

The Glory of the Cross (3)

The Superscription over the Cross (19.19-22)

v.19: Only John calls the writing above the cross a 'title'. Matthew speaks of an 'accusation' (charge); Luke a 'superscription' (to write over, a notice). The purpose of such writing was a public declaration of the crime for which the person was crucified. But, as far as John is concerned, there is no crime to record or answer. This is therefore a title – something that cannot be changed (cf. **v.22**) – He **is** Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. John's gospel is full of such titles: Lamb of God (1.29, 36); King of Israel (1.49); Son of God (1.49); the Christ (4.29); Saviour of the world (4.42) and Son of the Living God (6.69). John records the fullest superscription of the gospel records: '*Jesus (humanity) of Nazareth (humility), the King (royalty) of the Jews (nationality)*'. This title answers the first question found in the gospels: 'Where is he that is born King of the Jews?' (Matthew 2.2). On that occasion, in Bethlehem, He neither looked like a King, nor was found in the place of a King. The same can be said here at Calvary. The King is on the cross. It is marvellous to think that the despised Jesus of Nazareth is now seated in the highest place that heaven affords (Acts 22.8).

v.20: The title was written in three languages. *Hebrew* was the language of Judea and represents the *religion* of the world. *Greek* was the common language of the Roman empire and represents the *wisdom, culture* and *commerce* of the world. *Latin* was the *lingua franca* of the army and local government thus representing the *power* and *politics* of the world. All in all, John is painting a picture of universality. The whole world was arrayed against God and his Christ. *Acts 4.26-27: The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate (Latin), with the Gentiles (Greek), and the people of Israel (Hebrew), were gathered together.* If the whole world was involved in the guilt of His death, praise God the whole world is involved in the grace of His death. *Revelation 5.9: Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, tongue, people, and nation.* According to Colossians 2.14, there was another superscription on the cross, unseen by human eyes – the handwriting of ordinances that was contrary (hostile) to us. Whilst Paul is thinking primarily of Jewish believers who once were under the law, it is most blessed to know that the record of our sins has been obliterated by nailing it to His cross.



The Soldiers at the Cross (19.23-24)

v.23: There are three references to garments in John 19. The mock royal robe was the garment of a *king* (19.2). The body of the Lord Jesus was wound in linen clothes, the typical garb of the *priest* (19.40). Such clothes were laid aside on resurrection day as the work of propitiation was complete (20.5; cf. Leviticus 16.23). Now his garments are associated with *prophecy* – that the Scripture might be fulfilled (**v.24**). Garments that were once willingly laid aside (13.4), are now taken by the soldiers. The confiscation of goods was a common penalty attending execution (Keener). The Romans normally crucified their victims naked, rarely affording the dignity of a loincloth (cp. Genesis 3.9-11, 21). It seems the Lord Jesus had *five* items of clothing: sandals, a head-piece, an outer robe, girdle and 'the (inner) coat'. The first four items were distributed amongst the four soldiers (quaternion). The inner coat was recognised as being particularly valuable and thus lots were cast to see whose it would be. All this was in fulfilment of Scripture (Psalm 22.18).

Garments in Scripture speak of *character*. Think of His perfect *walk*, as illustrated by the **sandals** (cf. Luke 3.16). *A perfect path of purest grace, Unblemished and complete, Was Thine, Thou spotless Nazarite, Pure, even to the feet.* And yet we ought to walk, habitually, even as He walked (1 John 2.6). His manner of life is a pattern for us. His **head-piece** suggests a mind that was always focussed on the things of others (Philippians 2). Indeed, a mind that was determined to be obedient to His Father's will, despite the cost (1 Peter 4.1). The **outer robe** tells of His moral beauty and character. Perhaps it was still fragrant with the spikenard of Mary of Bethany (Mark 14.3). Thus, every believer is to be characterised by the same moral beauty as Him, clothed with Christ like as a garment (Romans 13.14). The **girdle** speaks of His faithful and humble service (John 13.4). Here is One who was ever marked by righteousness and faithfulness (Isaiah 11.5). The '**coat**' was a seamless undergarment, worn close to the skin and conjures a myriad of precious

thoughts – not least the uniqueness of His person. The fact it was *seamless* contrasts the first garments (or ‘aprons’) in Scripture which were a patchwork of fig leaves, full of seams (Genesis 3.7). Here is One without spot or blemish. Being *woven* suggests His perfect humanity blended with the fullness of deity – a major theme of John’s gospel (cp. 1.1, 14). The Lord Jesus is one, complete and perfect person. Let us not rend it! The word ‘woven’ is unique in the NT, but is used in the LXX of the High Priest’s robe of the ephod which was ‘all of blue’ (Exodus 39.22). Presumably this is the garment Caiaphas wore and subsequently rent before the Sanhedrin (Matthew 26.65). This was a highly symbolic act, suggesting his ministry as High Priest was over. He was going out, but Another was going in (Hebrews 9.12, 24). The inner coat is also a picture of one who was seamless and unbroken in His service (17.4, cp. 21.7).

