

JOHN 19:16-25—THE CRUCIFIXION

INTRO.: Most people, whether we are a Christian or not, at least much of the time, ask ourselves: “God, do you care?” After all, God is invisible—we can’t see Him, we can’t hear Him. And so we wonder, “God, are you there? And if you are, do you see me? And if you do, do you care?”

It seems to me there are 2 main things that cause us, in different ways, to wonder whether God cares:

(1) Evil and Suffering—We all face bad things in our lives. The rate of cancer, accidents, the heartbreak of betrayal, financial loss, and other tragedies of life is the same for Christians and non-Christians. When these things happen we wonder: “How could you let this happen to me? I’ve been faithful to you! God, do you care?”

(2) Our own sin—When bad things happen TO us, it’s easy for us to think “God doesn’t care.” But what about when we hurt others, through our anger, harsh words, neglect, self-centeredness, ignoring other people’s needs? And what about our “secret sins.” You know, the things we do only inside of ourselves, or when no one else is watching. Things like our pride, lustful thoughts, hateful thoughts, thoughts of revenge, unforgiveness, internet pornography, stealing something from work, lack of concern for the poor. The list could go on and on. When we do such things we are ACTING as if God doesn’t see or doesn’t care, and we may even say something like, “This is only a little thing, God really doesn’t care so much about this; there are lots worse people than me and lots worse things than this.”

So, does God care or doesn’t He? Knowing this is fundamental for our relationship with God. Because knowing this should make a difference in how we respond when bad things enter our life, and should make a difference in how we treat people and what we do when we are alone. Yet the answer to this issue cannot be found when we look either to our external circumstances OR to our internal feelings. So how can we know?

Today’s passage of Scripture—**John 19:16-25**—answers that question, shows us—in a very graphic way—how much He cares. [**READ JOHN 19:16-25**]

PROPOSITION: Does God care? Oh yes. In fact, this passage is telling us that, not only does He care, but: **God in Christ holds nothing back in His love for us.**

O/S: We will see how God holds nothing back for us in two ways: (1) God orchestrates the events of history to culminate in this, the supreme manifestation of His love for us; and (2) How deeply Jesus demonstrates God’s love for us.

I. GOD ORCHESTRATES HISTORY.

A. vv. 16-17 [READ]—This was not by accident or the spur of the moment: Peter—**Acts 2:23**; Prayer—**Acts 4:27-28**

B. v. 17 says “**They took Jesus, and He went out bearing His own cross.**” That is very much like **Isa 53:7** which says that He was “**Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter.**” Isaiah wrote his prophecy >700 years before Jesus. But there is more: The identification of Jesus with the sacrificial Lamb is reaffirmed in **1 Pet 1:19; Rev 5:6, 8**. Christ was crucified at the time of Passover when the Passover lamb was killed (**Luke 22:1; John 19:14, 31**). The NT says in several places that Passover was prophetic of the sacrifice of Christ.

You see, this was all part of a great plan, instituted by God from before the foundation of the world. The Bible tells us that the entire OT, incl. Israel and all of its institutions, was a “Type” or “Shadow” that really was pointing forward to Christ and the church. So, the Passover, the sacrificial lambs and all of that were instituted ultimately to point to their true fulfillment: the crucifixion of Christ. God was orchestrating things even in OT times to point forward to Jesus.

C. v. 18 [READ]—Prophesied >700 years before in **Isa 53:12** which says, “**He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors.**”

C. v. 19 [READ]—Prophesied ~500 years before in **Zech 9:9 [READ]** Jesus fulfilled that when he rode into Jerusalem the last time. Again, God through prophecy was orchestrating things.

D. vv. 20 [READ—B/g w/ “the place where Jesus was crucified...”]

1. “3 languages” = Universal Proclamation: *Hebrew (or, Aramaic)*, language of the Jews; that is symbolically telling the Jews, God’s OT chosen people, that Jesus is their Messiah & King. *Latin*, language

of the government; that is symbolically letting governing authorities know that the true King is here. *Greek*, the common language of the empire; the message in Greek symbolically is telling the entire world that the prophesied savior and King of all mankind has come.

