

John 19.1-16a—Christ or Caesar?

I. Introduction

- a. I want you to consider how these verses teach us how to love in the midst of suffering and also how to suffer for God's glory. If we are to become like Christ, then we need to become like him in his ways even how he suffered.
- b. As I worked through this text, I cannot find in these 16 verses where Christ is not suffering. Whether it's how to take a beating with a whip or a tongue, there's something to learn and grow in. There's nothing like suffering to reveal things about us that might not otherwise be refined out of our lives. But suffering for Christ is not just the result of following Christ, it is the means by which the mission of God is accomplished. In other words, we must suffer to fulfill the Great Commission.
- c. This past Saturday, we were headed to visit my mom and we were listening to the final chapters of *The Hiding Place* by Corrie Ten Boom. It is unbelievable how Corrie and her sister Betsy endured such appalling and grotesque tortures. As you read that book, you will often hear them say that it was only God who caused them to endure. Corrie told a pastor one time, "hold loosely the things of this world."
- d. Jesus does not hold on to this world. Why? May we discover that as we watch him suffer.

II. Main Point

- a. Christ's sufferings are his glory. Behold the Man! He is entrusting himself to the Father and standing firmly in the truth he came to reveal.

III. Outline

- a. Jesus shines the light of God's glory through his sufferings
- b. Pilate tries to release the King but continues to fail—he didn't know it but there's someone who has authority over all the affairs of this world. And that's why he cannot release Jesus.

IV. Exposition

- a. We do not associate suffering with glory. Like a good soldier, Jesus bears the strips and the strips are his glory.
 - i. As this scene begins, we are reminded that Pilate had just previously attempted to release Jesus whom he found no cause for crucifixion by way of a custom. However, it did not work because the chief priests stirred up the crowd to ask for the release of Barabbas who was guilty of murder.
 - ii. I believe in chapter 19 Pilate attempts to release Jesus by flogging him. You might think that is a strange way to release someone but it is Pilate's strategy and his strategy is our salvation.
 - iii. We need to look at the details of Christ's sufferings before we can see why Pilate would attempt to use a flogging to release him.
 1. First, the flogging. This was a brutal, torturous form of punishment. We know this word means to beat with a whip. Typically, the prisoner would have his hands tied to a post so that the back was well exposed. The whip would obviously tear the flesh and weaken the prisoner before crucifixion to make it faster.
 - a. The number of lashes was probably similar to Paul's numerous lashings of 39.
 - b. Unless you have some wrong idea about who Jesus is, just know that he felt pain just like you would. I will spare you further details of what this scourging would do to the body. I'm sure you can imagine well enough.
 - c. Let it suffice to say, he received many strips on his back by which we are healed.
 2. Now, let's move now to the mocking. We are given many more details about this part but we must keep in mind the torn body of Jesus.
 - a. The soldiers begin by weaving some thorns into a crown to which they laid it on his head.

- i. I went looking for the word “thorn.” The first place it shows up will be no surprise to you—Gen. 3:18 because of the fall, is a consequence man must bear.
 - ii. Guilty with no way back to God. The only hope is that promise of a child born of a woman.
 - b. With sure confidence, I believe Jesus is that child. Down in John 19:5, it says that Jesus comes, literally, bearing the crown of thorns.
 - 3. They put a purple robe around him. There are a lot of different images we should get from this text.
 - a. Most clearly, they are mocking him because purple is a sign of royalty.
 - 4. Next, they were coming up to him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!”
 - a. Just a note about the word “hail,” the word means rejoice! We often limit rejoicing to merely outward expression. Trust and contentment in the Lord can happen in the heart while the body is grimacing in pain.
 - 5. Mockery wasn’t enough. They also were giving him blows with their hands.
 - a. Psalm 2 warned the nations to kiss; not strike the King lest he be angry.
 - b. Interestingly, there’s a connection here with Isaiah 50:6 that we will see in a moment.
- iv. Now, I want to know how Jesus endured such brutal torture and I think Isaiah 50 has much to say about that.
 - 1. “Why do we have ears on the outside of our head? Why not the inside? Because we are not supposed to listen to ourselves. I wonder how much of our misery stems from our almost religious devotion to our own thoughts and feelings?” (Ortlund, 333).
 - 2. In Isaiah 50, the reason this servant gives his back to those who strike is because he listens, not to himself, but to God.
 - a. What we need each and every day does not come from within us but outside of us. We need to hear God’s Word and gladly obey him.
 - b. Notice this servant, who undoubtably, is the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 who we know to be Jesus. How is he made ready to suffer?
 - i. (Isa. 50:4-7) Morning by morning he awakens; he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. ⁵ The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backward. ⁶ I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting. ⁷ But the Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame.
 - c. There’s so much more we could discuss here but the extreme importance of simply reading and listening to God’s word, morning by morning cannot be overlooked.
 - i. He knows what to do when he is struck because he has listened to the Father.
 - ii. You might ask, does God expect me to suffer too? (Matt. 5:9-11) ¹⁰ "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.
 - iii. The answer is, yes. And the sermon on the mount goes on to teach us how to do that...like (Matt. 5:39-40) ³⁹ But I say to you, do not resist the

