

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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John 19:17-37 -- The Crucifixion of the King

by Dan Trygg

“They took Jesus, therefore, and He went out, bearing His own cross...” (vs. 17,18) -- The details of the journey to the cross, mentioned by the other gospel accounts, are not referred to by John. There is no mention of His stumbling under the cross, or of Simon of Cyrene being forced to carry His cross to the place of execution, or of His words to the women along the way (cf. Lk. 23:26-31). ***“...to the Place of a Skull, ...Golgotha...”*** -- All the gospel writers agree on this point, although Luke does not call it Golgotha, the Hebrew Aramaic name. This would have been meaningless to his Gentile readers. ***“There they crucified Him...”*** (vs. 18) -- Note, that **to crucify someone referred to the method of execution**. The eventual outcome would be death, but **crucifixion is not equivalent with death**. Thus, in Rom. 6:6, our old self can be described as “having been crucified with Him”, and yet Paul could also describe the old self in Eph. 4:22 as still being in existence, and even “being corrupted (ongoingly) according to the lusts of deceit”. As long as we are alive in these earthly bodies, the old self somehow remains with us, and we can either give in to it, or we can “lay [it] aside”. **Again, what was crucifixion?** The victim was either lashed or nailed to a cross, so that his arms were outstretched, and his feet were propped up on a small shelf. **One of the most cruel and excruciating deaths ever devised by man**, it progressed like this: As the victim tired, he began to sag, which caused his arms to stretch further out, expanding his chest. In order to breathe, the victim would have to push or pull himself up enough to let air out of his diaphragm. As he became more tired, eventually he would not be able to do this anymore, and would asphyxiate. The nails in the hands and feet were more for the purpose of torture, than for support. They were strategically placed in nerve centers that were especially sensitive, so that as the victim struggled for air, the movements required for breath would horrifically aggravate the pain. In addition, the nails placed in wrist/hand area would cause the muscles of the arm to spasm and cramp, with no relief possible. To “crucify” someone was to place them on the cross, so that this slow torturous death process could proceed.

Pilate’s inscription. – ***“Jesus of Nazareth, The King of the Jews”*** (vs. 19) -- Again, John brings us back to this theme. Note that this was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek, so that passersby could read the charge. Though the Jewish leaders wanted Pilate to modify the statement to indicate that Jesus was a false claimant to the throne of Israel, Pilate refused to do so. Thus, in the eyes of Rome, Jesus was executed as a legitimate king.

Dividing of Jesus’ garments (vs. 23). Recorded in all four gospels, undoubtedly because of the clear fulfillment of OT prophecy. ***“...this was to fulfill the Scripture...”*** – (vs. 24; Psalm 22:18).

Providing for the care of His mother. ***“...standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.”*** (vs. 25) -- Women are recorded as being present at the crucifixion in all four gospels. Matthew says that there were “...many women... looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee while ministering to Him” (Matt. 27:55). The scene of a crucifixion was no place for respectable women. **One of the horrific aspects of crucifixion was that the condemned person was generally stripped naked, totally exposed to the onlooking gawkers.** While the other writers mention the women standing a ways off, only John includes this brief account of those women who had come near to the cross during Jesus last hours. Of Mary the wife of Clopas, we know nothing else. Mary Magdalene is referred to by all four gospel writers as being at the crucifixion and at the tomb on Resurrection morning. The only other reference to her is found in Lk. 8:2,3, where we learn that she was one of several women who were following Jesus’ entourage of disciples, and was helping to support His ministry out of her private means. In her case, we learn that her devotion toward the Lord began when He delivered her from seven demons. We learn also that Jesus’ mother was there. This may fit our ideal of motherhood, but many a condemned man has died alone, with no family or friends nearby. Certainly this was the fulfillment of old Simeon’s prophetic declaration to her so many years before, “Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed, -- and a sword will pierce even your own soul -- to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed” (Lk. 2:34,35). No matter the pain or shame to herself, Mary wanted to be near her son during His last hours. ***“When Jesus saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby...”*** (vs. 26) -- Apparently, this was not a planned-out arrangement that Jesus was about to make. It appears to have been rather a spur-of-the-moment kind of decision. Yet, who would be more suitable for the charge which Jesus was about to give than His beloved friend and disciple John? ***“Woman, behold your son!”*** -- As the firstborn male, it was Jesus’ responsibility to provide for His mother in her old age. By this declaration, and the reciprocal form directed to John, Jesus appointed this closest of the twelve disciples to care for her in His stead. ***“From that hour the disciple took her into his own house.”*** (vs. 27) – Jesus’ wishes were heard and honored.

