

John 19 The Crucifixion

There have been a number of surprises in Ireland in recent years. Who ever thought that Irish people would agree to go outside to smoke? But they did! Or that people would carry little bags to clean up after their dogs? But they do. Or that abortion would become legal? Same sex marriage fashionable?

Some might say the modern world has mixed up priorities, making a big fuss about relatively small issues and turning a blind eye to massive ones. We'll fine or arrest you if your dog goes to the toilet in the street but not say a word about real ethical issues.

What was it Jesus said about the Pharisees? 'You strain out a fly but swallow a camel!'

And here in ch 19 they're at it again. They won't go into the Roman Governor's palace for that would make them ceremonially unclean. They object to the wording of the sign on the cross. They don't want bodies on display on Passover day so they request the execution be hurried up a bit. Fussing over details but wilfully blind to the enormity of what they are actually doing!

They've just colluded to condemn and murder an innocent man! They have just rejected their promised Messiah, the Son of God, their heaven-sent Saviour. In so doing they have consigned their children to judgement and their city and temple to destruction.

No matter, as long as they get the wording correct on the sign!

Human beings are notorious for this obsession with appearance. Never mind the substance, how does it look? Never mind the global crises, will the new curtains match the paint in the living room? Never mind what's in our hearts before our Maker, what do you think of our new shoes?

The Bible says we must all one day give an account for our life choices to God, maybe we need to start thinking about that! Maybe it's time for a fresh look at our priorities!

Well, if the Pharisees are ignoring their sin and fussing over relatively minor details, what are Jesus' friends doing in this chapter?

Most have fled the scene, frightened and confused, but we see a small group of faithful women, including Jesus' mother, staying as close as they can until the end. We see them obediently caring for each other in loving fellowship. John takes responsibility to look after Mary and vice versa. And we see Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus doing what they can to give Jesus a decent burial.

These are honourable men. Not confrontational like Martin Luther King but courageous nevertheless. They found themselves a minority of two as the rest of the Sanhedrin voted to have Jesus executed. Unable to stop the atrocity they now risk their reputation and maybe more to ask Pilate's permission to honour their Master's remains at their own expense.

There are times we may feel helpless, the problems seem too great, the world too broken. We cannot fix everything in the short term but people of faith continue to trust in God and do what good we can. It's Friday and things are bad, sad, horrific, but Sunday is not far away. The Lord's day is coming. So we wait, trusting to see what He will bring.

Well, what about Jesus then, what is *He* doing in this chapter? And at first it might look like He's not doing very much, just being brutally executed, but John records a number of significant details.

Four times he points out that these circumstances fulfil predictions made in the Old Testament hundreds of years before. In other words, gruesome as it is, this is no accident. This was planned from all eternity. Symbolically lifted up between heaven and earth Jesus is being clearly identified as the great High Priest, the Mediator between God and human beings. He is the Way, through Him we may approach Almighty God.

Back in ch 1 John says the divine 'Word' became flesh and lived among us. Sin entered the world through a man, the first man, Adam. Sin is dealt with by another man, a better man, the Son of God become man, suffering in the flesh, thirsting, experiencing pain, submitting to death on our behalf.

In ch 1 John the Baptist identifies Jesus as 'the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world'. He's not only the priest but also the sacrifice. It's no accident His bones are not broken, a Passover lamb had to be without blemish.

The symbolic parallels continue when the soldier pierces His side to check He's really dead. There's a flow of blood and water. Medically this is an evidence of death, blood and water separating in the heart, but it's more. The sacrificial Lamb has been offered for sin. His work is finished, complete. Redemption and new life can now flow to all who believe!

The blood signifies cleansing. Our sins are washed away, we are declared clean and acceptable to God. There's no more offence separating us. We are no longer condemned. Christians are 'redeemed by the blood of the Lamb' Jesus.

Not just that but there's also a flow of water, a universal symbol of life. Now the sacrifice is complete, the basis for salvation secure, the Spirit can be poured out bringing new life and sanctification. Jesus' death on our behalf brings not only a new status, legally justified before God, it brings us into a dynamic, transforming relationship with the Lord. He lives in us and we live like never before.

In some ways Golgotha is a terrible scene of human prejudice, injustice and cruelty but when we understand these symbols it becomes for believers a most precious scene of divine grace. Jesus is doing what He came to earth to do, very deliberately laying down His life to save ours.

'Here is love, vast as the ocean, lovingkindness as a flood, when the Prince of life, our ransom, shed for us his precious blood.'

'Here might I stay and sing no love song so divine.
Never was love, dear King, never was grief like Thine!
This is my Friend, in Whose sweet praise
I all my days could gladly spend.'

Amen