

## EXPOSITION OF JOHN

Message #73

John 19:17-30

If you were to ask most people who go to church what Christmas is all about, more than likely the universal answer would be the birth of Jesus Christ. This certainly would be a proper answer. Ever since A.D. 336, Christmas is a day that shows up on a calendar which was observed in Rome. So ever since the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D., Christmas has celebrated the birth of Jesus Christ.

It is interesting to observe that the celebration of Christmas was not commanded by Jesus Christ, nor was it an apostolic mandate to the church. In fact, Mark and John do not actually even give any details concerning Christ's birth.

But if you would have asked John, or better yet, if you would have asked Jesus Christ Himself about His birth, He would point you to the cross and say, "For this I have been born and for this I have come into the world" (John 18:37). What we see in this text is the very reason Jesus Christ was born and the very reason Christ came into this world and what you see is this:

**JESUS CHRIST WAS BORN TO DIE ON A CROSS FOR OUR SINS AND HE PUT UP WITH THE HORRIFIC DETAILS OF THE CRUCIFIXION UNTIL HE COMPLETELY FINISHED THE NECESSARY SACRIFICIAL WORK.**

The only reason God became flesh was because no one could have a relationship with God without His sacrifice. We are all sinners and just as Israel did not have the righteousness necessary to inherit God's Kingdom on earth, we do not have the righteousness necessary to inherit God's heaven.

Now in this text, John takes us through the crucifixion narrative through his eyes. He was the only apostle actually there to see it. It is obvious that God does not want us to ever forget about this holy event. There are eight observations we want to make:

**OBSERVATION #1** – They took Jesus from Pilate's judgment seat to the place of crucifixion and made Jesus bear His own cross. **19:17**

A procession to the cross in Jesus' day was, as one writer said, as common as a funeral procession in our day. Typically when Rome crucified a prisoner, they would choose the longest route possible so that everyone in Jerusalem would see 'crime does not pay.'

We must keep in mind that Jesus has been without sleep and He is beaten to the point that He is beyond human recognition. It was the custom to have a prisoner carry his own crossbeam which could weigh over 100 pounds. If Jesus traveled a direct route to the place of crucifixion it was less than one-half mile, about 600 yards. But if the long route were taken it could be nearly two miles. This route is traditionally called Via Dolorosa. Jesus started out carrying His own cross but apparently collapsed and Simon the Cyrenian carried it the rest of the way for Jesus (Matthew 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26). Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus, who Paul mentions in Romans 16:13.

Christ was taken to the place of the skull, which in Hebrew is Golgotha. It was called the place of the skull because the place had a skull shape. It was here that Jesus would die.

**OBSERVATION #2** – They crucified Jesus between to other men. **19:18**

Crucifixion was never inflicted on Roman citizens. This was the worst form of capital punishment and it was reserved for the worst of criminals such as highway robbers, rebels and various prisoners of war.

The cross usually consisted of an upright beam, which extended, at times, above the other beam, which went horizontal to the ground, thus forming the letter “T”. There was another type of cross the “X” cross, however, we believe Jesus was crucified on a “T” cross for several reasons:

- 1) The early church fathers said He was crucified on a “T” cross.
- 2) The “T” form appears in early Christian art.

The real discussion in Christianity is not whether or not it was a “T” cross or an “X” cross, but whether the vertical beam rose above the horizontal beam (“T” or “t”), which we tend to think is the case in view of the next observation. They were able to nail a sign up above His head (Matt. 27:37), which would logically suggest that there was room above His head in order to nail it.

In the middle of the cross was a piece of wood on which the crucified somewhat sat and often ropes were used to bind the hands so when the hands were nailed to the cross beam the prisoner’s weight would not cause him to rip off the cross. His feet were nailed to the upright beam. The height of the cross was not great and the crucified person’s feet were almost always less than two feet off the ground. Sometimes a person was nailed to the cross before it went up and sometimes he was nailed after it was already up.

The worst suffering that Christ is enduring here actually is not the physical pain, although it was excruciating. Actually you don’t die because of the nails, you die from hemorrhaging, asphyxia and shock. It is painful, but the real agony Christ is experiencing here is our sin. Isaiah said “the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him” (Isaiah 53:6). Isaiah again said that Jesus “poured out Himself to death and was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many” (Isaiah 53:12). He who knew no sin became sin for us and was hanging on that cross.

