

Comments on John 19

¹ Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him. ² And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and they put on him a purple robe, ³ And said, Hail, King of the Jews! and they smote him with their hands.

⁴ Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him. ⁵ Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man!

⁶ When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him. ⁷ The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God.

v1-7 Pilate has Jesus scourged, the typical treatment for those being crucified (v. 1), and the soldiers mock him by putting a crown of thorns and purple robe on him (v. 2), calling him "King of the Jews" and hitting him (v. 3). Pilate brings Jesus out again and tells them he finds Him guiltless (v. 4) and attempts to appeal to their compassion (v. 5). They continue to demand His crucifixion, so he attempts to diffuse the situation by saying he is going to let Jesus loose, and they should deal with it themselves, because he sees no capital offense (v. 6). They respond by saying Jesus claims to be the Son of God (v. 7).

v1 "and scourge him", the whipping couldn't have been too bad, as Jesus afterwards is brought before the crowds and then has a conversation with Pilate. There are accounts of Roman scourging where the person is [brutally whipped nearly to death](#) before being crucified. This suggests Pilate knew Jesus was innocent and was deliberately going easy on him.

v2 "crown of thorns...purple robe", the Roman soldiers are mocking Jesus as the king of the Jews. It is likely the Romans aren't so much mocking Jesus in specific as the Jews in general.

Also consider the context of the fear of uprising they would have had earlier in the week with the Triumphal Entry. Their relief at Jesus being rejected by the population after being adored by the population just days earlier would have been significant.

v5 "Behold the man!", while Pilate is appealing to their compassion, it is more likely his concerns are political. His

interest is in keeping the Pax Romana. An appeal like this would be a temperature check on the crowds, to make sure the attempt by the Sanhedrin to execute Jesus isn't against popular opinion, potentially fomenting general rebellion and bloodshed. It is very unlikely Pilate is genuinely moved with compassion for Jesus at this point. It is much more likely Pilate is primarily concerned with keeping the peace and protecting himself politically.

v6 "Take ye him, and crucify him", Pilate is telling them he is unwilling to follow through with the crucifixion of Jesus himself, so he is telling them to do it themselves, which he knows perfectly well they are not allowed to do. If they do follow through with it, then they themselves will be subject to Pilate's justice and likely be crucified as well.

Pilate is leveling a potent implicit threat. He is saying Jesus has not committed a capital offense, and if they seek to punish him as though he has, then they will be punished with the same fate.

⁸ When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid; ⁹ And went again into the judgment hall, and saith unto Jesus, whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰ Then saith Pilate unto him, speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? ¹¹ Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin. ¹² And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar.

v8-12 Pilate hears the accusation leveled at Jesus and is concerned about the implications (v. 8). Pilate takes Jesus back into the hall and questions Jesus more, but receives no answer (v. 9). Pilate gets frustrated with Jesus and challenges him with his authority (v. 10), which Jesus rejects as being worldly. Jesus then tells Pilate that those who make the false accusations bear more of the guilt than he does (v. 11). Pilate then insists Jesus be freed, but the Sanhedrin and their lackeys counter with a political argument that carries an implicit threat of their own (v. 12).

v8 Pilate's reaction may be a result of his Roman cultural and religious background which held to the idea that humans could be

deified, as was the case with Caesar, or that there were demi-gods like Perseus. Regardless, hearing this accusation causes him to be fearful. But, fearful of what? His biggest fear would be that of popular insurrection. If the Jewish population in general believed Jesus was divine, and Pilate executes Him, then there would certainly be a backlash against him, which could have political and military implications.

v10-11 While Pilate attempts to exert his power and demonstrate it to Jesus (v. 10), Jesus dispassionately rejects his assertions (v. 11). Pilate was likely stunned, or at least surprised, by Jesus' response.

v11 While Pilate ruled brutally, he clearly has a well-developed sense of justice, and fears doing the wrong thing. Jesus lets him off the hook, as He places the blame for the situation firmly on the Sanhedrin.

v12 The Sanhedrin counters Pilate's implicit threat (cf. v. 6) with their own threat of failing to uphold Caesar and eliminate any insurrectionist who would oppose him. As Jesus says he is a king, the Messiah of the Jews, then his monarchy would be in opposition to that of Rome, and would therefore be an insurgent who needed to be executed. Failure to do so would be a political risk, one the Sanhedrin insinuates they will use against him.

