
Day 1

Learn: Prayerfully read John 19.16-18. Roman soldiers retained control of Jesus throughout the scene with Pilate and the crucifixion, so it is best to understand that Pilate turned Jesus over to the soldiers *for the benefit of* the religious leaders [*to honor their request*], so the soldiers took Jesus away. John did not mention a second whipping, but we know from the other gospels that Jesus suffered greatly before going to the cross. The custom was that those sentenced to die on the cross were whipped so badly that they often died before they got to the cross. As also was the custom, Jesus had to carry his own cross out of the city. The vertical portion of the cross was firmly planted in the ground, but the condemned carried the heavy horizontal crossbeam across their shoulders. Jesus was so weak from the whipping that he collapsed somewhere near the city gate, so the soldiers forced another man to carry the crossbeam [Matthew 27.32]. Jesus was crucified at a place known as “The Place of the Skull.” We are not sure why the place had this name, which was “Golgotha” [gol-goth-UH] in the local dialect of Aramaic. Interestingly, this place was *not* known as “Calvary,” as we sing in so many hymns: that term came from the King James Version, which mistakenly Anglicized the Latin word meaning “skull” [*calvaria*] in Luke 23.33 instead of translating it. We are not certain where exactly the site was, though it likely was a hill closely outside the walls of the city. Today two sites are championed as the location. Gordon’s Calvary is the type of place you would expect, but scholars favor where the Church of the Holy Sepulcher lies, though that ground has been so mutilated over the centuries and so built up today that it is impossible to perceive the hill and grave. Once at the place of crucifixion, the condemned would lie on the ground on his back, arms out; then the soldiers would attach his arms to the crossbeam with nails or ropes. The soldiers would haul the man with the crossbeam up to secure them in place on the vertical beam, attaching the feet with rope or nails. It was difficult to breathe in that position, so Jesus – though badly beaten to the point of collapse – would have to lift himself to take breath. The crucified could suffer like this for hours or even days.

Reflect: Movies, especially Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ* [which leaves the viewer in shock] often do a good job of conveying the physical torture involved in crucifixion, which was thought of as the most cruel form of execution in Roman times. And Jesus certainly suffered: he was beaten, whipped, whipped again to shreds, nailed to the cross, and left to die there struggling for breath. Yet when we talk about Jesus taking our punishment, this suffering and even his physical death are not what we mean. Yes, Jesus died for us, and physical death is part of our punishment for the sinfulness of mankind, but what Jesus did for us was even greater: he took on the spiritual condemnation we all deserve. When we physically die, we *should* go to Hell, a place without God where we would be eternally separated from God. Jesus somehow took that punishment for us on the cross, so that we could be forgiven. Put on some worship music and sing praises and thanks to Jesus; take some time to write a thank you note to him.

Day 2

Learn: Prayerfully read John 19.19-22. Pilate would not bother to do his own writing, but he ordered someone to write an inscription about the crime and put it on the cross, as was the custom. The inscription for Jesus said, “Jesus the Nazarene [from Nazareth], King of the Jews.” The Jewish religious leaders had used political pressure to force Pilate into condemning Jesus on the charge that Jesus was a rebel who claimed to be king, so Pilate indicated that on the sign; but Pilate probably also had an agenda in writing it. He viewed the accusation of the religious leaders as ridiculous and he resented being manipulated, so he wrote something he knew would upset them. This inscription emphasized the irony of the Jewish religious leaders siding with Caesar over someone who claimed to be their own king, and pointed out how seemingly helpless both Jesus and they were before the might of the Roman government. This is extra ironic, because – despite being rejected by his own people – Jesus really is God the Father’s chosen eternal king for the Jews. The inscription was in the local language of Aramaic, the official empire language of Latin, and the business language of the empire [leftover from the previous conqueror], Greek. Thus, all the Jews who had gathered in Jerusalem for the festival could understand the sign, regardless of what language they spoke best, and so the work of Pilate and the religious leaders served God’s cause to spread the word about the identity of Jesus and his crucifixion, laying the groundwork for when the apostles would soon start to spread the good news of the gospel.