**OBSERVATION #3** – Pilate wrote an inscription which identified Jesus Christ as the Nazarene who was king of the Jews and had it nailed to the cross in three different languages in opposition to the chief priests. **19:19-22**

It wasn’t enough that Pilate delivered an innocent Person up for crucifixion, but he also wrote a title to be put above Christ. The title read that Jesus is the one from Nazareth and “the King of the Jews.” It is so ironic because at Christ’s birth wise men from the east traveled to see Jesus as a baby and they asked Herod, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?” (Matthew.2:2). That same Person is hanging on a cross and just as one of the first things about His life is that He was identified as King of the Jews, so one of the last things before His death is that He is identified again as King of the Jews.

Pilate wrote this in Hebrew, the national language of the Jews, in Latin the official language of Rome and in Greek the common language of the people. So Christ is clearly identified as King of the Jews in the language of religion, in the language of the government and in the language of the common people. Don't for one moment think this is done in three languages as just some 'useless verbiage.' **God wanted all people to know and understand that they were guilty of rejecting and killing the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.**

**OBSERVATION #4** – The soldiers took Christ's outer garments and divided them four ways and cast lots for the tunic in fulfillment of prophecy. **19:23-24**

The typical Jewish man wore five pieces of clothing, other than a loin cloth - sandals, turban, belt, inner tunic and outer robe. Four parts were divided up, but the last part, the robe, was not divided and the soldiers decided to cast lots for it. This, of course, was in perfect fulfillment of what David predicted in Psalms 22:18, which says, "They divide my garments among them and for my clothing they cast lots." **Don't ever forget this, prophecy is always fulfilled literally.**

These soldiers are so worldly focused that they do not understand that the one hanging on that cross above them can save them from all of their sin. They completely miss the saving and atoning value of the death of Jesus Christ and are all excited about new clothes.

I cannot help but think of family vultures who realizing a member of the family is nearing death, just really get focused on what they are going to get and lose focus of the one dying.

**OBSERVATION #5** – Certain named women were standing by the cross of Jesus Christ. **19:25**

As far as we know, John was the only apostle of all the apostles who was actually at the cross to witness the crucifixion. He looked around and carefully saw the women who were there.

- 1) Jesus' mother, Mary, was there.
- 2) Jesus' aunt, Mary's sister, whose name was Salome (Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40), Zebedee's wife and the mother of James and John, was there. This was the woman that Jesus had one time rebuked because she wanted her two boys to sit on His right hand and left hand when He would reign in His kingdom (Matthew 20:20).
- 3) Mary, the wife of Clopas, was there, who we don't know much about.
- 4) Mary Magdalene was there. Mary Magdalene had been a demon possessed woman (Mark 16:9; Luke 8:2), who had been a terrible sinner. She was the one who came to Jesus at a Pharisees' house and washed His feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair and anointed them with costly perfume.

Now I want to put this in some perspective. This is God hanging on this cross. As He looks down from that cross, all He sees are five people who actually care enough about Him to be physically present at His death, four women and one man.

If you have ever thought your life hasn't really amounted to much or accomplished much because you don't see great numbers of people being affected by who you are and what you do, just remember this cross scene. Jesus has just traveled all through Israel teaching the wonderful truths of God, and when He dies for their sins, only five people show up.

**OBSERVATION #6** – When Jesus saw His mother He turned her into the custody of John for his care. **19:26-27**

As Mary looked up at Jesus, as a mother, she must have thought about that baby she once held in her arms. She must have thought about Bethlehem and the shepherds and the wise men and the fleeing to Egypt and the returning to Nazareth. She probably reflected on the time when He was twelve when He stood right in the temple in Jerusalem and confounded the greatest scholars of His day. All of that must have been going through Mary's mind, but even more significantly, Mary was going through Jesus' mind. Here He has the sin of the entire world on Him and He still cared for His mother. He has pain shooting through the muscles and tendons. When hanging on a cross, one is straining just to breathe and yet He still cared about His mother.