¹³ When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. ¹⁴ And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! ¹⁵ But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar.

v13-15 Pilate makes a last ditch effort to appeal for sympathy from the general population, but they have none. The Sanhedrin are so far past reason they contradict their own religious beliefs of a Messiah and confess the Roman king is their king.

v15 "the chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar", the irony of such a statement is staggering. This is the Sanhedrin, the religious and political leadership of the Jews, and they are ignoring absolutely everything about their religion

in order to have the innocent Jesus executed. They loathed the Romans, but their hatred of Jesus exceeds even that. Johannine irony at its finest.

¹⁶ Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led him away. ¹⁷ And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha: ¹⁸ where they crucified him, and two other with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst. ¹⁹ And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS. ²⁰ This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin. ²¹ Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. ²² Pilate answered, what I have written I have written.

v16-22 Pilate, knowing he is politically trapped, is forced to follow through with Jesus' execution (v. 16). Jesus has to carry the crosspiece, as is typical for Roman crucifixion (v. 17). Jesus is crucified with two others (v. 18). Pilate places a title on Jesus' cross identifying him as the King of the Jews in the three major languages of the area (v. 19), so everyone can read it, and many do read it, because of the proximity of the site near a major road into Jerusalem (v. 20). The Sanhedrin come to complain to Pilate about the title of Jesus' cross (v. 21), and he refuses to change it (v. 22).

v17 "bearing his cross", the vertical uprights were permanent. The horizontal crosspiece was what the victim had to carry.

v19 "Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross", this plaque was the *titulus*, the accusation against the executed individual that was deemed a capital offense. It was part of the Roman public relations effort associated with the gore of the spectacle. As a warning to those who were occupied, the executed individuals would have a plaque identifying their crimes to advertise to everyone what got them tortured to death.

Jesus' cross having a *titulus* was common, although the inscription was obviously not. That Jesus was given such a large and lengthy *titulus* in three different languages, so any passerby could read it, is indicative of Pilate's irritation at the Sanhedrin.

v22 Pilate's calling Jesus the King of the Jews and refusing to change the inscription is his final spiteful act against the Sanhedrin.

²³ Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. ²⁴ They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did.

v23-24 Owing to the value of fabric in an ancient setting, the Centurions split up Jesus' undergarments (v. 23), but as the overgarment was a single woven piece, they cast lots rather than cut it up (v. 24, cf. Ps. 22:18).

Christian art depicting the Crucifixion drape Jesus to preserve His modesty, but in reality, the Roman custom was to entirely strip the victim to publicly humiliate them, and also fully expose them to scavenging birds and insects when crucified.

v24 John's reference to Ps. 22:18 is intended to pull the context of that entire Psalm into the present text.

²⁵ Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! ²⁷ Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.

v25-27 While Jesus was on the cross at least four women are there, Jesus' mother, His aunt, Mary Magdalene and Mary wife of Cleophas.

"Mary the wife of Cleophas", this Mary is generally assumed to be [sister-in-law by marriage](#) of Mary, mother of Jesus. Her husband may be the same referenced in Luke 24:18 as one of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and this same Cleophas is assumed to be brother of Joseph.

v25 From a historical standpoint, the presence of women relatives at the crucifixion is to prevent scavengers from

harassing the victim of crucifixion. They are doing whatever they can to ease the suffering of the victim. They were certainly lamenting as well, given the horror of the scene. The men are obviously absent, with the exception of the author, because they don't want to be the next victims crucified.

v26 It is surprising John Beloved was present at Jesus' crucifixion, and he was apparently the only disciple there. Given the clear overt hostility of the Sanhedrin and the willingness of Rome to execute Jesus, his disciples certainly felt vulnerable at this point (cf. 20:19).

v27 Jesus' mother Mary was apparently widowed at this point, so Jesus makes sure John Beloved takes her into his care. Despite such horrific suffering, Jesus still makes sure His mother is taken care of.

