

Twenty-One Days With John

Day 19 – John 19

Prayer:

O sacred Head, now wounded, with grief and shame weighed down,
Now scornfully surrounded with thorns, Thine only crown:
How pale Thou art with anguish, with sore abuse and scorn!
How does that visage languish which once was bright as morn!

*“O Sacred Head Now Wounded,” v. 1 Anonymous
Trans. by Paul Gerhardt and James W. Alexander*

Meditation:

Most Christians are familiar with the events recorded in John 19. Jesus' flogging, being struck, and His abused is noted. These items—and others—are also noted in the other Gospels. What is important here is that John's unique purpose was to demonstrate how the words and actions of those most intimately involved in the crucifixion demonstrated Jesus' innocence.

Note the testimony of Pilate. “I find no basis for a charge against Him” (19:4). Pilate spoke again, “You take Him and crucify Him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against Him” (19:6). After interrogating Jesus further, Pilate's mind was unchanged.

Chapter 19 makes it apparent Pilate was not a willing accomplice. According to John, Jewish blackmail (and Pilate's cowardice to succumb to Jewish pressure) were the only reasons Pilate sent Jesus to the cross. “Shall I crucify your King?” Pilate asked. “Finally,” an exasperated, worn-out Pilate, handed Jesus “over to them [that is, the Jews] to be crucified” (John 19:16).

Continuing through the crucifixion episode, John noted how Pilate kept the Jews—and the responsibility for the crucifixion—away from him at arm's length. Note Pilate's stubborn response to the increasingly blood-thirsty chief priests. “What I have written, I have written” (John 19:22)

Once Jesus is on the cross, John turns his attention to the evidence of Scriptures (19:24, 28 et al.). Note John's argument: If the Scriptures were fulfilled in the events of Jesus' crucifixion, the inescapable conclusion is that the Scriptures must have *ergo* prophesied a *crucified* Messiah. Jesus' crucifixion, then, does not exclude Jesus as the Messiah. Instead, the crucifixion confirms beyond all doubt that Jesus truly is the Messiah.

That was a stumbling block for Jews. They couldn't understand that the Messiah must be crucified. This was a also barrier for a prominent Jews named Saul of Tarsus. After his conversion, St. Paul understood the Truth of which John wrote.

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us,
for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’” Galatians 3:13 (NIV).

Chapter 19 was not merely written to demonstrate that everything that Jesus did—and happened to Jesus—occurred “so that Scripture might be fulfilled” (John 19:28). It was also written so that all would believe that Jesus is the Christ of God.

At the end of this chapter, John, the only one of Jesus' twelve disciples to eye-witness the crucifixion declared his personal verdict. “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).

Jesus' burial, mentioned in 19:38ff, includes an important reference to two notable men. One, Joseph of Arimathea, was a prominent, wealthy man, who followed Jesus but apparently kept his faith secret for fear the Jews. The other notable man, Nicodemus, was one of the Jew's own “man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council (John 3:1).

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John 19 offers a simple summation of John's testimony. Pilate didn't want to crucify Jesus. He did it only out of fear of the Jews. The wealthy man of Arimathea, as powerful as he may have been (even with all his money, power and influence), didn't come forward because he, too, feared the Jews. Nicodemus, a man from the inner circle of the Jews, recognized the Truth early on...and only came to Jesus "at night" (19:29) for fear of the Jews.

Their fear gone, these men came forward to give Jesus an honorable burial. Their actions, John would note, were an extraordinary act of bravery and defiance to the Jewish leaders. More important, their willingness to bury Jesus in honor demonstrated that they were willing to place everything on the line—even their honor—to honor the One they believed in as the Son of God.

Who, then, are the guilty ones? Whatever the reader might decide, for John the answer is clear...crystal clear. The Jewish leaders were guilty of murder. But, by putting Jesus to death, they unwittingly triggered and participated in the events that irrefutably demonstrated that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ of God.

What other evidence would anyone need? If any other evidence is needed, that evidence—the greatest evidence of all—is still forthcoming. Hang on...because the best is yet to come!

Prayer:

What language shall I borrow to thank Thee, dearest Friend,
For this Thy dying sorrow, Thy pity without end?
O make me Thine forever; and should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never outlive my love for Thee. Amen.

*"O Sacred Head Now Wounded," v. 3 Anonymous
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