2. **“Crucified NEAR the city”**—This is one of those little facts that is stated almost in passing, but has great theological significance. **Heb 13:10-13** explains this [READ]. What does this mean? P.W.L. Walker explains the significance of Jesus’ being crucified outside of the city in his book *Jesus and the Holy City*: He points out that **Heb 13** is telling us that:

“Jesus had inaugurated a new system which stood in stark contrast to the [existing] Temple-system. In fact the two systems were mutually exclusive: A choice was therefore required—either go to Jesus ‘outside the camp’ or remain, as it were, within the city and focused on the Temple. Were one’s loyalties with the Temple mount or with ‘the place of the skull’? The contrast between the two was plain. A new means of approaching God had been established; a choice had to be made.” (Walker 1996: 206-07)

That same choice still confronts every human being today: How are we going to approach God? Will we do it on our own terms—i.e., we think we will score points by being fairly decent people and doing good deeds? Or will we do it on God’s terms—i.e., recognize that there is NOTHING we can do to justify or save ourselves, and place our sole trust and life in the hands of Jesus? That’s the choice. There is no other. And God’s orchestrating everything to point to Jesus shows us that there is only one correct answer to that question.

E. v. 21-22—Pilate wrote on the sign: **“This is Jesus...the king of the Jews.”** What Pilate wrote was true. And as **Luke 23:2** tells us, that was the very charge that the Jewish leaders had made against Jesus in order to get Pilate to crucify Him. But now they realize: *“We can’t have the world see that Jesus is the true king.”* So they try to get Pilate to change what he had written, from “Jesus IS the king of the Jews” to “He only SAID He is the king.” But Pilate says **“What I’ve written, I’ve written.”**

In this, Pilate is acting just like the high priest Caiaphas in **John 11:47-52**. Caiaphas said **“It’s better for one man to die for the people than that the whole nation perish.”** But John tells us that he did not say that on his own initiative, but was unwittingly prophesying that Jesus was going to die, not only for the nation but for God’s children throughout the world. You see: God was orchestrating things. Caiaphas and Pilate were the 2 men most actively and immediately responsible for Jesus’ death, and yet they are both unwittingly serving God’s redemptive purposes. That didn’t happen by accident. God was in charge.

F. vv. 23-24 [SUMMARIZE]—Tunic was the undergarment, worn next to the skin like our modern underwear. John points out that this also was to fulfill prophecy, specifically **Ps 22:18** which John quotes. Psalm 22 was a psalm of David written >900 years before Jesus was crucified. It is called a Messianic psalm, because it clearly pointed to Jesus, the Messiah. In fact, from the cross Jesus Himself quoted from **Ps 22:1** (**“My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?”**). **Ps 22:7-8**, which talks about the people sneering at Jesus and saying let’s see if God rescues Him, were also fulfilled at the cross, as was **Ps 22:5, 14-17** which talk about how Jesus was scourged, how His hands and feet were pierced by the nails, how he was surrounded by evildoers who were staring at Him, and the effects of crucifixion on his body.

You see, this event, the crucifixion of Jesus, was the most profoundly important event of all of history, esp. when put together with the resurrection of Jesus, which validated the meaning of the crucifixion. This event was planned from before the foundation of the world. And God orchestrated all of history to lead up to it—so that no one would be in doubt that this is the time, and this is the fulcrum upon which all of history pivots.

But we need to understand the depth of the *meaning* of the crucifixion. And we will see that when we understand

II. HOW DEEPLY JESUS DEMONSTRATES GOD’S LOVE FOR US ON THE CROSS.

To understand this we need to first understand what forgiveness means.

A. What forgiveness means. Let me quote from Tim Keller’s book *The Reason for God*. [READ pp. 187-88]

B. Forgiveness costs something. It hurts. And the greater the wrong the more it hurts and costs to forgive. In fact, if you have been greatly wronged and hurt, forgiving the wrongdoer may be the most difficult thing you will ever do in your life. As Keller says [READ pp. 188-89]

C. So what about God’s forgiveness. Why did Jesus have to die? Why couldn’t God just say “I forgive you”? [READ p. 192-93]

D. Some people look at Jesus’ death on the cross as a wonderful example of sacrificial love. And it is—but that can only be true if something else also is true. Keller explains what that something else is [READ n.6]

1. The cross shows us—and only the cross can—our utter lostness and helplessness in sin. There is no other religion in the world at all like Christianity, b/c every other religion or philosophy of life basically says “If you are going to get right with God or whatever higher power there is, it’s up to you: work harder, obey the rules, make sacrifices, do good deeds, pray 5X p/day toward Mecca, whatever.”

2. Only Christianity exposes that as nonsense. There is nothing we can do to make ourselves right with God. We can’t even meet our own standards, let alone God’s—and we know it. That is why the cross—the crucifixion—is the most profoundly important event in history.

3. Which, BTW, also shows that Christianity could not just have been invented by people. Because no one would dream up the idea of God dying on a cross like a slave or common criminal as Jesus did. The cross was universally recognized as the most degrading and shameful manner of execution—and in fact pagan writers MOCKED Christians and Christianity b/c of the cross. The Apostle Paul admitted as much when he said that the cross is “**a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness [or madness] to the Gentiles**” (1 Cor 1:23). No one would have invented a religion that, at its very heart, exposed one to being mocked and derided as nuts.

