

John 19:17-27 “The Surprising Cross”

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- [0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama.! Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- ! Insurance, meals, reports, tests, relationships.
- There is so much going on, isn't there? The stuff of life can be overwhelming. It can draw all of our attention.
- And this morning, God wants to lift up our heads, okay? And all of that is going on. He wants to lift your head. We're getting to the main event in human history.
- The one that is at the center of all of life. It gives meaning to all that other daily stuff. Now, to be fair, we do talk about the cross of Jesus all the time around here.
- [1 : 22] But this is a little bit different, especially this week. Especially this week. It's not just another story in that story. We finally arrive in John's account of all of these events at the crucifixion itself.
- John slows down here. And we will too. I know you're not surprised. For these next four weeks leading up to Easter, we'll be at the cross.
- Before we look at these few verses in John 19, I want us to remember that this whole story from Jesus' closest friend has been pointing to this moment.
- Over and over, we've read, My hour has not yet come. And now it has. We've heard Jesus also say the Son of Man must be lifted up.
- Echoing those other gospel accounts where Jesus repeatedly says, I must suffer and die. This is central to Jesus. The cross of Jesus is so central in the early church that the primary good news of Christianity is sometimes summarized as the message of the cross.
- [2 : 36] When Paul says what's of first importance, he starts with that Christ died. So we preach Christ crucified, he says.
- The power of God and the wisdom of God is Christ crucified. And it's not just in biblical accounts. I mean, it's all through the Bible. But it's featured by Jewish writers, Roman historians.
- You could easily make the case that it is the most well-attested event in all of ancient history. But the cross is not just ancient history, is it?
- To this day, over 2,000 years later from the event itself, people wear crosses around their necks every day. Put them on church buildings around the world.
- Hang crosses on the walls of their homes in every country. It's a symbol of Christian faith, right? Isn't that something? An instrument of torture and execution so beloved by so many.
- [3 : 44] There must be more than meets the eye going on with the cross. What about the person hung on the cross?
- The man who said he was the life was there put to death. And yet so many understand the cross as crucial to their life.

Their relationship with this Jesus centers on the cross. See, the cross is central in ancient history and in life today because it is the turning point in the big story of the whole universe.

Did you know that? The story that begins even before human history begins. I need you to hang with me if you don't believe this, okay? But the guy who died on the cross claims that before any person walked on this earth, before the first flower bloomed or the first star shone in our galaxy, he and his father got together and determined that the cross would be the decisive battle in the war of good versus evil.

In fact, it would be the way for God's whole world. For the people like you and me living in it to be restored to what we would be created for, to our great purpose.

[5 : 14] That's what the cross is about. That's the story, that cosmic story, that's the one that your doctor's appointments and your soccer practices and your dirty diapers and all of the rest are a part of.

They matter because of the cross. Because the cross brings your daily story into this grand story.

So, as we look at the cross, let's listen really carefully and really hopefully. God's word. Just a couple verses in John 19 for now, before we pray.

Pilate has finally handed Jesus over to the crowds calling for his crucifixion. We'll pick up at the end of verse 16.

So they took Jesus and he went out bearing his own cross to the place called the place of a skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha.

[6 : 21] He carried the cross. The picture you should have is of this cross bar, the horizontal bar across his shoulders. Think of the weight of it.

The pain having already been beaten of carrying that. The other gospel accounts tell us Jesus physically doesn't make it all the way beyond the city.

And Simon has to carry the cross for him the rest of the way. All the way outside the city. Away from the temple.

Away from God's presence. There, they crucified him. And with him two others.

One on either side. And Jesus between them. Let's pray. God, we see your son there numbered with transgressors.

[7 : 25] Jesus on a cross in the center. The center cross. Might it be, Father, that you would help us to see him there this morning.

To keep him there in our vision every moment of every day. Keep us near the cross. Keep his cross at the center of our vision and our lives.

Help us in that, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, John next gives us three views around the cross of Jesus that will help us understand what's going on.

And each of them, because of Jesus, because he's the one on the cross, it brings a surprising reversal of what we would normally expect at a crucifixion.

We'll pick up the reading at verse 19. Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.