one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. ⁴⁰ And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.

- v. After the torture, bloodied and clothed like a King, Pilate announces in verse 4 that he is bringing out the one he finds no cause to execute.
 - 1. (Jn. 19:5) ⁵ So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold the man!"
 - 2. How did Pilate expect the Jews to respond? I do think he is seeking to release him.
 - a. A clue for me came when I discovered another place this phrase "behold the man" is used. In Samuel 9 and following, Saul is made King. He is said to be taller than everyone else and there is none like him among all the peoples. And they shouted, Long live the King!
 - b. In verse 6, when the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried: crucify, crucify.
 - 3. I know Pilate wasn't expecting that response. What I think he expected was when they saw him beaten and bloodied, they would think: he is no threat. Look at him. He is weak and powerless. His followers are nowhere to be found. This is enough. Pity the man.
 - a. He's just a man—hence the behold the man.
 - b. The Jews cry out, crucify because they seem even more sure now—this isn't our King. And they do exactly what Isaiah claimed: (Isa. 53:1) Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?
 - i. The implied answer is, no one. They didn't want God as their King so he gave them Saul. Now, they have the King they most desperately need and they refuse him.
 - ii. But this will be their salvation! Who would have ever designed such a plan of redemption? Only God!
 - iii. Joseph's brothers had no idea that selling him as a slave would end up being their salvation. Joseph can say with a clear conscience, what you my brothers meant for evil, God meant for good.
- b. Pilate's next attempt to release him while Jesus continues to teach us how to suffer. Pilate will find out he doesn't have the authority he thinks he has. We know that God is sovereign and ordering the affairs of men.
 - i. Jesus is unwanted by everyone. Yet, he is certain and secure in his identity as God's Son.
 - ii. (Jn. 19:6) Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him."
 - iii. Again, Pilate claims to find no cause for death. But the Jews continue to back him into a corner. They respond according to the what seems to be the law since they are under Roman rule.
 - 1. (Jn. 19:7) "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God."
 - 2. Their claim thus far had been: he claims to be a King. However, there is no death penalty for claiming to be King in God's law. But there is for blasphemy.
 - 3. So, they appeal to (Lev. 24:16) ¹⁶ Whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death.
 - 4. For Pilate, it seems he has failed again to find a way to release this man in whom he finds no cause.
 - 5. The Jews give him cause—he has made himself the Son of God.
 - 6. This causes Pilate to be even more afraid.
 - a. I'm not sure Pilate even knows the true source of his fear.