It is a marvelous thing to think that God cares about the provisions of a mother and He specifically charged John to take care of his mother. Notice, Jesus says to His mother, "Woman." This is God speaking from the cross. He is not dying as just a man on this cross; He is dying as God on this cross. This is God caring for a mother.

John already had some responsibilities to his own mother, Salome and now Jesus gave him another responsibility, His mother, John's aunt. Jesus wanted him to take care of Mary. John could have said 'this is no great ministry assignment. After all I'm an apostle.' This is seemingly no great apostolic assignment that is on the front lines of evangelism. This is not the kind of apostolic ministry that stands before massive numbers of people and generates huge responses. **But this is the one key assignment Jesus gave to John.** Did you ever stop to think that one of the greatest ministries for God you will ever have will be to take care of a grandmother, a mother or an aunt who needs your help? Don't ever minimize the importance of caring for a mom or dad, an aunt or uncle. If Jesus cared for His mother while hanging on the cross, then we certainly had better care for ours.

When we were on vacation, in one of the mansions we visited, a table had a classical Greek reader on it which caught my interest. The tour guide noticed that I was carefully looking at the book and asked, did something about the book interest me. I said, "Yes, because I know Greek and I am trying to figure out what this says." The woman said, "Well tell us all; we have always wondered what it said." I couldn't read everything, but the essence of what was said was that this writer had a great love for his mother. When I said that, the tour guide said, "I like that." Everyone likes to learn about a love for a mother and Jesus certainly had love for His.

**OBSERVATION #7** – When Jesus knew He had fulfilled everything demanded by God, He asked for a drink, which was sour wine. **19:28-29**

John is the only one who records that Jesus asked for a drink. When Jesus had first arrived at Golgotha, they tried to give Him a wine mixed with a narcotic, which He refused (Mark 15:23). Now he was thirsty and asked for a drink. This again was in complete fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. David predicted that the King of Kings would be given vinegar to drink for His thirst (Ps. 69:21). Now when one was hanging up on a cross, a hyssop branch, which was a reed about 1 to 1½ feet long, was used to get liquid up to the condemned person's mouth.

A sponge was soaked in wine (Mark 15:36) and placed on the end of the hyssop branch and lifted to the person's parched lips. I do not think it is a mere coincidence that a hyssop branch is used, for this was the very branch used in Exodus at the Passover to brush blood on the doorposts (Exodus 12:22). This is a direct allusion to the fact that Jesus is our Passover sacrifice. Any person who rejects Jesus Christ will one day thirst for one drop of water, but it will be too late.

The actual Greek word (οξος) used to describe what the soldiers put into Jesus' mouth is one that refers to 'sour wine.' This was the ordinary drink of laborers and common soldiers. The word seems to imply that the wine had sharpness to it, not smoothness (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 319).

I have always believed that using Welch's grape juice at a communion service does not do justice to what we need to remember. This moment was anything but sweet and smooth for Jesus Christ. It was a bitter, sharp moment and it is illustrated by the 'sour wine.'

**OBSERVATION #8** – When Jesus had taken a drink He said, "It is finished" and He gave up His Spirit. **19:30**

Notice it is Jesus who is in charge of His Spirit. He determined the moment that His Spirit left His body. The only One who actually controls this moment is God. The actual moment that a person's spirit departs his body is controlled by God and Jesus controls His own Spirit, proving He is God.

But carefully look at what Jesus Christ says - "It is finished." He knew with precision the moment of finality to God's work. This is His victory cry.

Do not miss this. Jesus Christ finished everything necessary to save your soul from sin. From the heathen sinner to the religious sinner, your salvation is completely finished in Jesus Christ. If you believe on Jesus Christ you are forever saved. The work is finished at the cross. He is the author and finisher of your faith and when you believe in Him your sins are "paid for in full."

Do not slap Him in the face by thinking your works can save you. It is only His work that can save you. Some theologians have said if you believe that you are only saved by believing in Jesus Christ, then you believe in a 'cheap grace.' How dare any look at what Jesus is doing on this cross and call it 'cheap grace.' There is nothing cheap about grace. It cost Jesus Christ a great deal to save you from your sins.

That is why He is hanging on that cross and for this reason Jesus was born into this world.