[8 : 35] Many of the Jews read this inscription for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city. And it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, Do not write the King of the Jews, but rather this man said, I am the King of the Jews.

And Pilate answered, What I have written, I have written. We talked a lot about Jesus being King last week, right? Here, Pilate, who has not been able to hold the line on Jesus' innocence, even though he was convinced, refuses to back down from calling him the King of the Jews.

King. Is that even possible? How could you be any more powerless, any less kingly than hanging on a cross, where we can still see the blood running down his face from the mocking crown of thorns on his head?

King? And yet, Jesus has been in control every step of the way from the garden to the cross these last few days, hasn't he?

He had to help them arrest him when they had all fallen down in awe of him. He reminded Pilate where true power rests. And here, he doesn't fight.

[10 : 10] He carries his cross willingly, doesn't he? That's John's point. Jesus has been saying he would be crowned when he was lifted up on a cross. Is it possible?

Could that be what's happening now? He's being crowned King through suffering? Suffering, friends.

Some of you are really hurting right now. Don't miss this, okay? God is faithful even when it seems like he's not. You're going to meet Jesus in your suffering.

That's where he is. Notice that. Jesus is in control even when he seems least powerful. And God is at work.

What's happening? God is announcing the Messiah, the promised king, the one whose kingdom, he said, would cover the earth and would have no end on a cross notice.

[11 : 11] It's this card that would be put up there to say who you are and what kind of criminal you are that you have to go to the cross. That's what it is. And this card is written this time in three languages.

The Jews walking by can read it. All the Romans can read it. Pilate makes sure of that. And anybody else who was traveling through could read in the Greek the language of any area in the world that they would be going to.

They can read it. Do you see what's happening? The king of the Jews, the promised Messiah is not being crowned just in Jerusalem, is he? Even while Jewish leaders are rebelling against his reign, don't call him king of the Jews.

He is launching a missionary kingdom to every Jew and Gentile and to the uttermost parts of the earth, isn't he? That's what King Jesus has always been about. The message of the cross is meant to be proclaimed to everyone because King Jesus is there suffering for the least of these.

Because King Jesus is there reigning over men and women and boys and girls from every tribe and tongue and language and nation. Have you remembered lately that you're an ambassador of that global kingdom?

[12 : 31] You're meant to be proclaimed, announced to everyone around you, even if you don't know their situation. Even if you don't speak their language, God has sent you to them.

Let him take care of the details. Even when you kill him, you're crowning King Jesus. Amazing.

Jesus surprisingly turns the cross from a tool of execution into a tool of exaltation as when he is lifted up on it, he draws all people to himself.

The king who never traveled or spoke or campaigned far outside of his hometown is soon to be worshipped and followed and spread around the world.

The wonder of the cross that happens at the cross. Next, John tells us what the Roman soldiers did after they hung Jesus on the cross.

[13 : 37] Verse 23. When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts. One part for each soldier.

Also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. So they said to one another, let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be.

This was to fulfill the scripture which says, they divided my garments among them and for my clothing they cast lots. So the soldiers did these things.

These things. Why? To fulfill the scripture. Yet another reminder that God is not out of control.

That Jesus is willingly following his Father's will in the darkest hour. And yet another reminder that Jesus is the divine Messiah King.

[14 : 37] The scripture being fulfilled here by the soldiers is Psalm 22. We read the beginning of it earlier. We're going to see this Psalm referenced over and over by John and by Jesus at the cross.

It's his understanding of what he is enduring. It's actually a Psalm written by David several hundred years before this moment. King David was often rightfully described as a shameful but righteous sufferer.

It's what the Psalms about. That description would often fit David. But the words of Psalm 22 go well beyond anything David or any other king had ever experienced.

To foretell a crucified king. We'll look at this Psalm even more next week. But notice a couple of things as the shameful sufferer nears death.

It's what's being described. Right as he's getting there, verse 18. They divide my garments among them. And for my clothing they cast lots.

[15 : 46] There it is. It's a reminder, isn't it, that your life is over. When your very last earthly possessions are being divided up right in front of you.

What an indignity. Right? Add to that the indignity, the shame of nakedness.

