



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

John 19: 16-25

Summer 2023

"Jesus Crucified"

TRANSCRIPT

Good morning. Well we have sung our first hymn about the cross, and now we're going to read about the cross; for that's where we come to, here in John's Gospel, chapter 19, beginning with verse 16 down through verse 24. In fact, I think I'll read the beginning of verse 25 as well. John 19, beginning with verse 16,

¹⁶ So he then handed Him over to them to be crucified.

¹⁷ They took Jesus, therefore, and He went out, bearing His own cross, to the place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha. ¹⁸ There they crucified Him, and with Him two other men, one on either side, and Jesus in between. ¹⁹ Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It was written, "JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS." ²⁰ Therefore many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Latin *and* in Greek. ²¹ So the chief priests of the Jews were saying to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews'; but that He said, 'I am King of the Jews.'" ²² Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

²³ Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His outer garments and made four parts, a part to every soldier and *also* the tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece. ²⁴ So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, *to decide* whose it shall be"; *this was* to fulfill the Scripture: "They divided My outer

garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.” ²⁵ Therefore the soldiers did these things.

John 19: 16-25

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word, and may He bless our time of study in it together. Let's bow together in prayer.

LORD, we do ask Your blessing upon us. We come before You, and in doing that come into Your throne room, come to the throne of grace. This is not a perfunctory thing. This is Your people, Your saints coming to You actually, really, through prayer to seek help for ourselves at this time—help to understand the things that we've read and to request that the Spirit of God open our eyes, illumine our minds, help us to understand the things that we will study, and how they apply to us.

Father, this is a very important time in the week for each one of us when we deal with the Word of God. I've said it before, it can be said every Sunday, every day, the Word of God is unique; it's Your revelation and You've given it to us. It is the most precious possession we have. But we're not adequate for it. Only the teacher, the Spirit of God, is and we pray for His ministry to clarify and apply the things that we've read and what we will study. We look to You to bless us, Father.

And what a privilege we have to do this. We were reminded from 1st Peter, chapter 2 this morning that we are priests. We are priests of the Lord God and we have this great priestly ministry this morning, each one of us, every day for that matter: and that is this opportunity to pray—to pray for one another, to praise You. And to thank You for Your grace and Your mercy. We have much to pray about spiritually. We pray for that. We pray You'd bless us spiritually, and build us up in the faith and nourish us through Your Word.

You know our needs. You know the needs that we have personally, the needs we have within our families. We pray Your rich blessing upon all of those who are in difficulty one way or another, whatever it may be, and that You would bless and

encourage and build us up in the faith; strengthen all of us, Father. And equip us for the week ahead and the opportunities of ministry that You'll give us. And so we pray for that—and pray that this time will be to that end, that You would build us up in the faith. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

(Message) When we think of the Middle Ages, we think 'Dark Ages'—when learning and progress stopped. That's not really true. There were some bright lights then. One of them was the theologian Anselm, who in the 11th century wrote a book titled, *Why Did God Become Man?* Now there's not a more enlightened question than that; 'Why did God become man?' The apostle John said He did: His Gospel begins, "The Word was with God, and the Word was God", (Jn 1:1), and, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." (Jn 1:14). But why did He become flesh?

The answer's not hard to find. A few verses later, John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn 1:29). God became man to become a lamb—to become a sacrifice for sinners by offering Himself up on the cross. The cross is the reason for the incarnation. —Christ came to die. J. I. Packer said, "To understand the significance of the cradle at Bethlehem, you must first understand the cross at Calvary."

From the first book of the Bible when Able offered a lamb to God, to the last book where Christ is seen in heaven as "a Lamb standing as if slain", (Rev 5:6), as a sacrifice, the cross is the theme—the center of Scripture, from beginning to end. This is the turning point of history—and it is to the cross that we now come in John 19.

Jesus has been pronounced innocent three times by His Gentile judge—but the crowd still cried out, "Crucify, crucify!" (vs9). Pilate yielded to their demand. Verse 16 states, "He handed Him over to them to be crucified." Grammatically, the pronoun, *them* should refer to the Jewish priests; but we know the crucifixion was carried out by the Romans, so John may have been referring to them.

But it's not clear, and it raises the question, 'Who killed Christ, the Jews or the Gentiles?' Down through the centuries, the Jews have been accused of deicide, and called 'Christ Killers'. That became an excuse for persecuting the Jews and for antisemitism—which exposed people's ignorance of Christ's death and was used by "the enemy" to tarnish the Gospel.

