

The Crucifixion

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[0 : 00] I think what John 19 shows us is that he is no kind of statue Jesus.

Would you agree with this? In a society like ours that's broadly moved on from Christianity, because it has. Like living active faith in Jesus has gone from the public square. If you're a follower of Jesus at school or work you're the odd one out, that's for sure. There's maybe one thing people in our culture do recognise that's Christian and that would probably be the cross and Jesus on it. So like in most church buildings or in museums or on Spanish trips or in graveyards or in TV dramas with a religious angle, everyone has seen the statues like this one. They're all over the place.

There is a cross and Jesus hanging there. He's thin and still and mouth shut. It's hard to know what to make of it though really. If something like that is your only way into Christianity, what do you see? The cross looks cruel. He died. I guess that's not good, right? And as you look at statue Jesus on your tourist trip round a church or something like that, there's not actually much there to capture me.

[1 : 24] There's not much here that looks relevant to life now. There's not much here to make me go, oh I'd really like to follow Jesus. It's just kind of old churchy stuff. You pass by, you take a picture if you want, but then you move on. Except the truth is of course he is no statue Jesus.

John wrote his trustworthy eyewitness account of Jesus's life because he wants people to see Jesus truly. At the beginning of his gospel, John 1 14, he wrote, the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us and we have seen his glory. The glory of the one and only son who came from the father full of grace and truth. Jesus who was with God and was God became flesh and we have seen him, his glory. In John's gospel chapters 1 to 18, we're invited to listen to and feast our eyes on Jesus as he makes God known and speaks truth and raises the dead and offers us life to the full with God as we believe in him and follow him in our lives.

In John 19, we arrive finally at the crucifixion. Where? Having been arrested and tried and condemned, now comes the cross. And as John shows us here in these verses from John 19 what takes place, we are meant to see so clearly that he is no statue Jesus. He's doing nothing, the cross looks cruel, he died, I guess that's not good right, but there's nothing much here to capture me, nothing relevant.

Instead, at the cross we are meant to see Jesus in all his beauty and his glory. We're meant to be captured by his character and his work as he hangs there and then we are meant to believe in him and bow down to him and receive the life that he offers. With this text open in front of us, I want to point out four things from our verses, the four things that John himself focuses on as he shows us Jesus on the cross.

First the journey, then the notice, then the clothes and finally his family. So first together the journey as Jesus goes out and they crucify him. Read with me really carefully what happens. In verse 16 at the conclusion of the trial, finally Pilate handed him over to the chief priests to be crucified and so the soldiers took charge of Jesus. If you know this, in the other gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, at this point Jesus is taken and he is led to the place of the skull. He's passive and taken and partway along the soldiers seize a man called Simon of Cyrene to carry Jesus's cross behind him. That happened for sure.

[4 : 20] But here John has a different focus. No mention of Simon and Jesus is not taken, rather he himself goes to his death. It's put so simply in verse 17, carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha, and there they crucified him and with him two others, one on each side and Jesus in the middle. Do you see? He's not grabbed. He's not dragged against his will. He went out.

In John 10, 17 and 18, Jesus says, the reason my father loves me is that I lay down my life only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down. In John 18, verse 4, just hours before, Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, who is it you want? In full control, voluntarily, bravely, obeying his father's will, he stepped forward to those coming to arrest him. And now here, having been flogged, mocked, condemned and handed over, carrying his own cross, again, he went out. You and I naturally turn away and run away from being hurt. Of course we do. Or if we're caught up in trouble and can't escape, maybe we just grit our teeth and try to hold on. But Jesus is not like that.

This is part of his glory. Not dragged to the cross against his will. Rather, sent by his father into the world to save the world, Jesus comes. And now at the climax of his life, he goes out to give his flesh for the life of the world and lay down his life for his friends. Do you know that about him?

The glory of Jesus. He is no passive victim. First, the journey, he went out.

[6 : 44] Second here, notice the notice. Because having said in verse 18, they crucified him, you might expect John to zero in on Jesus hanging there. The expression on his face, the pain in his body or something like that. Cross statue, Jesus. Instead, notice the notice.