No more clothes. They have them. That was a part of Roman crucifixion. You have to go all the way back to the Garden of Eden to find people naked and unashamed.

Since we sinned, we've all been trying to deal with our shame. Right? With fig leaves trying to cover our shame.

So many varieties of fig leaves through the centuries. For many of us these days, we cover our shame with our perfectionism and control.

[16 : 53] With our overworking and financial success. With weight loss and skin care obsessions. All in an effort to cover our blemishes and our scars.

To compensate for our weaknesses and our inadequacies. To hide our failings and our insecurities. Because we hate feeling ashamed, don't we? Every one of us.

Can you even imagine what would it feel like to feel totally exposed and at the same time feel totally confident?

Can you even imagine that feeling? Is it possible to have hope in our shame and our suffering? That's actually the hope of Psalm 22.

If you keep reading, God doesn't shame the shameful. In fact, verse 24, he hears them. And then verse 26, he comes and rescues them.

[17 : 58] He gives them life and full life. Forever. Forever. Repeatedly through the Old Testament, prophets like Isaiah and Ezekiel describe salvation as God covering our nakedness.

It's a really important picture because it reminds us that all of the things that you're ashamed of. Down to the very deepest thoughts of your heart that you don't want anyone else to know.

Including those things that you've experienced that have been done to you. Jesus is bearing that shame on the cross.

Two ways that our shame is dealt with by Jesus. First, he takes it upon himself, doesn't he? By hanging on the cross with no clothes, in public, being spit upon.

Mocked like a common criminal. Friend, the shame due your sin has been spent on Jesus.

[19 : 08] It is not yours to endure. It has been covered when he was exposed for you. What a gift.

But maybe even more beautiful and hopeful than that reality is that we know something about Jesus. He was hanging on this cross intentionally, wasn't he?

No one takes his life from him, but he lays it down of his own accord. So listen, this gets even better. The one who's hanging there on that cross.

The one who sees everything about you. Loves you. Sees it all about you first and still goes to the cross.

To shed his blood for you. To give his life because you are precious to him. The one who knows what you want no one else to know.

[20 : 14] Says he's worth dying for. She's worth suffering for. The one who knows you most.

Loves you best. More than you can imagine. That's the kind of, as that sinks in for you, it's the kind of reliable relationship.

The kind of unassailable confidence. The kind of secure value that we long for. That we grasp for in all sorts of other places in our shame.

Because we can't find it anywhere else. The shameful but righteous sufferer is not being cast out and humiliated forever.

No. No. He's being crowned as king. And we will reign with him. He is trampling the powers of darkness down. And we will fight for his kingdom alongside of him.

[21 : 16] He is bearing our shame. And so we will be clothed in his righteous robes forever. That's what's going on. That is the wonder of the cross.

John gives us one more surprising reversal at the cross. Remember what Jesus is going through here. The unimaginable anguish.

The excruciating pain. We get the word excruciating from the cross. If at any time you could imagine a person thinking only of himself.

And that being understandable. It would be while hanging. Gasping for breath. On a cross. But listen at verse 25.

But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister. Mary the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby.

[22 : 27] He said to his mother, woman, behold your son. Then he said to the disciple, behold your mother. And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

I suspect the mothers among us can best feel Mary's pain. But every one of us can imagine grief.

That a widowed woman. Now watching her first born son be executed. Must be feeling. All the way back to Jesus' dedication in the temple as a baby.

Mary had been told. That a sword would pierce her own soul too. Certainly this would feel like a sword through the heart of one who bore him.

Raised him. Watched him suffer. Heard him. Rejected. Can you imagine that the feeling? Empty. Abandoned.

