

Series: Receiving life by believing in God's Son (a Gospel of John study)

Sermon Text: John 19:16-22

Key Words: A Hidden King

(*This account is also found in Matthew 27:32-38; Mark 15:21-28; Luke 23:26-34)

Today, we're starting a new series of messages from 19:16-37 called, "*Looking up at the cross with John.*" For the next few weeks, we'll consider some of John's observations on the cross. Each week, as we inch closer to the end of the 4th gospel, we'll remind ourselves why it was written. John 20:30-31 tells us, "*Jesus did many other signs...not written in this book; but these are written so you may believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*" This lens must guide our interpretations. So, let's get right into our first...

BIG IDEA: There's more to Jesus than meets the eye.

After Pilate delivered Jesus over to the Jews to be crucified *verses 16-17* say, *they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha.* I was surprised to learn nobody carried a full cross, rather the vertical beams were kept stationary for Rome's convenience. A victim carried the 70-pound horizontal crossbeam on their shoulders, which was plenty to bear after flogging left your body fileted, bloody, and nearly in shock. Oddly, John left out the part where a North African named Simon was compelled to carry Jesus' beam along the way. Of course, this is an omission, not a contradiction, since he never said, "*nobody helped Jesus.*" You see, John included bare-minimum details that made certain theological truths stand out. While his can be reconciled with the other 4 gospel accounts, that isn't really what we're supposed to do with them. If we color John's account with too much from Matthew, Mark, and Luke we miss what he intended to spotlight by arranging details as he did. There's a reason John added a 4th gospel after the other 3 had been written, and it wasn't just to repeat what they had already said. This is a key to Bible study I used to miss--we must compare Scripture with Scripture without turning a writer's unique voice into someone else's message. This is known as "[biblical theology](#)", and we'll see its value again when we study John's Revelation of Jesus Christ. Another way we might blur John's voice here is by fixating on the gory details and overlooking his simple point...Jesus died. While the history and science of *crucifixion* is intriguing, none of the gospel writers, not even Dr. Luke, offered details of the practice itself, likely because it was familiar to their readers. In fact, I'm amazed how little they said about the time Jesus spent on the cross! John preferred we see the divine meaning of all Jesus did, so that we

believe! He invites us to stand at the foot of the cross and look up with him, to pick up all the clues he laid out along the way, and to discover what God was up to during a time when hope seemed lost.

So, as we step back and observe John's portrait, one thing that should catch our eye is what we'll call ***Observation #1: The crucifixion was Christ's coronation***. Do yourself a favor and re-read from chapter 11 up to this point. Take note how John developed his story to spotlight the way God turned a cruel instrument of death into a glorious instrument of exaltation! When you get to **19:1-3**, the irony should jump out at you as they parade Jesus like a clown in a thorny crown and purple robe saying, "Hail, King of the Jews." As we come to **verses 18-19**, we're told, ***there they crucified him with two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. Pilate also wrote this inscription and put it on the cross, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."*** A notice of crimes committed typically hung from their neck, so those watching the parade to the cross took warning. **Verses 20-22** tell us, ***Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in the 3 major languages of their day...Aramaic, Latin, and Greek. The chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."*** Not bad for a guy who previously cowered to the political threats of Israel's religious leaders. He finally stood up to them, if just to rub their noses in it. Despite his lack of courage to stand for truth, at least he refused to publish their lie. John hoped we would see a double meaning here as we did in chapter 11 where Caiaphas, the High Priest said, "It's better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish."