Because Jesus goes out and they crucify him as God's king. To the naked eye, crucifixion looks like shame and failure and defeat. And John says, no.

The one crucified is a king. And the cross is his throne. On Palm Sunday, five days beforehand, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey.

See, your king is coming, the Old Testament prophecy had said. At his trial, again and again, are you the king? Are you the king? And they jammed a crown of thorns on his head and mocked him. And then Pilate brought him out and said, here is your king.

Now, verse 19, Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. And it read, Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews.

[8 : 01] Many of the Jews read this sign for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city. And the sign was written in Aramaic and Latin and Greek. Why tell us about that, John?

I wonder, actually, if you've seen the statues of Jesus around the place with some letters printed above. Maybe you can't see that. I-N-R-I. Just above on the cross.

Which is shorthand. It's the first letter for each word in Latin for Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews. At his crucifixion, it was written in three languages above him for the world to read.

In verse 21, the chief priest of the Jews protested to Pilate, don't write to the king of the Jews, but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews. Of course they don't want the notice there, but Pilate answered, what I have written, I have written.

And maybe Pilate is trying to humiliate them, there's your king. But whatever he really thinks, the notice labels Jesus truly. Because hanging on the cross is the king.

[9 : 17] God's long-promised Messiah. Come to bring in the kingdom of God. And on the cross, displaying his kingly majesty to us.

Through John's gospel, looking forward to his crucifixion, Jesus speaks again and again of when he will be lifted up. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the son of man must be lifted up.

When you have lifted up the son of man, then you will know that I am. I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.

And he said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. He was lifted up physically on the cross. But lifted up also means you're exalted and honoured.

So when the striker, when the striker scores the goal that wins the cup, the fans stream onto the field at the end and they lift him onto their shoulders to honour their champion. And when the king is crowned, he is seated high on his throne, you're to look up at him and honour him.

[10 : 30] And now here, Jesus is pinned high for all to see. And he's shown to be who he is in all his glory. He's Jesus of Nazareth.

He's the king of the Jews, sent by God. He's the rightful king, not just of the Jews, but of the world. Not just Aramaic and Latin and Greek readers, but English and Spanish and Arabic.

Look up at him at the cross. And you see the king. With all of John's gospel that we've read over these past 18 months, teaching and shaping us, you see at the cross, Jesus' kingly character.

As he loves his father and does exactly what his father commanded him. As he loves his people, his disciples, his sheep, as he dies for you.

You see at the cross, Jesus' kingly work. Sacrificing himself to take away the sins of the world. Defeating and driving out Satan. Suffering majestically, so he might draw all people to himself.

[11:40] There's no failure or defeat here. There's no king beaten and bowed. The cross is his throne. It's where he's lifted high.

He reigns from the tree. Displaying his character. Defeating his enemies. Saving his people. So royally. Four things John draws our attention to that are true.

First, the journey. He goes in control so courageously. Second, the notice. He is God's king. Lifted up. Third, now the clothes. For this is God's king.

Fulfilling God's plan. Again, to the naked eye, were you to look at the cross. It would look like everything has gone wrong and spiralled out of control for this so-called king.

But not a bit of it. Look, verse 23. When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining.

[12:51] This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. Let's not tear it, they said to one another. Let's decide by lot who will get it. Why tell us about the clothes, John?

Why point us to Jesus, stripped naked, and then soldiers splitting his kit between them and throwing dice for the undergarment? That's awful. It's so degrading. Why mention that?

Here's why. This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said, they divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.

So this is what the soldiers did. See, as these soldiers act in the moment, splitting Jesus' clothes between them, they are fulfilling God's plan, down to the tiniest detail.

The quote in verse 24 is from Psalm 22. It's a psalm written by King David, who was king of the Jews 1,000 years earlier. And in that psalm, 1,000 BC, David spoke in a sense of his own suffering.

[14:07] Listen to the verses around. Dogs surround me. A pack of villains encircles me. They pierce my hands and my feet.

All my bones are on display. People stare and gloat over me. They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment. Isn't that amazing?

1,000 years before Jesus. And David speaks of his sufferings that were so crucifixion-like.

As though it was written into the script that God's king would die like this. And that is because it was.