- [23 : 35] Heartbroken. Heartbroken. Jesus spoke so few words from the cross it was physically quite difficult to do so.
- Mary must have been surprised to hear, woman, behold your son. Just think of what's happening. Because she's been seen by Jesus.
- Right there when she hurts. Worse than we can imagine. Jesus sees her. Jesus sees you. Here he sees his mother.
- And he's making sure she's cared for. Honoring his mother. Even when he could have thought of his own suffering. I think we are to see here beautifully the complete righteousness of Jesus in every moment.
- To the very last breath. In our place. As abandoned and alone as he must have felt. Perhaps even feeling his father turning his face away.
- [24 : 46] As he bore our sins in his body on the tree. Jesus ensures that his mother will not be alone. He is not only paying for our sins.
- We call that passive righteousness as he suffers. But also providing active righteousness. Living the righteous life that we owe to the God who made us.
- To live in his image. And follow his law. And live after his heart. Wow! Jesus at the same moment doing both of those things. Many have wondered why his disciple John is the one that he entrusts Mary to.
- When we know Jesus had younger brothers. Well we also know that it wasn't until after his resurrection. That his brothers believed in him. And Mary already did.
- Jesus you see has come to create a new community. Hasn't he? Of people united in him. Notice with both Mary and John here. They are defined in this passage by their relationship to Jesus.
- [25 : 57] His mother. The disciple he loved. With his twelve disciples. And now with two disciples of different genders.
- Of different generations. They are connected. Jesus has established his church. We are seeing a little picture of it.
- Who are they? They are those for whom he is dying on the cross. Right? Do you see what's happening on the cross? It's not merely a place where someone is isolated and alone.
- Although certainly it is that. It is a place from which he is creating new community. Unbelievable. That primary relationship in Christ is why we call it the family of God.
- Since Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers. We are co-heirs. We are family. There are so many I trust.
- [27 : 03] Obvious applications for us and our families honoring our own parents. But perhaps especially in a church family here.
- How do we care for our widows? For example. Some of them we don't get to see here very often. But do we go to them?
- Recently Jim Lancaster, one of our deacons. The deacons made a couple dozen of these beautiful handcrafted frames.
- And he put in each of them. The church office number. The name and contact information for each widows specific Southwood deacon that they can call.
- Whenever they need help. Put them in each one of their homes or rooms. What a thoughtful gift.
- [28 : 04] They love it. I love watching the Southwood family care for one another. Have you found an older woman here to welcome into your life as a mother?

Maybe it will happen on the women's retreat this weekend. Do you think often of all the mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters that you have here.

That God's placed you in. Do you lean into living like that? Like the family that Jesus makes you into in your home? On your prayer list?

Near your heart? Is that the way some of these people are to you? Do you have family here? Some of you have told me this is your only family.

And God wants you cared for and loved like that. He wants that for everyone of his sons and daughters in his family.

[29 : 13] One of my favorite visions of this family that I get really often. It's really not fair that I get to stand up here and see it all the time. Is when you all stand at a baptism.

The whole family stands up and says, we're here for the next generation.

For this specific child and this specific parents and this family. We're going to support them. It's powerful.

Maybe you've gotten to see it a couple of times. This is why our grace groups are such vital places. Not merely to exist.

I mean, it's great to say I have a grace group. Yeah, but really to deepen the bonds of family relationship. To unite on his mission together. To care for one another.

[30 : 10] As though Jesus had personally from the cross. Asked you to care for your brother or sister. In a sense he has asked you that.

You know that? I tell you, if he puts you in their grace group. He might have said it by name. You're that close. He loves them.

He died to make your brother or sister. Even the one who's so different from you. And sometimes frustrates you. He died to make that person your eternal sibling.

What could unite you to someone else? More than having your shame removed by the love of Jesus.

And theirs is too. And he rejoiced together in that. More than giving you a place. And an eternal kingdom. And a role with a purpose. And you're fighting the battles he's called you to.

[31 : 13] And there they are right beside you. What else could unite you more to them? What about inviting you into a family. And a regular meal. And there they are seated next to you. Jesus says, put them there.

And said, love them. Show them my love. I ate this week with a woman four decades ahead of me. Of a different race.

With a very different background and story. That I got to hear for the first time. But with a very familiar love of Jesus.

That had us laughing and hugging and sharing one another's hearts in just a few minutes. The power of the cross. The power of the cross.

When it's central. The story is told of parents of famed Bible commentator Matthew Henry. That when they met in England. In the 1600s.

[32 : 13] Her friends warned her not to get involved with him. That while this new man in town. He seemed a wonderful preacher. But they didn't really know where he was from.