So, what does it all mean? What are we supposed to see in John's portrait? Jesus was being lifted high (as predicted in 12:32) in a public place for all to see Israel's King. Most importantly, something only John tells us--***the notice was written*** so everyone could read the truth about Jesus in their own language! To me, this set the stage for what God will do later in Acts 2--everyone heard the gospel in their native tongue! Make no mistake, God wants the gospel communicated plainly so people aren't required to learn an unfamiliar language to hear about Jesus. To share God's heart involves sharing His Word in simple, easy-to-understand ways. It also involves embracing a truth missed by Israel's power-hungry, nationalistic religious leaders...the gospel is for every type of person. Revelation 7 declares the gospel is for every nation, tribe, people, and language. We must take to heart the lesson Paul taught Peter in Galatians 2:11ff--the things Christians do and are involved with can help or hurt

our message. The gospel is for all types of people regardless of where they're from and what they've done, so we never want our lifestyle to imply anyone is people beyond the reach of God's love.

In summary, John believed the Old Testament contained oodles of prophecies of God intention to send a Messiah-King, not just for Israel but for all nations. I'll share several examples next time but consider this one from Psalm 72 (8, 11), "*May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth! ...May all kings fall down before him, and all nations serve him!*" John wrote his account in a particular way to help us realize Jesus fulfilled such predictions, despite the efforts of powerful political and religious figures who worked against Him. What does this say to us? It proves God's truth cannot ultimately be suppressed! While evil appeared to win the day Jesus was crucified, the truth made its way to the surface and was apparent to those with eyes to see and ears to hear. And if God turned the crucifixion into a coronation, then His unstoppable power can bring about His glory and our good in our worst possible moment, even if that moment is our death. Let's close by reading what this powerful truth inspired the Apostle Paul to pen in 1 Corinthians 15:55-58, "*O death, where is your victory...and your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*" As we stand at the foot of the cross and look up with John, may we see what he and so many others saw, so that we "*may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*"

Let's pray: Father, it's remarkable to me, that somehow, you turned death into a pathway to eternal life, not just for Jesus but for all those united with Him by grace through faith. It's also obvious that if your perfect Son didn't have a pain-free life, then we must prepare ourselves for difficulty. Help us to not be like those in this story--so caught up in self and culture that we can't recognize when we're in the presence of King Jesus or can't discern the difference between Jesus and a terrorist like Barabbas. In the worst of times, may we look to Jesus and believe your purposes cannot be stopped, your glory is always at work, and you are ultimately in control. May we look to our faithful example, who taught us how to handle ourselves when bad things happen, so that we may be faithful instead of surprised, discouraged, or detoured. If we're attempting to suppress the truth in unrighteousness or doing things that prevent certain people from knowing God, grant us the humility and power to repent. Amen.

Let's sing: "Hero"

So, what's your NEXT STEP?

- Remember, our next step always begins with faith in Christ. Either placing faith in Him for the first time or exercising faith to repent, change, and grow. Either way, His Spirit will help you.

Quotes related to this passage:

- **Different crowd:** “This isn’t the Palm Sunday pilgrim company which had greeted Jesus with hosannas a few days before. This is more recognizably the urban mob, laced no doubt with the flunkies of the high priest, the revolutionary sympathizers who hated Rome, and among whom Barabbas the mobster was a popular hero. This crowd wants no part in any ‘kingdom of truth’ that will not pit itself against the spears and swords of the hated Roman occupiers; no part with a king who would rebuke their sins and expose their hearts’ rebellion against the living God before they could truly express his rule in their society.” Pastor Bruce Milne
- **Pilate’s end:** “Clearly, Pilate had been impacted by his encounter with Jesus and, apparently, saw some credence in His claims. However, we have credible evidence Pilate later clashed with the Samaritans and was recalled to Rome, where he was banished to Gaul and died by his own hand.” Pastor Chuck Swindoll
- **Jesus died while Barabbas was set free:** Pastor Chuck Swindoll noted that “The man’s name was reported to be Barabbas, which has the nonsensical meaning ‘son of a father.’ It might have been a ‘John Doe’ kind of alias adopted for the sake of protecting his family from Roman retribution...” The Reformation Study Bible adds an ominous note that “Instead of him, the true Son of the Father dies.” Professor NT Wright said, “Ah, but that’s the truth. The truth that belongs with Passover. The truth that says one man dies and the others go free. Barabbas, the brigand, perhaps himself either a would-be king or a supporter of someone else’s failed messianic movement, faces the gallows as well. Somehow, through the cynicism, the casual local custom, the misunderstandings, the distortions, the plots and schemes and betrayals and denials, the Truth stands there in person, taking the death that would otherwise have fallen on the brigand. Pilate didn’t see it at the time. Even cunning Caiaphas probably didn’t appreciate the irony of the point. But John wants us to see it. This is what the cross will mean. This is what truth is and does. Truth is what Jesus is; and Jesus is dying for Barabbas, and for Israel, and for the world. And for you and me.”
- **Four gospel perspectives:** “...this is also woven into a larger theological tapestry in which each Gospel writer—and John in particular—is giving an interpretation, a perspective of the meaning of these things. Our task, therefore, is not simply to understand the historical details of the story, but to discern the theological presentation. For instance, it is a historical fact that Jesus is given the title ‘king’ during the trial and that this is tossed back and forth between Pilate and the temple leaders in seven carefully constructed scenes. But John so builds the story to disclose a deep irony in it, that Jesus is indeed Israel’s king, and this is his coronation. To use an analogy: It is one thing to know the full details of the French Revolution; it is quite another to see it through the eyes of Victor-Marie Hugo’s *Les Misérables*. His views do not distort the reality of what happened in that fateful week, but rather they place elements of it in high relief, seeing it through the eyes of faith.” Professor Gary Burge
- **The practice of crucifixion:** Pastor Bruce Milne wrote, “Invented by the Persians, developed by the Carthaginians, perfected by the Romans, such was crucifixion. So terrible was crucifixion that no Roman was permitted to undergo it, however heinous his crime.” Professor Gary Burge also tells us, “The practice of crucifixion is somewhat debated. We know that

thousands of slaves and criminals were crucified, but we have no complete description of the process, and only one crucified skeleton has been found, as recently as 1968 in a burial cave in Giv'at ha-Mivtar, Jerusalem. But literary references make clear that this was a death reserved for lower classes, slaves, foreigners, and criminals. The victim was laid on the ground with his arms stretched across the beam. After he was either nailed or tied, he was hoisted up and mounted on the vertical post. Various postures on the cross were possible but the least likely appears in Christian art (with the nails inserted on top of the foot). Romans nailed the ankles together, forcing the feet to lay sideways on top of one another. They also kept a peg on the vertical post (the sedile) for the person to sit on and hence not tear away. The key is to remember that nailing was not the means of death on the cross. Many factors, such as hemorrhaging, asphyxia, and shock, played a role. It is easy to see why Josephus (who watched many crucifixions during Titus's conquest of Jerusalem) referred to this as "the most wretched of deaths" (Wars, 7.6.4)...According to a later tradition recorded in the Talmud, women of Jerusalem's nobility would offer the condemned a narcotic wine in order to numb the senses (b. Sanh. 43a). In Luke we read that Jesus turns and addresses them (Luke 23:28–31). John offers none of these details and keeps the story to a bare minimum."