For at the cross, every action of every person, and the soldiers here, was sovereignly controlled by the God who had planned and then promised and then sent his son into the world as king to suffer in precisely this way for our salvation.

[15:17] The journey, the notice, the clothes, and fourthly, finally, in these verses, see how he is with his family. Jesus goes out and they crucify them.

He is God's king, fulfilling God's plan and loving his own. For near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene.

And when Jesus saw his mother there and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, woman, here is your son. And to the disciple, here is your mother. And from that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

I don't know what you think of that. I think that's a stunning moment as Jesus is about to die. Now listen to this from one commentator.

The great problem with the human saviours, who over centuries have dreamed their great dreams and flung their empires around the world, is that in the process they lose sight of the individual.

[16:31] Our little personal universe of hope and pain, struggle and achievement, pales into insignificance beside the great all-inclusive plan. The individual becomes nothing.

But the king who reigns from a cross on Golgotha is different. Because here is a king whose embrace is as wide as the world, and yet who can at the same time embrace each of us in a personal, loving commitment.

It is perfectly illustrated here, for as Jesus hangs with the burden of a world's redemption on his shoulders, he finds time to express his personal, loving concern for his mother and one of his special friends.

We're not his nuclear family, none of us Jesus' mother or his special beloved disciple like the first one, but you see the point. Jesus is sovereignly fulfilling God's plan.

He's dying for the sins of the world. It is the great central act of all of human history, and in this great moment, he loves his own, personally, and individually.

[17 : 43] He loves his mother, he knows her, and cares for her, and her future. And as he was towards her, and with the disciple he loved, so he is towards every single one of his dearly loved children, his sheep, his disciples, those who turn to him as Lord and God, you.

He knows you by name. He cares for you. As he hung on the cross, he had you in mind. He gave himself up for you.

He loves you personally, and he will see you looked after until the day he takes you to be with him forever.

Said at the beginning, he is no statue Jesus. I don't know what you think of those statues. The cross can be something so background, something you walk by and pass by.

He is no statue Jesus. Just hanging, dying, that's no good, not so good, but whatever, take a photo of the statue and then move on. We're meant to see here in John 19 the truth and the glory of him.

[19 : 02] Do you see Jesus courageously going out to lay down his life? Do you see him lifted up as the king of the Jews, the long-promised Messiah, so majestic and royal, loving and obeying his father as he acts on the cross to save his people and judge his enemies and take away the sins of the world?

Do you see there God's plan of salvation being worked out right down to the tiniest detail under God's sovereign control? Do you see at the cross the personal love of Jesus for his own, for you and for me?

We've preached through, I don't know how many sermons, 25, 30 so far in John's Gospel. There is actually only really one application from John's Gospel.

There is only one thing to do. In John 20, verse 31, John tells us the purpose of his Gospel. These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name.

We're meant to see Jesus truly and see him in all his glory, not just as he lives but as he dies. See him.

[20 : 25] Be captured by the beauty of his character and his work. Don't be distracted by flashing lights and phones and life going on around. See him so beautiful and glorious in his character and his work.

We are meant to see Jesus in all his glory and then believe. Jesus, you are the Messiah. You are the Son of God.

You are the Saviour of the world. You went out and you laid down your life for me and so I receive you. I believe in you. I bow before you, my Lord and my God.

Because by believing in him today, this one who died and rose 2,000 years ago, today we will enjoy life. Life to the full now and resurrection life beyond death.

A life of knowing God now and for all eternity that is all held out to us as so many of us know. And all of this is through Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews who died.

[21 : 42] I'm going to lead us in a prayer. Let's pray together. we have seen his glory, the one who came from the Father full of grace and truth.

Our Lord and our God, we praise and thank you for your sovereign plan to send your Son to be the Saviour of the world. Lord, we thank you for Jesus, for his loving obedience to you, for his giving his flesh for the life of the world.

Thank you that he is King and Lord of all. Thank you that on the cross he acts in his royal power to save his people, defeat his enemies and take away the sins of the world.

make us those, we pray, who see Jesus in all his glory today, this week, this Easter and for the rest of our lives and make us those who bow before him, receive him and have him as our Lord and our God, we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen.