

The Glory of the Cross (2)

The Scrutiny of Pilate (19.4-12)

v.5: In an unwitting reference to Zechariah 6.12, Pilate presents the Lord Jesus as 'the man'. Rather than *admiration*, he is probably appealing to the Jews' *compassion* following the scourging. Hadn't He suffered enough? 'Behold the man' reminds the reader of John's emphasis on the manhood of Christ (cf. 1.14, 30; 4.29; 7.46; 9.11) and the disdainful references to 'this man', often by the Jewish authorities (5.12; 9.16; 11.47, 50; 18.17). There are also two clear links to the OT. **1.** *Genesis 3.22: The LORD God said, Behold, the man (Adam) is become as one of us, to know good and evil (moral discernment).* Now roles are reversed! God has become one of us to deal with the sin of the world. **2.** *1 Samuel 9.17: When Samuel saw Saul, the LORD said unto him, Behold the man whom I spake to thee of! this same shall reign over my people.* Israel demanded a king to be like the nations, now they are rejecting the One to whom they all pointed.

v.6: In Mark (15.13-14) the cry for crucifixion comes from the crowd (people). In John it is the Jerusalem elite, later called 'the Jews' (v.7). The 'chief priests' were a group of individuals in charge of temple worship in Jerusalem, and regarded as leading representatives of the Jewish people. The 'officers' were the personal servants of the priests. Their response to Pilate's presentation of the man is 'crucify!' which constitutes a demand (imperative). The Lord Jesus was thus first rejected as the *Son of Man* (19.4-6), then the *Son of God* (19.7-12) and finally as the *Son of David* (19.13-15). The Jews had brought Christ to Pilate for trial, but they would not accept his judgment of 'no fault'. With a sarcastic taunt he mocks the Jews' impotency to crucify Him themselves (cf. 18.31). **v.7:** Recognising their political charges have failed, the Jews revert to a different course of action by referring to their law (Leviticus 24.16). Their real complaint was 'He made Himself the Son of God'. *Phillips: He did no such thing! He did not make himself the Son of God. He truly is the Son of God.* As Pilate was responsible for maintaining local law and keeping the peace, this was a charge that must be taken seriously. **v.8:** Pilate's fear may have been *superstitious*. The Romans were absorbed with myths of 'deities' appearing in human form and wielding supernatural powers. Pilate had clearly seen enough of the Lord Jesus to recognise there was something very different about Him, not to mention the message from his wife (Matthew 27.19). Alternatively, Pilate may have been fearful for *political* reasons. The recent (AD 31) execution of his mentor and supporter in Rome (Aelius Sejanus) left his position tenuous, and any unrest in Jerusalem would make matters worse.

v.9: Returning again to the Praetorium, Pilate presents the *sixth* of seven questions to the Lord (cf. 18.33, 35, 37, 38; 19.9, 10). If Christ was a 'god' where was He from? This is a familiar question in John's gospel (cf. 2.9; 3.8; 4.11; 7.27, 28; 8.14; 9.29, 30) which now reaches a climactic pinnacle. The Lord gives no answer (Isaiah 53.7). Pilate's question was not the cry of an earnest soul genuinely seeking the truth, else further light would have been given. He had shown no interest in real understanding, and, having heard the truth, rejected it (18.36-37) – thus the Lord remains silent. **v.10:** The verse literally reads: 'To *me* are you not speaking?' He was the great governor of Judea, the representative of Caesar Augustus. Did this Man not realise he had the authority to crucify or release Him? **v.11:** Pilate's authority, and that of Rome, was God ordained (Romans 13.1). In John's gospel, Christ has authority in the realm of salvation (1.12), judgment (5.28) and life and death (10.18). Pilate has authority in civic matters – but only as given by God Himself. The greater sin (Pilate is still implicated) lies with 'the one' who instigated legal proceedings against Christ in the first place. Therefore, the one that delivered the Lord to Pilate is probably not Judas but Caiaphas, the High Priest, acting as the representative of the nation. **v.12:** Pilate is again convinced of the Lord's innocence, and continues to seek His release. In a final move of desperation, the Jews threaten to bring the matter to Caesar's attention. 'Caesar's friend' was a '*special designation for those close to the ruler. Roman emperors conferred 'friendship' on trusted associates, from whom they drew their primary advisors*' (Keener). It is possible Pilate had attained, or hoped to attain such a title, but he could not keep it if Rome thought he had released a challenger to Caesar's rule. This would be tantamount to treason.

The Sentence of Gabbatha (19.13-16)

v.13: Pilate had to choose between Christ and the world. He preferred friendship with Caesar (cf. James 4.4). Rather than sacrificing himself for Christ, he sacrificed Christ for himself. Pilate's mind was made up. Sitting on the 'judgment seat' (*bema*), he brought Christ forth to pronounce his verdict, ironically, on the One to whom the Father has entrusted all judgment (5.22). Strangely, the Greek verb allows the object of 'sat down' to refer either to Pilate or Christ. Whilst unlikely, it could be that Pilate made one final mocking gesture, seating Christ on the judgment seat and declaring 'Behold your king!' (confirmed by Justin Martyr, a second century Christian writer). The symbolic picture is that of Christ sitting enthroned as His accusers' Judge – a picture which becomes reality at the Great White Throne. The *bema* was located in a place called the 'Pavement' (*lithostrotos*), or in Hebrew, *Gabbatha* (high place). This would have been located in front of the governor's residence and likely made of large paved or mosaic stones. **v.14:** The day was Friday,

