

The Glory of the Cross (1)

The Setting of the Cross in John

It is instructive to compare and contrast the gospel records, especially in relation to the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The emphasis and theme of each gospel writer is different. **Matthew** focusses on the POWER and MAJESTY of the cross. The Sovereign dies and so creation goes into mourning. *Matthew 27.51-52: And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose.* Those who were watching 'feared greatly' (Matthew 27.54). **Mark** emphasises the PRECISION and ACTIVITY of the cross. The Perfect Servant is working everything according to the minutest detail of time. It is only Mark that records the Lord Jesus was crucified at the 'third hour' (Mark 15.25), also making reference to the 'sixth' and 'ninth' hours (Mark 15.33). He is particularly concerned with the activity of different individuals at the cross. Some are railing (they that passed by), others mocking (chief priests) and reviling (thieves), Mark 15.29, 31, 32. **Luke** speaks of the PITY and SYMPATHY of the cross. Only Luke records a 'great company of people and of women' which 'bewailed (mourned) and lamented (grieved)' as they followed Christ out to Calvary. Yet He says, 'Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves' (Luke 23.27-28). Only Luke records the great words of compassion from the cross, 'Father, forgive them' (Luke 23.34) and 'To day shalt thou be with me in Paradise' (Luke 23.43).

And what of **John**? The PROPHECY of the cross. John references *four* specific Scriptures, three of which were fulfilled.¹ He quotes from the Law (19.36; Exodus 12.46; Numbers 9.12), the Psalms (19.24, 28; Psalm 22.18; 69.21) and the Prophets (19.37, Zechariah 12.10). Furthermore, there is a contrast between Pilate and the soldiers, who unwittingly fulfil Scripture, and the Lord Jesus who knowingly fulfills Scripture (19.28). All then is *glory*. This is the Son of God, who, together with His Father, is in total control of every circumstance. Hence the word 'therefore' is used 14 times in the chapter. He is the Sovereign in total command. Though the Jews cried out for His crucifixion (19.15), Pilate delivered Him to be crucified (19.16) and the soldiers nailed Him to the cross (19.23), He is still the Good Shepherd voluntarily laying down life under His own authority. Even in terms of the sentence, He will not be stoned (as the manner of the Jews) but 'must be' lifted up (3.14). The GLORY of the cross. At the beginning of the second section of John's gospel (John 13-21, the book of *splendour*) we read: *Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him (13.31).* At the cross, the Son of Man was glorified by His submission unto death; God was glorified by the declaration of His holiness, righteousness, love and grace. Calvary was the arena in which God's glory was displayed. So, John does not mention **Gethsemane** by name (oil press), neither the Lord 'in an agony' (Luke 22.44). Instead Gethsemane is a 'garden' (18.1), emphasising fruit and fragrance. Judas and a band of men and officers come to the Light of the world with 'lanterns and torches', but Christ, knowing all things, goes out to meet them declaring 'I am', after which they went backward and fell to the ground (18.4-6). At **Golgotha** there is no record of Simon of Cyrene. Instead the Lord Jesus goes forth bearing the cross for Himself (19.17). He alone shouldered the wood (cp. Genesis 22.6) and the mighty load of our sins on the cross. John gives no record of the darkness or cry of abandonment for in his gospel the Son 'is not alone, because the Father is with' Him (16.32). Again, there is no rending of the veil for in John's gospel Christ Himself is the temple and cannot be broken (2.19). What's more, this is a gospel in which the Father is constantly being unveiled in His Son (14.7, 9).

The Scouring of the Soldiers (19.1-3)

v.1: 19.1 breaks into the account of the Roman trial. The Lord has already been before Annas (18.13), Caiaphas (18.24) and the Sanhedrin – the Jewish trial. From Pilate (18.28-38), He was taken to Herod (Luke 23.6-12) and now stands before Pilate for a second time. Christ has been rejected in favour of Barabbas (18.39-40) and is 'scourged'. Pilate has been seeking different ways to release the Lord Jesus, beginning with a *courtesy* (sending Him to Herod), then a *custom* (offering His release instead of Barabbas) and now *chastisement* which he thinks may meet the Jews' demand for punishment. He will later appeal to *compassion* (v.5). Both Matthew (27.27-31) and Mark (15.16-20) place the scourging and mocking of the soldiers *after* Pilate's final verdict. But, it is quite possible the Lord Jesus was scourged twice (privately and publically). There were three forms of flogging administered by the Romans, and this first occasion was likely the less severe *fustigation*. This was a beating for small offences, often accompanied by a severe warning. The second scourging (Matthew 27.27; Mark 15.16) was before the whole band (600 troops) and likely the most severe *verberatio*, which was often associated with crucifixion. It was designed to hasten death and often caused death itself. Jewish scourging was limited to 40 stripes (Deuteronomy 25.3), but Roman scourging had no limit. The victim was tied to a pillar or post and beaten with a whip with a short wooden handle and leather thongs interspersed with jagged pieces of iron or bone. *MacArthur: The body could be so torn and lacerated that the muscles, bones, veins, or even internal organs were exposed. So horrible was this punishment that Roman citizens were exempt from it (cf. Acts 22:25).*