- b. However, fear finds us all. It is part of our nature. It exposes our weaknesses.
 - c. Yet, Jesus has no fear because he fears the Lord and listen to him.
- iv. Jesus must have been taken back inside after the call for crucifixion. Pilate returns to his headquarters to question Jesus.
 - 1. He asks, "Where are you from?" I suppose this is a strange question to us about Jesus' origin. But for Pilate who was immersed in numerous ideas of pagan gods could have thought any number of things.
 - 2. Whatever he meant, Jesus elects to be silent. The truth would not have made any difference to a man who says, "what is truth?".
 - a. Truth isn't often the motive of people's questions. Fear is.
 - b. When people are listening to their own thoughts and feelings, they are impulsive and harsh.
- v. Pilate responds to the silence: (Jn. 19:10) "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?"
 - 1. Jesus finally speaks. The last thing he said was back in 18:37 about the purpose for which he was born and had come into the world.
 - a. He says, (Jn. 19:11) "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above.
 - b. Oh my! I take great comfort in these words. I was reminded of the song "All the Way my Savior leads me" and particularly the line: For I know, whate'er befall me, Jesus doeth all things well.
 - c. This is how Jesus suffers well. He knows that nothing befalls him apart from the sovereign authority of God!
 - 2. Pilate has been granted authority from God to release Jesus or crucify him and he will be held accountable for his actions. But Jesus says this: (Jn. 19:11) Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin."
 - a. In other words, Pilate did not bear all the responsibility he thought he did.
 - b. "Pilate's role has been passive. He is still responsible for his spineless, politically-motivated...decision; but he did not initiate the trial or engineer the betrayal that brought Jesus into court. Judas, Caiaphas, and Pilate all acted under God's sovereignty. But Pilate would not have had judicial authority over Jesus unless the event of the betrayal itself had been given to him from above. Therefore, the one who handed Jesus over to Pilate, the one who from the human vantage point took the initiative to bring Jesus down, is guilty of the greater sin." (Carson, 602).
- vi. It's easier to suffer for the cause of Christ when you remember who is in control. Whate'er befalls me, Jesus does all things well.
- vii. We are told in verse 12 from the time Jesus gave this response in verse 11, Pilate was seeking to release him.
 - 1. The one who has authority to release can't find a way to release him and we know why!
 - 2. But his opponents are well prepared and they will use any law available to manipulate Pilate.
 - a. (Jn. 19:12) but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar."
 - b. The irony is, "in order to execute Jesus, the Jewish authorities make themselves out to be more loyal subjects of Caesar than...Pilate." (Carson 603).

- c. Pilate has no way out of this one. They have used their law to say he must die for blasphemy but the charge of sedition and insurrection against Caesar has forced Pilate to the judgment seat.
- 3. Jesus is brought out. (Jn. 19:14-15) Pilate said to the Jews, "Behold your King!"
 - a. The promised Messiah they had been taught to look for was standing before them and they did not recognize him.
 - b. If Jesus had used his power to foil the flogging and slaughter his opponents, I wonder if they would have "Hailed him as King"?
 - c. They do not realize what they need. They are blind. Their hearts are as hard as stones. The God they claimed to know was perfectly revealed to them right in front of their eyes but they see him not.
 - i. (Jn. 1:11)¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.
 - ii. (Jn. 19:15)¹⁵ They cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar."

V. Response

- a. You are faced, once again, with a decision. Christ or Caesar? Caesar could not save them. He's dead. Repent and believe in Christ alone.
- b. If you have decided to trust and follow Christ, then you must be willing to suffer for his Name.
 - i. Obey no matter the cost
 - ii. And you must know that suffering is a means of carrying out the Great Commission. If carrying out the mission of God is not your desire then Christ is not your Lord and Savior.
 - iii. If you wish to have your best life now, you will lose it but if you wish to have your best life later, you will save it.
- c. I will end with this as a plea for us to join Christ in his sufferings:
 - i. J. Oswald Sanders told the story of an indigenous missionary who walked barefoot from village to village preaching the gospel in India. His hardships were many. After a long day of many miles and much discouragement he came to a certain village and tried to speak the gospel but was driven out of town and rejected. So he went to the edge of the village dejected and lay down under a tree and slept from exhaustion.
 - ii. When he awoke, people were hovering over him, and the whole town was gathered around to hear him speak. The head man of the village explained that they came to look him over while he was sleeping. When they saw his blistered feet, they concluded that he must be a holy man, and that they had been evil to reject him. They were sorry and wanted to hear the message that he was willing to suffer so much to bring them.