He was not of the same social standing. And that meant a lot. Especially then still today. He was so far removed. You don't even know where he's from. They said. She responded true.

But I know where he is going. And I should like to go with him. Perhaps the only picture better than the baptism one.

The baptism one is the one we're about to see together. You're going to come gather around tables with people you may not know super well. I don't know. Depends on where you sat this morning.

You may be a bit suspicious where they've come from. But you know where they're going. And by God's grace.

[33 : 14] You're going with them. Forever. Forever. So care for them. Like you'll be together forever. Because you will.

With the Savior King. Who was crucified. For you and them. For all of us. The wonder. Of the cross. It does that.

Is it really possible? Before we come to the table. Just reflect with me. Could that really be true? That a cross. Designed to bring death.

Could bring such life. It is if it's at the center. It is if the one on it. Is so divinely good.

And gracious. And glorious. That he can control. What men mean for evil. And turn it to good. If the cross of Christ. Is really at the center.

[34 : 13] And if it's so surprisingly. Upside down. From what we expect. It may mean. That your pain. Your mundane. Your doctor's appointments.

And soccer practices. And dirty diapers. And all of that. They're part of something. Much bigger. And much more lasting. Than you can even get your mind around. It may mean.

You really have a king. One you can know. Personally. And you're a really important part. Of a kingdom. That advances. Every time you bow.

Every time you suffer. Every time you serve. The kingdom inches forward. It may mean. That you have a purpose.

In spite of your failings. Bigger than your feelings. A confidence that is outside of your performance. That's beyond your shame. For shame.

[35 : 11] And it may mean. You have a family. That will last forever. That needs your love. That's worth sacrificing for. That your older brother.

Your savior. Died. To welcome you into. With him. That's actually why. We come to this table. Together.

Together. We can't live together. In his family. Without Jesus being the center. And the cross. Being what unites us.

As those deemed. Beloved enough. For the son of God. To die for. That's what he was doing that night. When he was betrayed. When he took the bread.

And he broke it. And gave it to his disciples. Who would be. In his family. In the same way. That I'm ministering. In his name.

[36 : 10] Give this bread. To you. Connected. In that same family. He said. This is my body. Given for you. Do this. In remembrance of me. In the same way.

After supper. He took the cup. And he said. This cup. Is the new covenant. In my blood. Which is shed for many. For the forgiveness of sins. Drink from it. All of you. As you eat this bread.

And you drink this cup. You proclaim the Lord's death. Until he comes. Eating this bread. And drinking from this cup. Proclaims. That the cross of Jesus.

Is the most significant event. Ever. And the most important reality. In your life. Bringing you into the family of God. Forever.

And into life giving. Life transforming. Relationship with him today. If that's. Not. What you've embraced. By faith. Personally.

[37 : 06] And what you've proclaimed. Publicly. By joining a church. Then don't come and take these. Elements. This morning. But we're so glad. That you're here.

And we do invite you. To come. And to observe. What's going on. Here at these tables. To ask us. To pray with you. If you would like. We would love that. Or if you prefer.

We invite you. Even to stay. Where you are. And ponder. The offer. Of Jesus. On his cross. To give you a king. To trust. For your shame. To be removed.

For a family. To belong to. I offer that to you. In the name of Jesus. Who can make it a reality. For you today. But if God is your father.

And Jesus is your older brother. Because you trust. His perfect life. And his sacrificial death. In your place. Then whether you're a member. Of this church. Or another one.

[38 : 01] Come. And eat together. Perhaps this morning. We'll gather in slightly larger groups. The ushers will help you with that. As we come. Because we want to get a really clear picture.

Of our savior. And a really clear picture. Of our brothers and sisters. That he's brought into a family together. Let's pray. And then we'll eat. Jesus. Thank you.

For another chance to see you. To see your cross. To see your love. And to see your family. It's not what we would expect. To find at a cross.

But it is what we need. And you loved us enough. To go there for us. And so would you. Even now. By your spirit. Remind us deeply. Of your love for us.

And of our calling. To share that love. With one another. And we ask it in your name. Amen. For more information. Visit us online. At southwood.org.

[38 : 59] At southwood.org. Music.