

John 19:17-41

What was the purpose of the written notice that Pilate had attached to the cross above the head of Jesus (v. 19)? Keep in mind what was going on in Jerusalem at this time—Passover, the biggest Jewish festival. Jewish males were required to make the annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Scholars estimate that around two hundred thousand Jews would have been in Jerusalem to take part in the festival. Many Jews—a number of whom were pilgrims on their way to or from Jerusalem—would have to pass by the cross. The words written above the head of Jesus served to remind the Jews that Rome was in charge and there was no place for dissension.

What was the significance of the three languages (v. 20)? The words were written in Aramaic, the language of the Jews of Palestine (Promised Land); Latin, the language of the Romans; and Greek, the common language of the day outside of Palestine. Everyone would be able to read the sign and understand the message.

What was the objection of the chief priests (vv. 21-22)? The chief priests naturally did not want Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews, to be proclaimed as such. They wanted Jesus to die for *claiming* to be the King of the Jews. So they protested to Pilate to change the title. Pilate refused to do so.¹

What was the significance of the soldiers' activity in stripping Jesus and dividing His clothes (vv. 23-24)? Their actions fulfilled the prophecy of Psalm 22:18: "*They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.*"

What action did Jesus take next (vv. 26-27)? Seeing her sorrow, Jesus honored His mother by entrusting her into the care of John, the beloved disciple. His brothers and sisters being away in Galilee were not in a position to care for or comfort her.² It was a thoughtful provision for her needs at the hour of supreme devastation. It is also an indicator of the great trust and respect He had for John.

Where were the other disciples during the crucifixion? They had scattered out of fear. John was most likely the only disciple to have been an eye-witness of the crucifixion. Judging from their apparent absence at His cross, Jesus' physical half-brothers probably didn't become believers until after His resurrection.

What does "*It is finished*" mean (v. 30)? It's the single Greek word, "*tetelestai*." This word had a legal meaning familiar to all Jews. When they had to pay a tax, they would take the money to the authorities, and upon completion of the transaction the word "*tetelestai*" would be stamped across the invoice, stating that it was finished, done, complete. A modern-day equivalent would be "paid in full." That is the status of our sin debt – paid in full by the atoning death of our Savior.

This word on Jesus' lips was significant. When He said, "*It is finished*" (not "I am finished"), He meant His redemptive work was completed. He had been made sin for all people (2 Corinthians 5:21) and had suffered the penalty of God's justice which sin deserved.³

That "*He gave up His spirit*" emphasizes the fact that His death was voluntary. He determined the time of His death. In full control of His faculties, He *dismissed* His spirit—an act no mere man could accomplish.⁴

Note: Who killed Jesus? No one! He was no helpless victim subject to the whims of those who had arrested Him. He laid down His life (John 10:14-18). It was not taken from Him. He was in control. He determined exactly when he would die. In fact, Pilate was surprised to hear that Jesus had died so soon (Mark 15:44).

What are the messages of the cross?

- The cross is a picture of victory over sin. We have been set free from bondage to sin.
- The cross marks the defeat of Satan. He no longer controls the life of the born-again believer.
- The cross is a picture of God's grace and love for mankind.
- The cross is a picture of Jesus' submission to the Father.

What did the Jews request of Pilate (v. 31)? They requested that Pilate break the legs of the three who were crucified so they would die quickly and they could take the bodies down.

In order to breathe adequately the crucified victim had to push himself up by using his legs to take a breath. Breaking the legs prevented him from doing so, thus hastening his death, i.e., he would suffocate.

Why was there a big rush to get Jesus off the cross and buried (v. 31)?

- The Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross until the next day which was the Sabbath—a very special Sabbath (Passover).
- The Old Testament law said: *"If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse. You must not desecrate the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance"* (Deuteronomy 21:22-23).

Did they break Jesus' legs (v. 33)? No. When they checked, He was already dead. There was no need to break His legs.

What did they do instead (v. 34)? They pierced Jesus' side with a spear bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.

What was the significance of these two actions (vv. 36-37)? They fulfilled two prophecies: Psalms 34:20 *"....he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken"* and Zechariah 12:10 *"They will look on me, the one they have pierced...."*

Who retrieved the body of Jesus and prepared it for burial (vv. 38-42)? Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus.

What do we know about Joseph of Arimathea? He was a wealthy member of the Sanhedrin....a Pharisee. Until now, Joseph of Arimathea had been a secret believer. Fear of the Jews had kept him from confessing Christ openly. Now he stepped forward courageously to claim the body of Jesus for burial.

What do we know about Nicodemus? He was also a member of the Sanhedrin, a Pharisee, and a secret disciple. He had met Jesus previously when he came to visit Him by night (3:1-2) He did not openly defend Jesus and His teachings before the Sanhedrin, but he did question his fellow Pharisees (John 7:50-52).

What were Joseph and Nicodemus risking by asking for Jesus' body and burying Him? They were risking their status in the Sanhedrin, including humiliation, their reputation, and possibly their lives.

Application: What risks are you willing to take to identify with Jesus?

¹ Edwin A. Blum, "John," in The Bible Knowledge Commentary: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 339.

² Ibid., 340.

³ Ibid.

⁴ William MacDonald, Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1565.