4. But you see it is only Christianity that has a true view of mankind’s utter inability to save itself by doing good deeds. B/c only Christianity has a clear, realistic, and true view of the unregenerate nature of the human heart. And remember, as we saw: the greater the wrong, the more it hurts to forgive. This means that only Christianity knows how deep is the pain that God had to endure in order to forgive the sin of people who CANNOT do ANYTHING to make up for their own sin and make things right with Him.

D. This is brought home very graphically in vv. 23-25. How?

1. Jesus said “**Foxes have holes, and birds have nests, but the SOM has nowhere to lay His head.**”

IOW, Jesus never owned his own home. He had to borrow the donkey to ride into Jerusalem the last time in fulfillment of **Zechariah 9**. Jesus owned only one thing in the world—the clothes he wore. And the soldiers took those away from Him before they crucified him.

2. When we see a crucifix or a picture of Jesus on the cross, it always shows him wearing a loincloth. Why? B/c the artist is too embarrassed to show Jesus naked. But the Romans weren’t. That’s why it mentions the tunic. To them execution was a way to shame and humiliate someone as well as kill him. So Jesus was crucified NAKED. And *that’s important*. Why? B/c Jesus was a grown man in his 30s. And as **v. 25** tells us, his own mother was there looking at his nakedness as he was spiked to the cross.

3. That tells us that Jesus held nothing back for us—even his own shame. He gave everything for us. That’s how much he loves us.

4. And it tells us something else—that is how much it TOOK to redeem us. Remember, the greater the wrong, the more costly is the price of forgiveness. The cross, and Jesus’ nakedness on the cross, shows us the utter depth of our own sinfulness, since it took the utter giving of everything Jesus had—including his own shame—in order to bear the cost and pay the price for our sins. Who else has ever done that? Not Muhammad; not Buddha; not any self-help guru or teacher; not you; and not me. Only Jesus.

III. APPLICATION

If we really understand this, then we will have a much clearer realization of the depth of blackness and hardness of our own hearts—our self-centeredness, our pride, and our inability to fundamentally change that on our own. And we will also have a much greater appreciation for how amazing God in Christ is: how He has held NOTHING back for us.

A. If you have not yet turned to Him in faith, then do so. What else do you want? You can’t save yourself. You can’t change yourself. The cross shows us that. Say in your heart right now: “I was blind but now I see. I have been going my own way my whole life. And it’s a dead-end street. Forgive me Lord Jesus. I turn to you now. YOU set my agenda from now on. From this moment forward I will trust you, and obey you, and follow you wherever you lead me—b/c you are my only hope.” If you say something like that, Jesus WILL save you. And you know it’s true—b/c of what He demonstrated on the cross. If you take that step, talk with Pastor Wade, or with me, or with some Christian here, b/c we can help get you started in your new life on the right foot.

B. Second—and this applies to people who have been believers for a long time as well as to new believers—since Christ held nothing back for us, how can we now hold back? God takes each one of us where we are—but he doesn’t leave us there. He wants to change us into his own image. There is some area in

your life in which you are holding back. It may be different for each one of us. Maybe it's money—there is a spirit of fear and greed that is causing you not to give generously to help the poor and build the kingdom. Maybe it's unforgiveness—You've seen what it took Christ to forgive you, so why aren't you forgiving that person whom you know you need to forgive. Maybe it's anger or fear and worry—Bad things have happened to you and you're angry with God, or afraid of what may happen next. But look at the naked Jesus on the cross: He has done *everything* for you. Since God was sovereign over and orchestrating even the judicial murder of the only completely holy and innocent man the world has ever known, that means that what is happening to you is no accident. Since He has done everything for you to prove the depth of his love for you, you don't have to be afraid—so how can you continue to be angry with Him?

Whatever it is, there is some area in your life in which you are not trusting Him and are holding back. LET IT GO! We see from the cross that we can trust Him. He loves us UTTERLY. He was willing to bear the supreme cost for us; so we have nothing to fear in following Him in all areas of our lives. That is why He tells us, to be His disciple, we must **“take up OUR cross every day and follow Him” (Luke 9:23).**

CONCLUSION: The cross is the most profoundly important event in the history of the world. Most people, including most Christians, have little real understanding of its depth and significance. On the cross God in Christ in a very graphic way proved that He held nothing back for us. So take that message and, whatever he is saying to you apply the new life that the cross guarantees. It will not make us worthy of the cross. Nothing could do that. But if we stop holding back, it will show that we are beginning to understand, and God will honor that.