²⁸ After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. ²⁹ Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth. ³⁰ When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

v28-30 Jesus knows everything He needed to do in mortality is done, so He makes one final significant Scriptural reference (v. 28), they fulfil the request (v. 29), he says it is done, and he dies (v. 30).

v28 John is referring to Ps. 69:21, but is pulling the entire context of that psalm into the current setting, esp. v. 4 and 9.

v30 We would assume Jesus had power over his physical flesh that exceeded the typical mortal's, and knowing He had completed everything, and His demise was inevitable, He wills His spirit to leave his mortal body.

The Greek word used here in John's account is [paradidomi](#), which carries a sense of deliberacy, as in to deliver up, give over or commit to the care of. The Greek terms for saying someone died, as a matter of natural course, is either [apothnēskō](#) or [teleutaō](#), which is not used here, or in any of the Gospel accounts.

Matthew uses the term [aphiemi](#), which is translated to yielded in the KJV. This term is used throughout Matthew in

other contexts and appears commonly throughout the New Testament, and generally means depart, separate or to leave. Mark and Luke use [ekpneo](#), translated to "gave up" in the KJV. In the case of [ekpneo](#), that context is the only usage of the term in the New Testament, so it is unique.

In all four Gospel accounts, the Greek term [paradidomi](#) is used repeatedly throughout in reference to Judas' betrayal of Jesus, when he delivers Him up to the Romans. Matthew, Mark and Luke then use different Greek terms to show that Jesus delivers Himself out of their hands, where only John uses the same [paradidomi](#) to say Jesus delivered Himself out of their hands.

The underlying issue, made explicit only in John's account, is the fulfilment of the type of the Passover lamb not having a bone broken (cf. v. 36, Exod. 12:46, Ps. 34:20). Had Jesus suffered the typical slow death of asphyxiation, His legs would have been broken to hasten the process, so He would die before sundown, thereby violating the Jewish Sabbath.

John's account seems to be suggesting that while Jesus had been delivered up by Judas to the Romans, Jesus never lost His power over the situation and at the time when He had completed all that needed to be done, He exercised His power to deliver Himself up, the final step of His mortal existence, which power His mortal enemies never actually had over Him.

One of the themes John emphasizes is how Jesus controls and predicts and manages the situation around Himself to get the outcome He desires, even though that outcome comes at great expense to His own person. He predicts the crucifixion, Judas' betrayal, Peter's denial, Pilate's powerlessness, the destruction of Jerusalem, and His own success and ascension. Here at the point where it looks like His enemies have won, He in fact is still in complete control of the situation, and it is His choice to deliver up His own spirit, as part of the larger plan.

So, can Jesus' act be considered a suicide? This is a nettlesome question that is not easily answered, given the complexity and uniqueness of the situation. If one does consider it to be a suicide, then one must also admit it is unlike any other suicide that has ever occurred, and cannot be compared to any other suicide.

³¹ The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. ³² Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the

other which was crucified with him. ³³ But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: ³⁴ But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water.

³⁵ And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. ³⁶ For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. ³⁷ And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced.

v31-37 Owing to the imminent start of the Passover Sabbath, someone in the Sanhedrin requests Pilate have the legs broken of those who are crucified, so they will die faster and then be taken away (v. 31). Pilate approves, so the Roman soldiers break the legs of the other two being crucified (v. 32), but Jesus is already dead, so they don't need to break his legs (v. 33). However, one of the soldiers pierces Jesus' side (v. 34).