being the preparation day (for the Sabbath) of Passover week. Ironically, this was the period when all leaven was removed from houses (Exodus 12.15) and yet the Jews were busy seeking to purge their nation of the Person who is the fine flour (Leviticus 2). John's reference to the 'sixth hour' is in direct conflict with Mark (15.25) who says Christ was crucified at the 'third hour' (9am). However, a simple explanation is that John is using Roman time (rather than Jewish time), especially when it is considered that he is describing the events of a Roman court. By this reckoning the sixth hour would be 6am.¹ 'Behold your King!' is one of four great 'behold' statements, each one corresponding to a gospel record (cf. Isaiah 40.9; Isaiah 42.1; John 19.5, 14). **v.15:** The cross highlights the depravity of mankind. There is the apostasy of the Jews in denying their Messiah and declaring allegiance to a Gentile king (v.15) and the total break-down of Gentile government by delivering to be crucified One in whom there is 'no fault' (v.16). In declaring 'we have no king but Caesar', the Jews were abandoning any messianic hope and the kingship of Jehovah Himself (Judges 8.23; 1 Samuel 8.7). Hosea had declared '*the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince*' (Hosea 3.4), and now they have deliberately accepted Gentile rule. Their true loyalties were evident. *Pink: Throwing off any and all allegiance to Christ and making allegiance to Caesar. This is man's religion, and it will, in the end, enthrone 'the Wilful One' and bow to his image* (cf. Revelation 13.8). **v.16:** At this point Pilate 'washed his hands' of the verdict and delivered Him up to the soldiers for public scourging, mockery and crucifixion (Matthew 27.24-31). Ultimately, God, not Pilate, delivered Him up for our *sins* (Romans 4.25, 8.32) and Christ delivered up Himself for me (Galatians 2.20). The Lamb of God was willingly 'led away' (Isaiah 53.7). He was neither driven nor dragged, for He made no resistance (AW Pink).

The Spectacle of the Cross (19.17-18)

v.17: Only John tells us the Lord Jesus bore His *own* cross. Christendom portrays Christ as stumbling beneath the cross. Scripture knows nothing of the sort. In fact, it is the opposite. The Greek literally reads, 'bearing the cross for Himself'. This is the strong Son of God going forth to do his Father's will. Men were often whipped into subjection to carry their crosses, but not the Good Shepherd. It is possible the Romans were ashamed that One who had been subjected to *two* of their brutal scourgings could bear the cross with such strength. Hence they 'compelled' (forced) Simon, a black man, to bear it instead and alleviate their embarrassment (Matthew 27.32).

The 'cross' is this world's verdict on the Son of God. The symbol of the cross is therefore the condemnation of the world. When a believer confesses Christ as Lord, they sever allegiance with the world and disassociate themselves with its verdict. The world is nothing to them, and they are nothing to the world. *Galatians 6.14: God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.* The Lord Jesus 'went forth' outside the city of Jerusalem just as the types had taught – the sin offering on the Day of Atonement was carried forth without the camp (Leviticus 16.27). Reference to the Lord Jesus 'suffering without the gate' is made in Hebrews 13.12. The background is Exodus 33 where, for the idolatry of Israel with the golden calf, Moses erected a tent outside the camp. All who 'desired' the presence of the Lord must go out to Him. The camp of Israel had rejected Christ; the presence of God was without. Though bringing the rejection of society and reproach of men, the writer to the Hebrews was exhorting them to abandon Judaism and separate unto Christ. The command has not changed. God still calls us to separate from the camp of organised and ordered religion, gathering out to the Person and Name of the Lord Jesus. This is where the presence of God remains. The Lord Jesus went forth into the 'place of a skull', being *Golgotha* (Hebrew), or *Calvary* (Latin). It may have been given this name because it was a well-known place of execution, but Scripture records that David brought Goliath's head to Jerusalem (1 Samuel 17.54). Tradition says he buried it in a place which he called 'Gal-Goliath', known today as Golgotha (cf. Hebrews 2.14). Spiritually, the place of a skull is a witness to the moral condition of the world – subject to death through sin. Golgotha also declares the emptiness of human intelligence and schemes to find satisfaction and salvation apart from God. *'The emptiness of man's wisdom in crucifying the Lord of Glory. The cross provides an answer to man's wisdom in its search for God'* (Leckie).

v.18: The Lord Jesus was crucified, 'and two other with Him'. The word 'other' (*allos*) means others of the same kind, i.e. *physically* they were treated the same way. Christ was numbered with the transgressors (Isaiah 53.12). Luke, however, employs the word *heteros* (Luke 23.32), meaning others of a different kind, i.e. *morally* in contrast to the malefactors. As ever, John emphasises the supremacy of the Lord Jesus. He was 'in the midst'. In terms of crucifixion, this was the place of greatest shame; the place of the chief sinner. Today the Lord Jesus deigns to presence Himself in the midst of His gathered people – the place of glory and pre-eminence. His rightful place is ever in the midst, collectively and personally. As a **child**, He sat in the *midst* of the doctors (Luke 2.46). As the risen **Christ**, He came and stood in the *midst* of His own (John 20.19, 26). As **Priest**, He walks in the *midst* of the golden lampstands (Revelation 1.13). As the **Lamb**, He *stands* in the midst of the throne (Revelation 5.6). As **Lord**, He *dwells* in the midst of His own (Matthew 18.20).

¹ See John Heading's volume on 'John' in *What the Bible Teaches* for an alternative, but less satisfactory explanation.