- **The cruelty of crucifixion:** "According to the Greek historian Herodotus, the Persians invented the practice after experimenting with other means of delaying death, such as stoning, drowning, burning, boiling in oil, strangulation, and flaying. The victim typically endured scourging before crucifixion. The lictor could affect how long a person would survive on a cross by adjusting the degree to which he injured the victim. Merrill Unger states that there are "instances on record of persons surviving for nine days." The Romans wasted nothing in the macabre art of execution, including wood and nails. Everything would be used again. Therefore, the patibulum (crossbeam) was attached to the top of the stipes (vertical member) with a mortise and tenon joint, which allowed them to dismantle the cross for the next victim more easily. Sometimes, to delay death and to prolong the victim's agony, the executioner attached a sedile (seat) between the victim's legs. The victim was usually tied to the cross rather than nailed. Nails were expensive and the Romans wanted to extend the process of dying, which took much longer when suspended with rope instead of nails. Death usually came by way of exposure, dehydration, starvation, or fatigue asphyxia. A victim nailed to a cross, like someone tied in place, also had to keep his body in constant motion to relieve the pain in his arms, chest, and legs, which only agitated the damaged nerves in the nail wounds. Unless the guards broke the legs of the victim, the primary causes of death for nailed victims were likely hypovolemic shock (excessive blood loss), traumatic shock, or cardiac and respiratory arrest."
- **Not carrying the whole cross:** "Jesus would...fall into the custody of the 'execution squad' comprising four Roman soldiers...The condemned man was forced to carry, not the entire cross, but the horizontal crosspiece (patibulum). It is likely, since crucifixions were relatively common, that the upright posts (Lat. staticulum) were permanently in place at the execution site beside the main highway just outside the city...we witness a re-enactment of the scene on Mount Moriah (the very hill on which the city of Jerusalem stood) when another son carried the wood for an altar on which he was to be secured as the victim (Gn. 22). Pastor Bruce Milne
- **Jesus was a victor, not a victim:** "This is not the tragedy we think; this is not a moment for panic; there is something hopeful happening, something we didn't see at first glance: This

scene, this hour does not belong to Pilate or Caiaphas, it belongs to Jesus. Jesus is in control of the situation. John 18:4 reminds us at the outset that nothing will take Jesus by surprise. He asks the questions, he takes the lead, he steps forward and presents his captors with queries that make them stumble. It isn't just the guards who fall to the ground in Gethsemane (18:6), but Annas and Pilate discover themselves plunging head-over-heel, made captive to questions they cannot answer. John's story reads like a medieval drama, where the true king of a tortured land, whose rightful rule has been temporarily overthrown, moves among the masses and is known only to a select few. He wears no crown, but the leather and wool of the commoner. But we who watch the play know that the usurpers are doomed. Even if the true king is captured and threatened with destruction, there will be some intervention (Merlin?!) that will reverse these events and win the day. Jesus is the true king, the hidden king, whose victory is about to be cheered. Perhaps when we see this, we see the greatest 'misunderstanding' of the gospel. The spiritual irony John enjoys most is when people only apprehend the surface of Jesus' identity or message. A woman at a well thinks he may show her a river; a rabbi on a Jerusalem night thinks he offers a return to the womb. But John delights in accounts of men and women betraying their ignorance, but also by their words disclosing the truths that even they do not see. Of course, in 9:40 the Pharisees are not blind—but then again, yes, they are. Of course, in 6:15 Jesus is not a king, hailed by an unruly mob—but then again, yes, he is. Of course, Jesus must be crucified as a pretender to the throne—but then again, yes, the throne is his!"

Professor Gary Burge

- **A life-long crucifixion:** "I read a book that's a reprint of an old Puritan book called 'None But Christ.' The writer is a pastor named John Wall who in 1650 wrote this book on the Lord Jesus Christ. And in it he said this, and I thought it was an interesting statement: 'All His life was a crucifixion. From the cradle to the grave, from His birth to His burial, all His life was a crucifixion.' What he is saying is that the Lord Jesus was humbled in every aspect of His life. The one who is the infinite, eternal God made Himself the suffering, lowly slave of God in taking on full humanity. In a manner of speaking then, He was crucified by a kind of lifelong cross of humiliation, a lifelong cross of suffering. And if you break out the parts you can understand that." Pastor John MacArthur
- **Glory that cannot be totally suppressed:** "No matter what the world may think about or do to this glory, this regal glory cannot be suppressed. People who least recognize the work of God inevitably pay homage to his presence, acknowledging that he is there. They intuit truth they try to suppress, but inevitably, the truth about God becomes known (Rom. 1:20–21). The Passion story of John is indeed a story of tragedy, but it is not Jesus' tragedy; it is a human tragedy as we witness the futile and tragic efforts of people blinded by darkness, unable to see the true king in their midst. Nevertheless, their reflexes (unknown to them) and their instincts still work. They are religious. They have spiritual fears and questions. 'Where do you come from?' Pilate asks (19:9). But their life in the darkness has made them only intuit the light, not see it, recognize it, or submit to it. Therefore, John's story says God will accomplish his purposes, revealing his glory despite what is happening in the world. No human being can stop it. No person is capable of stifling the glory of God if God intends for that glory to be shown. God is in control of history, even this hostile, seemingly darkened chapter of history that offers little hope...If God could transform this 'hour' with glory, so too he can transform any hour."