Christian theology is clear, and we must never forget that it insists, (as Don Carson wrote), that, "Each of us is as guilty of putting Jesus on the cross as Caiaphas." So it may be that John deliberately made this reference to *'them'* ambiguous, so that it would allow for all of the groups involved to be included—and not restricted to one. Each one of us can say, "My sin put Him on the cross."

Now that doesn't mitigate the guilt of Caiaphas and Pilate or the guilt of the crowd and the soldiers. But it does give us the reason for the cross. It's because of sin, the sin of the world—my sin, your sin. And that means there was a purpose for the cross. It was not, as so many consider it, 'A tragic mistake of history.' Christ came for this very purpose, which takes us back into the eternal council of the Godhead. And it is there that we find the ultimate answer to the question: 'Who killed Christ?'

God the Father offered up His Son for us. That's the testimony of Scripture from the Old Testament to the New. Isaiah 53, verse 10, "The LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief." Psalm 22, verse 15, "You lay me in the dust of death." In Matthew 20, verse 28, Jesus said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." The Son of God willingly offered Himself up; that was His mission. He is the Lamb slain from "the foundation of the world." (Rev 13:8).

'Christ crucified' was planned from all eternity because it was the only solution for the human condition. And every detail here in chapter 19 shows that it all happened according to God's purpose. That's clear, first from the way Christ went to the cross: No bull or goat ever went to the altar willingly, but Christ went to Calvary voluntarily, bearing His own cross.

We know that He went as far as the city gate before stumbling under the weight of the cross; that's when the Romans made Simon of Cyrene carry it the rest of the way. The other Gospels record that as well—but John doesn't. The reason he omitted it is because he wanted to focus on Jesus' command of the situation and emphasize His resolve to offer Himself up. He did this willingly; He did it in obedience to His Father's plan, bearing His own cross—just as Isaac carried the wood of his own sacrifice up to Mount Moriah.

Many Christians, from the time of the church fathers in the second century have seen Jesus as the antitype of Isaac—the fulfillment of Isaac. What Isaac *pictured* is fulfilled in Him: Carrying the wood on which He would be offered up. In fact, one rabbinical commentary on Genesis 22 described Isaac carrying the wood as, “One carries the cross on his shoulder.”

There are a great many similarities between Abraham offering Isaac, (his only son whom he loved), and the Father offering Jesus, His only begotten Son whom He loved. You read the two accounts, you see the similarities—but there's also major differences. Abraham was spared sacrificing his son; and offered up a ram as a substitute. But there was no substitute for Christ; the Father had to sacrifice His Son if He were going to save His people.

And so we read He went out, “bearing His own cross.” (vs17). No one else could bear His own cross. This was His mission, what's been called, ‘His particular piece of work.’ According to tradition, His path was the *Via Dolorosa*, the ‘*Sorrowful Way*’, through the city of Jerusalem and out the city gate to, “the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha.” (vs17b).

Why was it called a skull? That's not known, though there are traditions to explain it—most commonly that, ‘it was a hill in the shape of a skull’. And so we have our hymns in which we sing; “On a hill far away.” Another tradition is that the skulls of

criminals lay there—which is unlikely, as is the old tradition that that is where Adam was buried—and the place where his skull was found.

So whatever the reason, *Golgotha* is a fitting name for a place of execution, especially this form of execution. The Roman statesman, Cicero, called crucifixion, "The cruelest and foulest of punishments." It was reserved for the very worst of criminals. It was death by torture.

An interesting archaeological discovery was made in the northern part of Jerusalem in 1968, on what is known as "Ammunition Hill", (which was the sight of a famous battle just a year before that, in the Six Day War). Today it's a park where children play. But they made this very interesting discovery there. It's the remains of a man who was about 25 to 29 years old, who had been fastened to a cross by one nail through each forearm, and then a nail through both heels together.

You can see this in the Israel Museum there in Jerusalem. It's in a Plexiglass case, as I remember: There's the heel bone with a rusty nail in it. And all of that is to say, this was a horrific form of execution, designed to result in a protracted, prolonged death—a tortuous death.

