



John 19:17–22

17 Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). 18 There they crucified him, and with him two others – one on each side and Jesus in the middle. 19 Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: jesus of nazareth, the king of the jews. 20 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, Latin and Greek.
21 The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, ‘Do not write “The King of the Jews”, but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.’ 22 Pilate answered, ‘What I have written, I have written.’

Reflection

(Today’s reflection is given by Justin Mofatt)

So this is it. The big moment in John’s Gospel. John 19:18a.

‘There they crucified him...’

Because of that moment, the whole universe has been changed. And each one of

us is necessarily touched. Why? Because, as we learned yesterday, this is the ‘author of life’ being killed. Peter will say these exact words soon after these events, as recorded in Acts 4:15. Peter also has good news. He proclaims:

‘You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead.’

So my text today is John 19:17–22. It goes like this. Read it slowly. Stop this recording if you have to.

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had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, KING OF THE JEWS. 20 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, Latin and Greek. 21 The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, ‘Do not write “The King of the Jews”, but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.’ 22 Pilate answered, ‘What I have written, I have written.’

What we have here is a simple description of the crucifixion of Jesus, without the gory details and without emotion. Jesus is carrying his own execution device. We note that ‘carrying your cross’ is something he said every one who follows him must do.

And here he is, leading the way. He carried it to a specific place 'near the city', named 'the place of the Skull'. And...

18 There they crucified him, and with him two others – one on each side and Jesus in the middle.

You've got the picture in your mind. And it's created with such an economy of words. Jesus unfairly crucified with some thugs.

But we can't get enough of Pilate, who cannot control the situation. Perhaps out of conviction that this is all just wrong, perhaps out of plain Anti-Semitism, perhaps out of guilt, he has a sign made and then placed above Jesus on the cross. Like an insect collection, Jesus has been 'pinned down' and his 'classification' has been

nailed above him. And the classification, for all to read, is: 'JESUS OF NAZARETH, KING OF THE JEWS.'

This is your king, O Jews. And we killed him.

I love how the Chief Priests petition Pilate to consider a more nuanced wording. Namely, that this is not in fact the King of the Jews, but someone who claimed to be the King of the Jews'. But Pilate remains firm, and un-nuanced. This man is the King of the Jews, and it's not just his claim. Not that Pilate believed that. I think Pilate is genuinely confused. But it doesn't stop him putting his foot down:

22 Pilate answered, 'What I have written, I have written.'

Think

There are a number of ironies going on here in this chapter that I want you to have a think about. I want you to have a think about them because they expose the human heart. An example of what I mean is in Chapter 9 of John's Gospel. In Chapter 9, there is a blind man, who ends up seeing by a miraculous healing. And there are people there with perfectly good eyes that end up 'blind'. So the irony there in John 9 exposes the human heart. You think you can see! Be careful, lest you are truly 'blind'. You are blind? Perhaps if you trust Jesus, you will be able to 'see'. Jesus says as much in John 9:39:

39 Jesus said, 'For judgment I have

come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.'

Here are some ironies that could expose your heart in John 19:

First, in John 19:13, Pilate, representing a King in Rome called Caesar, sits down on the 'judges seat' to judge Jesus. Oh, how ironic. Its in 19:13.

When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha).

It's ironic, since Jesus is the one who will Judge the whole world. This is the one

who will judge the quick and the dead. Pilate is seated where Jesus should be. And the man in front of him will one day judge Pilate. It's ironic that Pilate says: 'Ecce Homo'. 'Behold the man.'

Second, in John 19:15, the Jewish people, who know that they have one King, and he is the God of heaven and earth, are baying for the blood of Jesus. They shout: 'Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!' But Pilate comes out and says: 'Shall I crucify your king?' And the Chief Priests reply:

15b 'We have no King but Caesar.'

It's ironic, since Judaism is built on one premise: that God is their King. But here they are admitting that they have no King!

They do not know God.

And it is in having no King (but themselves) that allows for the ultimate irony. That everyone there is talking about who the 'King' is and isn't. They are using Caesar's kingship to ensure the death of this troublemaker; this moth that needs to be swatted and destroyed and pinned for all to examine. But the only person who gets it right, the only person who correctly identifies him, is Pilate.

And he does it by making a sign and having it pinned above him. And what does it say? 'JESUS OF NAZARETH, KING OF THE JEWS.'

The irony is simple: This is the King. And here we are killing him.

Pray

Find a recording of 'My song is Love Unknown', by Samuel Crossman. It was written in 1664. And use it as a prayer. It takes you through the narrative here, but it shows all the ironies that reveal the darkness of the human heart and the lightness of the cross of Jesus. Ask God to show you. Ask God to open blind eyes. Ask God to show you the places in which we think that we are the true judges, and the kings and queens of our lives. And then ask him to show you Jesus. The hymn goes like this:

My song is love unknown,
My Saviour's love to me;
Love to the loveless shown,
That they might lovely be.

O who am I,
That for my sake
My Lord should take
Frail flesh and die?