

Session 44

POWER OF THE CROSS

John 19:17-24

Memory Verse

Pilate also had a sign made and put on the cross. It said: Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.

– JOHN 19:19, CSB



Power of the Cross

THEOLOGICAL THEME: Jesus's willing sacrifice on the cross completed the work of God's redemptive plan and removed the need for daily animal sacrifice as atonement for our sin.

CALL TO ACTION: Encourage believers to engage in gospel conversations with an emphasis on what Christ has done to forgive us our sins and redeem us from a life of unrighteousness. Believers are encouraged to share their own testimony of salvation.

The word sacrifice has many different applications. Some associate sacrifice with choices about food to achieve the desired physical result regarding weight or fitness. Others may think about choices related to stewarding their time. They sacrifice certain things to give time to a different priority.

Others think of choosing to do without to provide for another. Regardless of the connotation that sacrifice brings to your mind, it always involves giving something of value up. Today, we are studying the ultimate sacrifice as Jesus willingly surrendered Himself on the cross.

? What is the first thought that comes to your mind when you hear the word sacrifice?

? How do you think the world tends to think about sacrifice?



What are some of the spiritual applications of sacrifice?

Session Summary

Jesus's death on the cross is literally connected to everything else in Scripture because the entire Bible is about God's plan to redeem His people. Because sin deserves death and everyone sins, the crucifixion was the ultimate sacrifice for all time as Jesus the sinless Lamb of God willingly went to the cross and endured agony on behalf of all mankind.

Instead of having to sacrifice animals continually when we mess up and sin, Jesus took our sin on Himself. He suffered and died so that anyone who trusts in Him can be forgiven and have eternal life with Him in heaven. Christ followers all have a story to tell about what Jesus did for them and what His sacrifice means to those who still need to know Him as Savior.

1. The Crucifixion (John 19:17-18)

These verses pick up the account of the crucifixion right after the trial and the time when Pilate gave in to the crowd's demand for Jesus to be crucified. Scripture describes Jesus as "carrying the cross by himself" (v. 17). This was most likely just the cross beam but still would've been physically daunting with Jesus having just endured the beating from the Roman guards throughout the previous night.

Other gospels record that Jesus was so weakened physically that Simon the Cyrene stepped in to carry the beam for Him (Matthew 27:32). We must take a minute to consider the terrible, tortuous night that our Savior spent. Modern day depictions, such as *The Passion of the Christ* attempt to give us insight into all Jesus went through in our behalf, and many of these depictions are appropriately graphic. Yet, as awful as the physical experience was for Jesus, even worse was the weight of taking the sin of mankind upon Himself.

Crucifixion

Crucifixion was the Roman means of execution for slaves and criminals. The victim was nailed to a cross shaped either in the traditional form, or in the shape of a T, X, Y, or I. The nails were driven through the wrists and heel bones.

? How does it impact you to reflect on the trial and crucifixion of Christ? Why do these events matter for every person who has ever lived?

It has been said that crucifixion was invented by Persians but perfected by Romans. This style of execution was typically saved for the worst criminals and the lowest classes of people. Crucifixion was designed to humiliate and excruciate the victims as they died slowly.

Although many of the specifics of Jesus's crucifixion are not recorded in Scripture, the term alone would have served to tell those familiar with the practice exactly what occurred as it was a well-known punishment in that day. Knowing that this gruesome death was the centerpiece of the Father's redemption plan should humble us and magnify our understanding of the great love that Jesus has for mankind.

? What does the length Jesus went to save people tell you about the depth of His love?

It is mind boggling that the only One to ever live a sinless life allowed Himself to die the worst kind of death, usually reserved for the worst criminals. Careful reflection helps us see how incredible it is that our Savior willingly surrendered Himself to this type of death on our behalf. He was the perfect Lamb of God, but He died between two guilty persons on the cross at Golgotha.

? Application: How is God speaking to you as you reflect on Jesus's sacrifice for you?

2. The Charges (John 19:19-22)

It was customary in crucifixion that the convicted had their crimes written out and hung as a charge around their neck. This was a further attempt at humiliation, with their crimes listed out for all to see and mock. Once they arrived at the spot where the crucifixion was to take place, the title or sign was taken from their necks and placed at the top of their cross, allowing all who passed by to know the reasoning for the execution.