But John didn't give gruesome details; rather he described it with one word—"They crucified Him", (and in the Greek, that's one word). Leon Morris commented that "The popular piety with both Protestants and Catholics has tended to dwell on the anguish He suffered physically, (which was real, which was acute), but the Gospel writers didn't do that. Their interest was the death of Jesus for men, that is mankind, for people." As Morris put it, "They made no attempt to play on the heartstrings of their readers."

The women along the way to Golgotha wept, you'll remember. Luke records this in his Gospel in chapter 23. They were touched deeply by the sight of His physical appearance and the pain that He was suffering.

But that didn't save them. As excruciating as His physical suffering was, that wasn't the greatest suffering of the cross—it was spiritual. And it was beyond comprehension; it's what has been called, "The unknown sufferings of our Lord."

It's been said that, 'Only the damned in hell know what Jesus suffered when He died on the cross, because He suffered eternal death.' He suffered hell on our behalf; and yet, not even 'the damned' could know it because their suffering is deserved. Christ's was completely undeserved.

He's the perfect Son of Man; and they'd never been to heaven. They had never known what fellowship God the Father and God the Son had. So they cannot know what He lost when He was separated from Him on the cross. No one can. They were 'unknown sufferings'—sufferings of the soul, which are essential for our salvation. Calvin wrote, "If Christ had died only a bodily death, it would have been ineffective. Unless His soul shared in the punishment, He would have been the redeemer of bodies alone."

So John didn't emphasize the physical aspect of the cross. He gave the circumstances of Christ's death to show the fact of it, to show the history of it. It is a real event, an historical event. It happened; and he shows the indignity of it. But he did that, again, to demonstrate the divine purpose in it: It was the suffering of a sacrifice for us—and it was of God; it was His plan.

We see all of that in the first detail that's given in verse 17: That Jesus, "went out bearing His cross." Going out of the city recalled the sacrifices of the Old Testament; because on the Day of Atonement, for example, the bodies of the animals sacrificed were burned outside the camp of Israel. The red heifer, which was a sin offering, was sacrificed outside the camp. That signified the removal of sin from Israel and it showed the disgraceful character of sin. The dead animal was unclean—and cast out. So Jesus, "going out bearing His cross", signified the kind of death He died. It was a sacrificial death. It was a sin offering—a death that would remove the sin of His people.

And the shame associated with His crucifixion is also indicated by His companions in death. He was crucified with, "two other men, one on either side, and

Jesus in between." (vs18). The other Gospels mention this also. Matthew and Mark called the men, "robbers", which is the word that John used of Barabbas. These two probably were comrades of his. The Lord's enemies saw this as His final humiliation: 'Crucified with criminals, as a criminal.' But John saw spiritual meaning in it; that Jesus was, 'One with sinners in death—their substitute.'

But also, and importantly, it fulfilled Scripture: Isaiah 53, verse 12, that stated the LORD'S "Servant" would be "numbered with transgressors." So even in His humiliation, there was evidence, a witness to the truth, that He was the prophesied Messiah—that He is the prophesied Savior. Even Pilate testified to that with the title that he put over the cross.

It was a custom to publish the crime of the crucified person: It was put on a placard, carried before him as he walked to his execution, and then fastened to the cross above the person's head. Pilate wrote, "JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS." (vs19). And he wrote it "in Hebrew", (probably a reference to Aramaic), "Latin, and Greek", (vs20), the languages spoken throughout the Roman empire. And that was especially significant at this time of the year—the occasion of when all of this occurred because it was during the Passover. And during the Passover, Jerusalem filled up with pilgrims from all over the empire and the known world.

As they would pass through the gate, going in and out of the city, they would see crosses along the roadside and be able to read at least one of the three inscriptions. It's a message that the whole world could read, Jew and Gentile alike: The world that God so loved, that He sent His Son to save it. That's why God became man.

The chief priests didn't like it. They were happy for Jesus to die among criminals, but offended that Pilate's sign said what it said. And they protested; "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews'; but that He said, 'I am King of the Jews.' " (vs21). This time Pilate wouldn't bend. He answered the priests, "What I have written, I have written." (vs22).

For all of his brutish callousness, Pilate had a way with words: "What is truth?" "Behold the Man." And here, "What I have written, I have written."

Someone said that, "In this last statement, it seems as if we could hear the voice of God confirming it. He, too, is saying, "What I have written, I have written. It cannot be changed." It cannot be changed because it is true.