Standing by the Cross (19.25)

v.25: The word ‘now’ can be translated ‘but’ and affords a contrast between the four soldiers and four women. The soldiers were at the cross because their *duty* demanded it. These women were there out of a sense of *devotion*. Comparing the gospel records suggests the women were: **Mary** (the Lord’s mother), **Salome** (the sister of Mary and mother of John), **Mary** (wife of Cleopas, by tradition, the brother of Joseph) and **Mary Magdalene**. There are therefore *seven* individuals recorded by John in association with the cross (including John himself, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, vv.38-39). Luke also records *seven* individuals in relation to the birth of Christ (cf. Luke 1-2, cp. Luke 3.1-2). Here is a precious and faithful remnant attending both to His birth and His death. It is not popular to stand in public association with a rejected King. These individuals did (*seven* women and *seven* men in total) and so should we – not just in relation to His person, but also His teaching. Doctrines such as headship and the rapture are much maligned today. Luke 23.49 shows that later in the day these women ‘stood afar off’. It seems likely then, that during the hours of darkness, they had drawn back from the awfulness of the scene.

The Sayings from the Cross (19.26-30)

v.26: It is worth noting the contrast between John and Peter. In just a few verses time they will be seen running ‘together’ (20.4), but now John is alone (apart from the women), ‘standing by’ the cross. Peter had earlier followed ‘afar off’ to the High Priest’s palace (Luke 22.54), but now is nowhere to be seen. What made the difference? Just a few hours before John had leaned into the bosom of the Lord Jesus enjoying the intimacy of fellowship with Him (13.23). Peter, however, stood with the crowd and warmed himself by the world’s fires. Sadly, many saints are like Peter today, often standing on the edge of assembly fellowship and activities. The reason maybe that they are too close to the world’s fires and not close enough to the bosom of the Lord.

A cry of sympathy. In all the distress of the circumstances attending the cross, ‘Jesus saw His mother’. He no doubt saw the ‘sword’ that was piercing her own soul (Luke 2.35) and indeed her *suffering* and *sorrow*. How blessed to consider the caring and compassionate gaze of the Saviour. He also saw His disciples toiling in *service* (Mark 6) as well as the *sacrifice* of the widow’s two mites (Luke 21). He still sees the same from heaven today and graciously makes provision for our need. John would take Mary away from the cross and spare her the worst of the scene.

The Lord addresses His mother as ‘woman’ – a term of tenderness and dignity. The words ‘behold thy son’ was a legal form of address. He was passing responsibility of His mother’s welfare into the hands of His cousin John (Mary’s nephew). The Lord’s earthly brothers (James, Joses, Jude and Simon) did not yet believe (7.5). **v.27:** In early days, John had forsaken a father *for* Christ (Matthew 4.22). Now he receives a mother *from* Christ. This was, of course, no burden but a great privilege. Discussions between the two must have been profound! Notice that this privilege and responsibility in service was given to one who was close to the Lord – the disciple ‘whom He loved’. The obedience of John was full, total and immediate. ‘From that hour’ he took her ‘unto his own home’ (literally, ‘into his own things’). Presumably John had lodgings in Jerusalem to which he immediately took Mary. Apart from the spiritual reason (16.32), this explains why John does not record the hours of darkness. Roman Catholic teaching declares Mary the ‘co-redemptrix’, making her as much our redeemer as Christ. No wonder God in his providence took Mary from the cross! John furnishes us with a perfect example of obedience in relation to the word of Christ. Not only was it immediate, but Mary became part and parcel of his life and living. So the word of God should not only be immediately and fully obeyed, but become part of our lives and practice (James 1.22).

There was not much in this world the Lord Jesus could call His own. We read of *His* disciples, but they had all forsook Him and fled (Matthew 26.56). *His* garments had been divided and given to others (v.23). *His* mother is now committed into the care of the Apostle John. All He has left is Himself. And yet, He loved me and *gave Himself* for me (Galatians 2.20).