

Lesson 21
John 19:17 - 42

“EVEN THE DEATH OF THE CROSS”

Memory verse: “The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe.” (John 19:35 NIV)

The unique material in John's account of Jesus' crucifixion includes the controversy about the superscription over Jesus' cross (vv. 19-22) and several references to the fulfilment of prophecy (vv. 24, 28-29; cf. vv. 36-37). John was also the only Gospel writer to record Jesus' care for His mother (vv. 25-27), His sixth cry before His death (v. 30), and the piercing of His side (v. 34).

John omitted the detail that Simon carried Jesus' cross (Matt. 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26), which might have detracted from John's presentation of Jesus as the divine Saviour. He also made no reference to Jesus' sufferings on the way to Calvary that Luke, who had a special interest in Jesus' humanity, stressed (Luke 23:27-32).

The soldiers led Jesus from Pilate's judgment seat to Golgotha. Normally an execution squad consisted of four legionnaires plus a centurion (cf. v. 23). John did not comment on Jesus' painful journey to the cross, probably because he wanted to stress His deity. He did mention the fact that Jesus bore His own cross, however, probably for the same reason (cf. Gen. 22:6; Heb. 13:11-13).

Criminals condemned to crucifixion, such as Jesus, normally carried their entire cross or only the crossbeam (Lat. patibulum) of their cross. This was common procedure in crucifixions, as John's original readers undoubtedly knew. Jesus evidently carried the crossbeam.

Crucifixion was a deliberately long and excruciating form of death that humiliated the sufferer as well as torturing him. Its purpose was to discourage others from rebelling against Rome, the main reason for crucifixion. John's original readers would have been only too familiar with it, which probably accounts for his lack of elaboration.

All the Gospel writers mentioned the "two other men" crucified with Jesus (Matt. 27:38, 44; Mark 15:27, 32; Luke 23:32-33, 39-43). They were evidently robbers (Gr. *lestai*) and terrorists, as was Barabbas (cf. 18:40).

There was once a rather eccentric evangelist named Alexander Wooten, who was approached by a flippant young man who asked, “What must I do to be saved?”

“It's too late!” Wooten replied, and went about his work.

The young man became alarmed. “Do you mean that it's too late for me to be saved?” he asked. “Is there nothing I can do?”

“Too late!” said Wooten. “It's already been done! The only thing you can do is believe.”

The Apostle's Creed states it without embellishment: “He was crucified, dead, and buried.” These three events are described in John 19:17- 42, momentous events that we should understand not only from the historical point of view but also from the doctrinal. What happened is important; why it happened is also important, if you hope to go to heaven.

Scripture Reading: John 19:17- 42

To learn in this lesson: 1) Jesus' crucifixion 2) Jesus' death 3) Jesus' burial

Discussion Questions:

1) What implications can you draw from the scene of Jesus' crucifixion? (verses 17-27)

2) The death of Jesus is recorded in verses 28 to 30. Why is His death so important in the Christian faith?

3) The burial of Jesus has also special significance to the sovereignty of God. Discuss this in the light of what you know from verses 31 to 42 and scripture references that may help.