The irony is that a pagan wrote it. Maybe he did it as a last shot at the priests that he hated; or more so, (at least I think), he was moved by the impression Jesus had made on him.

He is the King.—And all who trust in Him become citizens of heaven and His kingdom, regardless of who they are; Jew and Gentile alike. That's an emphasis we see all through John's Gospel: The worldwide scope of the work of Christ, and the worldwide appeal of Him and His work.

In chapter 1, He is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (vs29). In chapter 3, He told Nicodemus, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son." (vs16)... 'To die for His people; some out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation'—whoever they are, whatever their status is, whatever their guilt as sinners is; whoever believes in Him, His death was for them.

In chapter 4, the Samaritans confessed that, "Christ is the Savior of the world." (vs42). In chapters 8 and 9, He is "the Light of the world." And so it goes throughout this Fourth Gospel. Christ is King, and He will reign universally across this world when He returns in glory.

And then, Paul tells us in Philippians chapter 2, verse 10, 'Every knee will bow to Him, in heaven and on earth.' And by God's grace, multitudes of those who bow will bow from faith—because at the cross, He bought them. At the cross, He saved them. At the cross, He gave His life for them through His death. That is, as we sang, "the power of the cross." It's not a provision—it actually accomplishes the very purpose for which God sent His Son into this world to accomplish, *the salvation of His people*.

Now that may have included some of those soldiers who read the inscription. They were a hardened, callous bunch who were at the foot of the cross, gambling for Jesus clothes. It was customary for soldiers who carried out a crucifixion to take the clothing of the executed man as part of their pay. In verse 23, John wrote that they, "took His outer garments and made four parts, a part to every soldier." The normal clothing worn at this time was a tunic, (which was an undergarment), a robe that was worn over it, a head covering, a belt, and sandals.

The soldiers divided these items of clothing among themselves, but there was one piece left over—the tunic, which was a seamless garment, "woven in one piece". They couldn't make four parts out of it without destroying it. And so they decided to "cast lots for it", which would go to the one who won the gambling there.

And yet that, too, was an aspect of our Lord's humiliation: All of His earthly possessions were taken by His executioners. And the obvious implication of that is that Jesus was on the cross unclothed, hanging in disgrace. But there again, it was by design, because John wrote, "...*this was* to fulfill the Scripture: They divided My outer garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots." (vs 24). That's Psalm 22, verse 18—the Psalm Jesus would quote when He cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?" (Psa 22:1).

And the significance of the soldiers gambling for Christ's clothes is to show that nothing at the cross happened by chance. It was all a fulfillment of Scripture, even the smallest, incidental things. Almost a thousand years before the Romans were crucifying people and dividing up their possessions, this was prophesied. Every little detail. A strange coincidence? No. That's providence. That's prophecy. That's fulfillment. It proves again that the cross was God's intention—His plan. And this humiliating display of Christ unclothed, signified in a poignant, vivid way, the meaning of the cross—that He bore our sin and shame.

Back in Genesis chapter 2, the creation account of Adam and Eve ends with the statement, "And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed." (vs25).

They were not ashamed because there was no sin in the world. They were pure. They were innocent. That changed.

In chapter 3, after they violated God's prohibition against eating the fruit of the tree, the text states, "The eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked." (vs7). Now they were ashamed and they tried to cover themselves with leaves and hide when God approached. But there was no hiding, no covering up—they were guilty and exposed.

Jesus unclothed and exposed on the cross showed that the guilt and shame of the first Adam, and the *shame* that he brought upon all of us as our representative, was put upon '*The last Adam*', Christ our representative, and removed it from us. —Christ took our shame so that we could have His glory.

That's what the cross accomplished and is the reason it is central to the Bible—central to the Gospel and the reason Christianity has been called, 'a *rescue* religion'. All other religions are about man reaching to God by his own works and merit. Christianity is about God reaching to man to rescue us from sin, and guilt, and judgment.

That's why God became man, to rescue us. And the only way He could do that is by becoming one of us, in order to be our substitute—in order to take our place in God's judgment, by dying the death that we deserve to die.

That's similar to the answer that Anselm gave to the question of his book, *Why Did God Become Man?*, though his answer was influenced somewhat by the age in which he lived. It was the age of chivalry, of knights in armor. "Man's sin," he said, "was against God's majesty, and against God's honor. Man was obliged to make satisfaction, but he couldn't do it. Only God can. So Christ became man, God's Man, to satisfy God's honor."