Professor Gary Burge

Quotes related to the larger context:

- **Full life:** John said he wrote this letter to help us find “*fullness of life through believing Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.*” Chapters 1-12 contain 3 years of real-life stories where people met Jesus during His public ministry. Chapters 13-21 slow way down as Jesus began to reveal His (God’s) heart to His disciples in the week leading up to the cross and resurrection.
- **Book Context:** The Gospel of the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee, provides a clearly stated purpose. *John 20:30-31* says, “*Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*” Some people demand to have all their questions satisfied before bowing to Jesus, yet John claimed his limited account was enough to bring anyone to faith. As we read it, our Savior and friend emerges from the pages as a real person in the real world. Jesus shows us what we could become, if we too would rely on His infinite Father who will gladly supply whatever we need.
- **Life in his name:** Life is the Greek word, “zōē”, which means “Life, Living, Lifetime, Life-Giving” and is where we get the word, “zoology” in English. Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words says it’s “used in the NT of life as a principle, life in the absolute sense, life as God has it, that which the Father has in Himself, and which He gave to the Incarnate Son to have in Himself, Jhn 5:26, and which the Son manifested in the world, 1Jo 1:2. From this life man has become alienated in consequence of the Fall, Eph 4:18, and of this life men become partakers through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, Jhn 3:15, who becomes its Author to all such as trust in Him, Act 3:15, and who is therefore said to be ‘the life’ of the believer, Col 3:4, for the life that He gives He maintains, Jhn 6:35, 63. Eternal life is the present actual possession of the believer because of his relationship with Christ, Jhn 5:24; 1Jo 3:14, and that it will one day extend its domain to the sphere of the body is assured by the Resurrection of Christ, 2Cr 5:4; 2Ti 1:10. This life is not merely a principle of power and mobility, however, for it has moral associations which are inseparable from it, as of holiness and righteousness. Death and sin, life and holiness, are frequently contrasted in the Scriptures.”

Other Articles/Songs/Videos: Please ask us about many other resources.

Direction for discussion leaders:

1. Keep circling back to the big idea and main points of the passage to stay on track.
2. Keep the discussion around 30mins. Go for a single, not a home run.
3. Keep the group small for deeper sharing. Once you hit the “sweet spot”, spend your time there.
4. Keep these simple questions in your back pocket: What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

Let’s prepare for our sermon from John 19:16-22.

- Take a moment to read the other accounts of the crucifixion in Matthew 27:32-38, Mark 15:21-28, and Luke 23:26-34. How are they the same? How do they differ? What seems odd, or confusing, or causes you to ask questions?

Let’s apply our sermon from John 19:16-22.

- Why is it important to present the gospel in simple ways without dumbing it down? Share a few ways people tend to complicate it or things we do that betray its powerful message. Do you have any personal examples to illustrate your points?
- When have you been tempted to give up hope in the gospel of Jesus Christ? Share a time when you felt engulfed by darkness and how you were led out by the light of God's gospel.

Here are some great resources for digging deeper into community group life...

How life together looks <http://austinstone.org/stories/film/item/140-missional-community-lukes-story>

Rethinking what we do https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvWnXYSELF4&feature=player_embedded

Numerous articles to provoke thought <http://toddengstrom.com/archives/>

What groups of 2-3 might look like <http://toddengstrom.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/LTG-Overview.pdf>