John Beloved, as he witnessed it firsthand and is writing the present account testifies of its veracity (v. 35). Everything that happened occurred to fulfil the prophecies concerning the Messiah (v. 36-37).

v31 More classical irony from John. In keeping with their scrupulous Sabbath preparations, they want to break the legs of the people so they die before the Passover starts, and their bodies be disposed of, so as to not offend the sensibilities of those coming up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover.

"that they might be taken away", those who've been crucified were typically thrown into a common burial pit after hanging on the cross for days. Here, the Sanhedrin wants them dealt with more expeditiously than the typical routine.

v34 Perhaps the soldier was testing to make certain Jesus really was deceased? John's inclusion of this detail is to make it clear to the reader that Jesus was deceased at this point. There was no question of Jesus surviving the crucifixion and entombment of three days, and was therefore simply not deceased or being raised from the dead, as was Lazarus in ch. 11.

v35 The accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke were not witnessed directly by the authors and are therefore not first-person. For those skeptical of the accounts for that reason, John is addressing that concern. He was present for the entire thing, witnessed it all, and now writes his experience down.

v36 John is quoting Ps. 33:20.

v37 John is quoting Zech. 12:10 from the Masoretic text, as it is not present in the Septuagint version of the same passage.

³⁸ And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus. ³⁹ And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. ⁴⁰ Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. ⁴¹ Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. ⁴² There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand.

v38-42 A member of the Sanhedrin, who was not part of the (cf. Luke 23:51) council against Jesus, asks Pilate if he may take the body of Jesus and Pilate agrees (v. 38). Nicodemus joins Joseph, bring an extraordinary amount of funerary preparations (v. 39), and the two of them take Jesus' body and prepare it according to custom (v. 40), showing great respect. They place the body in a new, previously unused garden tomb (v. 41) that is nearby, because they have little time to travel and attend to the body before the Passover begins (v. 42).

v38-39 "Joseph...Nicodemus", we would assume the two of them knew each other from the Sanhedrin and both of them had conferred together regarding Jesus' ministry.

v38 "Joseph of Arimathaea", apparently a wealthy (cf. Matt. 27:57) member of the Sanhedrin (cf. Mark 15:43, Luke 23:50-51), who was secretly a support of Jesus' ministry, but he kept it quiet, because he would lose his position if it was known. The Lucan account also tells us he wasn't party to the Sanhedrin's actions against Jesus.

Given the clear hostility between Pilate and the Sanhedrin, there must have been some prior relationship or knowledge between these two such that Pilate would have permitted him to take Jesus' body. Pilate's final goal was to humiliate the members of the Sanhedrin who wanted Jesus dead (cf. 19-22), so unless Pilate had some knowledge of Joseph's fidelity to Jesus

and general good character, it seems unlikely Pilate would have released the body to him.

"take away the body", people who were crucified by Rome were typically left on the cross for days, even after they died, as a public humiliation and warning, and then the bodies were thrown into open pits, as a further humiliation. Pilate sparing Jesus this indignity is exceptional, and shows his clear animus for the Sanhedrin.

v39 "Nicodemus", cp. ch. 3.

v41-42 Joseph having access to such a garden tomb so close to the city clearly indicates his exceptional wealth, as alluded to in Matt. 27:57.

Tombs were typically far from town, owing to them being unclean, and they were a relatively expensive commodity, especially one located in a garden, which would otherwise have been viable agricultural land. The reader would assume Joseph had procured the land and tomb for his own family use, but had instead dedicated it to Jesus.

Historicity of Crucifixion as a Roman Practice

Jesus being crucified was not a unique event for the time. To the Romans, Jesus was just another of many people they made examples of to dissuade others. There are a number of good sources available for the ancient historical practice which shed light on the currently available details on the matter.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crucifixion>

<https://www.livescience.com/65283-crucifixion-history.html>

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/first-physical-evidence-of-roman-crucifixion-found-in-britain-180979190/>

<https://www.thedailybeast.com/new-evidence-of-how-romans-would-have-crucified-jesus>

<https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/crucifixion/roman-crucifixion-methods-reveal-the-history-of-crucifixion/>

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