Now that, I think, strikes at the basic truth of what the cross did, how things occurred at the cross: That Christ's death, His sacrifice, was *a satisfaction*, it was *an atonement*. But more correctly, while it was to satisfy God's honor, it was more

importantly to satisfy God's justice. The just penalty for sin is *death*. That's Romans chapter 6, verse 23; that's "the wage of sin". Christ satisfied God's justice by dying for us, suffering the just penalty that we deserve by dying in our place and rescuing us from that terrible, eternal judgment that was due to us—and that we in our own strength, our own ability, could not do for we are guilty.

Well, that's God's gift. He paid our debt, and it calls for a response of gratitude from us. The writer of Hebrews gave that very instruction in Hebrews chapter 13, where he said Christ "suffered outside the gate" for us. (vs12). Then he wrote, "So let us go out to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach." (vs13). It's another way of saying that, 'We are to take up our cross and follow Him.'

'Oh, but that's costly!' someone will say. 'Bearing His reproach, that means rejection by the world. That means possible loss of old friends, status, loss of all the stuff that the world offers!' —That's true! That's true—but what do we really lose? Nothing that we can keep anyway.

The writer reminds us of that in the next verse, "For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking *the city* which is to come." (Heb 13:14). Here we don't have a lasting city. Nothing lasts in this world; so we are to be living for what's to come—it is a glorious city. It's what John Bunyan called "The Celestial City" in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The path that Christian took to that glorious place in the story was a dangerous path, a path of much loss and difficulty. But the place he left was much more perilous: It was 'The City of Destruction'.

Multitudes have the that hard but right path. The author of Hebrews describes some of them in chapter 11, the chapter of faith. And one was Moses, who grew up a prince of Egypt. He had the world at his feet. He was the son of Pharaoh's daughter, the adopted son. Some have suggested he may have been in line for the throne of Egypt—to be the next Pharaoh. Still, he made a conscious decision. He considered, "...the reproach of Christ greater riches, than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward."

(Heb 11:26). And so he said goodbye to the passing pleasures of sin and, "...chose instead to endure ill-treatment with the people of God." (Heb 11:25).

If you're a believer in Jesus Christ, that is what you are called to do. In coming to Christ, believing in Him, you have left, 'the temporary city' —the city...the world, doomed to destruction. You've gone 'out through the gate' into a new life—and there's no going back, no returning to the old life. You are dead to it, 'dead to the world', as Paul put it in the Book of Galatians. (Gal 6:14). All we can do is go forward; so the writer of Hebrews said, "Let us go out to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach." (Heb 13:13).

The better we understand what He sacrificed for us; the better we understand what He gained for us—the more we will do that; and the more easily we will do that, the more gladly we will do that. And that's what we're to do: Disengage ourselves from this world, (at least from the affections of this world). We are to be 'in it', and we are to continue to minister and be Lights in it—but we are not to love it. We are, 'to come outside the city', 'outside the gate', to Christ.

And you who may be here without Christ, well, you may have a comfortable life right now. In fact, you may have all that the world offers—and the prospect of gaining even more of it—but whatever you've gained, whatever you have...won't last.

Jesus spoke to you when He asked the question, "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?" (Mark 8:30)...Nothing! This is not a lasting city. We are just a vapor.

Come to Christ. Trust in Him. By faith, take hold of the cross—His sacrifice that removes our sin and guilt the moment we do that; and become a forgiven, clean child of God. May God help you to do that.

And help all of us to reflect deeply on the sacrifice of our Lord, and what He's done for us—and then resolve to live for Him.

(Closing prayer) Father, we thank You for that great sacrifice which we have studied, and of which we have just sung. What a blessing to have a *Substitute* to do for us what we could not do for ourselves—to be a *propitiation*, what a great word: The statement that says, 'You are satisfied, Your justice has been met; and now You can pour out Your love upon us.'

And You did that. And You've done it through the ages, by drawing the people Your Son; for whom He died; paid the debt; we are His; we are Yours by His blood and what He did. He purchased us, when we were enemies, when we were helpless.—We thank You for that.

Thank You for the cross, thank You for what Your Son willingly underwent, and what He sacrificed for us. We pray that we will honor Him in our life and we will go, 'outside the gate to Him, and bear His reproach.'

Now the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance on you and give you peace. In the name of Christ, Amen.

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