What Pilate wrote on the sign for Jesus is telling. Jesus was accused of claiming to be the King of the Jews and that is what Pilate put on the cross as His title.

? How was the charge against Jesus accurate, even if not in the way Pilate or others understood it?

It is fitting that Jesus was identified as King even in His death. While the two criminals adjacent to Jesus hung on their crosses with their crimes spelled out, the sign on the cross of Christ simply stated the truth.

Different scholars speculate on exactly where Golgotha was located, but John tells us that it was right outside the city. We also learn that many people passed by the place where Jesus hung as they ventured into Jerusalem. Pilate instructed that the words be written in multiple languages so as many people as possible could understand the sign. The intention was for the statement about Jesus to be as public as possible.

? What is the irony of this statement about Jesus being proclaimed to many people across many different languages? What does this tell you about God's ability to work all things according to His plan no matter the circumstances?

The religious leaders of the day objected to the words Pilate used on Jesus's sign. They did not believe that Jesus was the King of the Jews, and they attempted to get Pilate to write something else since this to be false. But it was Roman custom that once a sentence was given that it could not be altered. Without meaning to, Pilate honored Jesus by the truth of the statement over His cross.

? Application: What are some ways people might speak the truth about Jesus today without meaning to? How should followers of Jesus seek to interact with non-believers in these moments?

3. Prophecy Fulfilled (John 19:23-24)

Just as God used Pilate to give Jesus the truthful title King of the Jews in the face of opposition, He also used the Roman soldiers without their understanding. When you read these verses about the seemingly small details of the crucifixion, it is clear God cares about every detail and uses even those who are not willing participants to accomplish His purposes.

? When was a time you saw people used by God even if they weren't following Him? How has He used you when you were not focused on Him?

Roman soldiers were tasked with overseeing every aspect of crucifixions. They maintained order and made certain that the condemned died as sentenced. These men acted under the authority of Roman rule and had great power. When Jesus was put onto the cross, He had nothing left materially. Even His clothing was taken away as He let go of every earthly thing to take His place on the cross.

Four soldiers each took articles of clothing from Jesus until only His tunic remained. Scripture says the tunic was one piece without a seam. While it may appear to be insignificant that the soldiers decided not to tear the tunic into equal pieces to share, it is an important detail. These men were used to fulfill prophecy about the crucifixion of the Savior.

John referenced Psalm 22:18 that prophesied about the soldiers casting lots for Jesus's clothing. Psalm 22 describes the Messiah dying for the sins of the world while His enemies mock Him and cast lots at His feet.

? How do fulfilled prophecies about Jesus serve to build your faith in Him?

According to Exodus 28:31-32, the High Priest wore a seamless garment. This was not average attire and yet Jesus, who had hardly any material possessions, wore a tunic created in the same manner as the high priest. This is a reminder that Jesus is our Great High Priest, who has done the work to cover our sins once and for all.

? Application: What is something specific from this fresh look at the crucifixion that you may have missed before? How will you apply it to your life?

Conclusion

The religious leaders of the day were the ones who insisted Jesus be crucified. They instigated the crowd's shouts, calling for crucifixion, so they could enjoy the Passover free of this man who turned their ordered worlds upside down with His proclamation of the coming kingdom.

Though they knew Scripture and were near Jesus, they missed the point. They were so caught up in their notions about how the Messiah would come and operate, they missed out on seeing the actual Messiah. It is a great tragedy that people can know facts about the Lord, His Word, and even His promised coming, and yet completely miss out on knowing Jesus as Savior. Proximity does not equal salvation, and we see that in the lives of the Pharisees. We must embrace Jesus as He truly is and invite others to do the same.



What stands out to you most about the sacrifice of Jesus today?



How can we challenge one another to continually view the work of Jesus with fresh eyes?



Who can you have a gospel conversation with by sharing the events of the crucifixion this week?

Memorize

Pilate also had a sign made and put on the cross. It said: Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.

- John 19:19, CSB

References

¹CSB Study Bible: Notes, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).