Reflect: Americans often go bonkers over the celebrity of royal people, yet resent being lower in class or privilege, and often are suspicious of anyone who holds authority. The founders structured the US federal government with

limits to its own power and inalienable rights for its citizens. So it is hard for Americans to think about having a king, and even harder to like the idea. But what if the king were Jesus, the Son of God, who would be both benevolent and efficient in his governance. That would maximize our wellbeing, and indeed scripture foretells a kingdom of justice and peace [Isaiah 9.6-7]. Jesus right now knows everything about you and what is best for you, and he wants to bring you great blessing. Pray about being willing to submit to this king, now and when he returns.

Day 3

Learn: Prayerfully read John 19.23-24. It was accepted Roman practice for the soldiers overseeing a crucifixion to divide the condemned man's possessions among themselves. The garments easily divided likely were his outer robe, belt, sandals, and head covering. The "tunic" ["undergarment" in NIV; "robe" in NLT] was a long shirt worn close to the body, under the cloak. Jesus apparently had a really nice woven tunic, which they had removed before whipping him. So they agreed to play something like dice to see who got it. This fulfilled a prophecy in Psalm 22.18. This was a psalm written by King David about himself, but many of David's writings were thought to be prophecies about the coming Messiah-savior, who would be the ultimate king descended from David to rule in God's name. David probably meant this line of verse figuratively for his own situation, but it literally came true for Jesus.

Reflect: Psalm 22 [NASB] begins "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" But it ends with David praising God and prophesying that God would bring great deliverance to David and his people. So when Jesus quoted Psalm 22.1 as he was about to die on the cross [Matthew 27.46; Mark 15.34], what do you think was really in his mind, just verse 1 or how the psalm turns out? Why does it matter?

Day 4

Learn: Prayerfully read John 19.25-27. It is hard to tell in 19.25 how many women there are, but we think John listed four women to contrast the four soldiers. While the soldiers were barbaric and seeking to profit, the women were standing in faithful devotion. Jesus' mother was there. An otherwise unknown woman, Mary the wife of Clopas, was there. Mary from Magdala was there. Magdala was a small village on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, at the foot of Mt. Arbel. Not much is known about this Mary, just that she was an early believer in Jesus after he cast seven demons out of her [Luke 8.2]. Since Jesus' mother's sister is not named, some scholars speculate that this was John's mother [since John never names anyone in his family, not even his brother who was an apostle], thus making John the cousin of Jesus. In the other gospels, there is mention of a woman named Salome [Mark 15.40] and a woman identified as the mother of the sons of Zebedee [Matthew 27.56]; some believe these three women are the same. Even if John was related to Jesus, why would he care for Mary instead of Jesus' brothers? Within the next month, Jesus would appear in resurrected form to his brother James [1 Corinthians 15.7], with the result that his whole family came to faith and gathered with the earliest church to await the promised Holy Spirit after Jesus ascended to heaven [Acts 1.14], but for now his brothers were skeptics, while Mary and John believed.

Reflect: Even if Mary understood Jesus' identity and mission, it must have been hard to watch him in this tortured state. Once he started his ministry, Jesus was always distancing himself from his mother, but this was for her own good: she had to come to see him not only as a son, but as her personal savior. Think and pray today about Jesus being your personal savior: what does that mean to you? how does it make you feel? from what is Jesus saving you?

Day 5

Learn: Prayerfully read John 19.28-30. Jesus surely was desperately thirsty; but he also knew what prophecies needed fulfillment. This could refer to Psalm 22.15 [a psalm recently mentioned (day 3)] or Psalm 69.21 [a psalm cited in 2.17; 15.25]. John wanted readers to realize that everything was happening by God the Father's design and the Son's obedience. Even in death, Jesus gave up his spirit, it was not taken from him. In 19.28, Jesus reflected on how his earthly ministry was complete, so "the hour" really had come for his sacrifice. In 19.30, what Jesus said implies he had carried out his religious obligations, the work would be done in his death. The sour wine was cheap wine diluted with vinegar, which soldiers and slaves used to quench thirst better than water alone. A hyssop stalk would cradle the sponge; the soldiers lifted it over their heads to reach Jesus.

Reflect: Reflect on the control Jesus had to the end, and his willingness to suffer and die for you. Reflect on how the work is complete: what does that mean for your salvation?