Final words of Jesus. The gospel writers record seven utterances of Jesus given from the cross. They are: (1.) His prayer of intercession for His executioners, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they do” (Lk. 23:34); (2.) His words to His mother and John, providing for her care (Jn. 19:26,27); (3.) His assurance to the believing thief, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise” (Lk. 23:45); (4.) His cry of abandonment, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matt. 27:46; Mk. 15:34); (5.) His cry for water, to fulfill the Scripture, “I am thirsty.” (Jn. 19:28); (6.) His cry of victory, “It is finished!” (Jn. 19:30); and (7.) His cry of committal, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit” (Lk. 23:46). The struggle for Jesus was obviously not primarily a physical one, for having passed through the time of God’s wrath upon Him as the Sinbearer (Isa 53; II Cor. 5:21; I Pet. 2:24), He declared, **“It is finished!”** (vs. 30) (Gk. – *Tetelestai*, meaning literally, “Paid in full!”), and regained the composure to voluntarily dismiss His spiritual essence into the Father’s care. **“And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.”** -- Apparently, there was something very unusual about the manner in which He did this. Mark reports, “When the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him saw the way He breathed His last, He said, ‘Truly this man was the Son of God’” (Mk. 15:39). Earlier, Jesus mentioned that no one could take His life, but that He would lay it down voluntarily. “No one has taken it from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I have received from My Father” (Jn. 10:18). When Jesus cried out to the Father to receive His spirit, He then deliberately laid down His head and “gave up”, or “delivered over”, His spirit. The words and manner of Jesus’ expiration appeared to be so deliberate as to be noticed by the centurion, who had seen countless others fight the agonizingly slow gasping struggle for breath, before finally succumbing to exhaustion. **The Man who lived as no one else had lived (Heb. 4:15; Jn. 8:46), and spoke as no one else spoke (Jn. 7:46), also died as no one else died. Death could not take Him, because it had no hold on Him. Consequently, He “gave Himself over” to death, so that in His resurrection He could demonstrate His complete victory over it** (Heb. 2:10-15; Acts 2:22-24).

Proof that Jesus was definitely dead. **“Then the Jews, because it was the day of preparation, ...asked Pilate that their legs might be broken...”** (vs. 31). The OT Law provided that the corpses of those who had committed a crime worthy of death be hung from a tree as a sign of deterrence to the people. However, the corpse was not to be hung overnight, but was to be buried the same day. To leave a corpse exposed (as was common among the Gentiles) was to defile the land (Deut. 21:22-23). Thus, the conspirators who plotted to murder Jesus were concerned to avoid ceremonial defilement, and took steps to make certain that this turn of events would not occur. By having the victims’ legs broken, they would no longer be able to push their bodies up to catch their breath, and would soon suffocate. By thus hastening their death, no one would be left hanging on the cross, or die in the night. **“So the soldiers came, and broke the legs...”** (vs. 32) -- This was done by the use of a large sledgehammer. **“But coming to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs.”** (vs. 33) -- This is the first evidence that He was dead. Certainly, professional soldiers would be able to tell if He was dead. **“But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately water and blood came out.”** (vs. 34) -- This rush of water and blood from the wound would best be explained by the collection of fluid and blood which would have filled the sac around the heart (the pericardium). The separation of plasma from the blood cells begins immediately upon death. **“He who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true...”** (vs. 35) -- John himself was present and was an eyewitness to these events. **“...so that you might also believe.”** -- **John’s account was designed to bring people to faith. In order to establish the resurrection, it was necessary to firmly establish Jesus’ death,** so that no naturalistic explanation could be given. **“For these things came to pass to fulfill the Scripture...”** (vs. 36) -- John sees significance in the events that took place, events which are further evidence for the claim that **Jesus was the Messiah prophesied by the OT Scriptures.** **“Not a bone of Him would be broken.”** -- The fact that Jesus’ legs were not broken fulfills the OT law regarding the Passover lamb (Ex. 12:46), as well as the Psalm 34:20 reference which John quotes here. Jesus was the true Passover lamb, the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world (Jn. 1:29), as well as “the righteous [one]”, in a fuller sense than the OT may on the surface suggest. **“They shall look on Him whom they have pierced.”** (vs. 37) -- A reference to Zechariah 12:10, describing Israel’s future repentance and mourning.

The significance of Jesus’ crucifixion cannot be overemphasized. He, like a sin-offering, or a Passover lamb, bore our sins in His body on the tree (I Pet. 2:24; cf. Heb. 9:28; Isa. 53:12). So totally did Jesus identify with us, that Paul would write that God, “made Him who knew no sin to *be* sin on our behalf” (II Cor. 5:21). **Jesus bore the full wrath of God for our sins.** Isaiah had foretold this 700 years before, “...He was pierced for our transgressions, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on Him, and we are healed by His wounds. ⁶ We all went astray like sheep; we all have turned to our own way; and Yahweh has punished Him for the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:5,6). **God’s purpose in doing this was more than simply to reconcile us to Him** (II Cor. 5:18,19). It was to free us from the weight and bondage of sin, so that we become righteous in Him. **We are to live to honor and serve God, by walking in the freedom made available through Jesus, and reconciling others to Him through our service and sharing.**