¹ Zechariah 12.10 is referenced in John 19.37 as 'another scripture saith'. It is not spoken of as 'fulfilled' because its ultimate fulfilment awaits a future day.

v.2: Whenever a person was delivered to Roman soldiers for scourging they would engage in ‘barrack-room sport’ with their victim. As Christ was accused of being a king, they made Him a ‘mock king’. He was given a mock crown, sceptre, robe, homage (19.3) and anointing (Matthew 26.67, 27.30). What a contrast to the Second Advent. Then the Lord’s Anointed (Psalm 2.2) will come forth from Heaven as the King of Kings. He will have ‘many crowns’ on His head (Revelation 19.12), wear a vesture dipped in blood and wield a rod of iron (Psalm 2.8; 110.5). There will be no mock worship then. Every knee shall bow (Philippians 2.10-11). The ‘crown of thorns’ was possibly composed of branches twisted together from the date palm (3-4 inch spines) which was well adapted to imitate the radiate crowns worn by Roman emperors (symbolising the power of rule). Thorns resulted from the curse (Genesis 3.18), which curse was born by Christ. The ‘purple robe’ was probably a military cloak, purple being the colour of Roman imperialism. The Brazen Altar was covered with a purple cloth when carried in the Wilderness (Numbers 4.13). Now the Saviour, of whom the altar speaks, is covered with a purple robe making His way to the place of sacrifice. Note. The Lord Jesus was also arrayed in ‘gorgeous’ (Luke 23.11, bright or glistening) and ‘scarlet’ robes (Matthew 27.28). **v.3:** Roman emperors were generally greeted with ‘Ave Caesar’ and a kiss of loyalty. In imitation mock worship, the soldiers cry ‘Hail, King of the Jews’ and slap Him with the flat of the hand (*rhapismata*, used in Isaiah 50.6 LXX). Note. John strongly emphasises the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus, using the word ‘king’ *twelve* times in John 18-19. He is the *ridiculed* king (vv.2-3); *rejected* king (v.15); *revealed* king (v.19) and *recognised* king (v.38) – acting in supreme control of every event.

The Scrutiny of Pilate (19.4-12)

v.4: Pilate ‘went forth again’ hoping to secure a more compassionate response from the Jews. His constant movement from the ‘judgment hall’ (Praetorium) to the Jews (colonnade) becomes a symbol of his judicial weakness (cf. 18.28, 33, 38; 19.1, 4, 8, 12). According to Philo, Herod’s palace (rather than the Fortress of Antonia) was the normal place of residence for Roman governors (cf. Mark 15.16, ‘hall’ is the word ‘palace’). This is the first of three statements made by Pilate using the word ‘behold’. In each he unwittingly quotes from the prophecy of Zechariah, showing that a Divine hand was moving behind the scenes. ‘Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him’ quotes from Zechariah 3.8 and presents Christ *morally*. In v.5, ‘Behold the man!’ is Christ *personally* (Zechariah 6.12). ‘Behold your king’ (v.14) is Christ *officially* (Zechariah 9.9).

Three times Pilate declares that he finds no fault in Christ (cf. 18.38, 19.6). This is the Roman governor’s response to the threefold political accusation the Jews brought against Christ. Luke 23.2 shows that Christ was accused of: **1.** ‘Perverting’ (misleading) the nation and disturbing the religious peace. But this Man has only ever spoken truth and came to ‘guide our feet into the way of peace’ (Luke 1.79). **2.** ‘Forbidding to give tribute to Caesar’ and therefore was a financial risk to Pilate and the Roman Empire (but see Luke 20.24-25). **3.** That He was Christ (anointed one) and therefore a *political* ‘King’ – a potential rebel against Caesar’s rule. But the kingdom of the Lord Jesus is not of this world (18.36) and when Galilean Jews sought to make Him a king ‘by force’, He departed into a mountain alone (6.15).

It is remarkable that the scenes around Calvary produce a seven-fold declaration of the moral perfection of Christ. Judas had betrayed ‘the innocent blood’ (Matthew 27.4). Herod found ‘nothing worthy of death’ (Luke 23.15). Pilate’s wife declared Him a ‘just man’ (Matthew 27.19). The thief said He had done ‘nothing amiss’ (Luke 23.41). The Centurion recognised He was a ‘righteous man’ (Luke 23.47) and, together with others, the ‘Son of God’ (Matthew 27.54). Not least, Pilate declares three times, ‘no fault’! Even the basest of men could see what the Jews *refused* to see. Pilate could declare what he *did not* find in Christ. Positively, what *do we* find in Christ? What is our appreciation of Him? This is life’s purpose, and defines all we are in character and service for Him.

