fulfillment of Scripture (Ps. 22:18). Earlier, Jesus laid aside his outer clothes to serve as a slave washing the disciples' feet (13:4-5). Now he lays aside his clothes as he lays down his life.

A long time ago I copied a quotation about the cross. It comes from George MacLeod of a Christian community in Scotland:

I simply argue that the cross be raised again at the centre of the market place as well as on the steeple of the church. I am recovering the claim that Jesus was not crucified in a cathedral between two candles, but on a cross between two thieves; on the town garbage heap; at a crossroad so cosmopolitan that they had to write his title in Hebrew and in Latin and in Greek ... at the kind of place where

cynics talk smut, and thieves curse, and soldiers gamble. Because that is where he died. And that is what he died about. And that is where churchmen should be and what churchmen should be about. (quoted in R. Paul Stevens, *The Other Six Days*)

19:25-27 As Jesus gives himself for us, he gives us to each other. In this act of caring for his mother and this disciple, Jesus demonstrates Christian fellowship. To come to Jesus is to come into fellowship with each other on the level ground beneath the cross.

19:28-30 "I am thirsty." We see the reality of Jesus' humanity and suffering. He knows our need and our pain, our thirst.

"It is finished." Jesus completed his mission, the work the Father sent him to do.

Still in control, "He gave up his spirit." No one took his life. He laid it down willingly.

19:34-37 The blood and water flowing from his side again show the reality of Jesus' humanity and death. He came all the way to be with us and to be one of us. He went through everything, even death, for us to save us.

The blood of Jesus again reminds us that he is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world—including yours and mine. The water flowing from his side reminds us that he is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, who gives living water. He who thirsted on the cross is the source of living water that makes us never thirst.

An eyewitness encourages us to believe this account. Put your faith in the one who died for you. Trust him with your life and enter into a new life.