

Record of Sermons delivered during the month of May 2018

(added progressively after each Sunday)

(see following pages)

Teaching About Christ & Man

Per S Olyott

(Review of last time) -

This long passage is a very remarkable one from Scripture. It contains a large number of questions. 21 questions.

- 1 by an officer of the High Priest to Jesus in His so called trial,
- 3 questions put to Peter, about whether he is a follower of Christ,
- 6 questions by our Lord Jesus Christ, and
- 11 questions by Pontius Pilate.

You'll know that Palestine was ruled by the Romans. The 'Procurator' (governor of Judea) was Pilate. The Jews had a measure of self government, but they couldn't execute anybody. That was a prerogative of the Romans alone.

As we review these questions we gain the gist of the passage: although lengthy the passage is none the less a unit.

Chapter 18 verse 4: *"Whom do you seek?"* Our Lord has prayed in the street with His disciples. He's gone into Gethsemane, He's alone with the disciples and then this great rabble bursts in. "Jesus of Nazareth", is their response. Jesus answers: "I am"¹. Great quiet comes over Gethsemane, and *they drew back and fell to the ground*. As if they were blown over.

They get up again. And Christ repeats the question, *"Whom do you seek?"* Again the same reply: *"Jesus of Nazareth."* Peter, anxious to defend his Lord, takes out his sword and off comes somebody's ear. *"Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?"*, commands Jesus.

Then this awful rabble, sent by the Jewish authorities, takes the Lord off to the High Priest's house. Annas is the deposed High Priest. He is taken there first and then to Caiaphas, the current High Priest, who is the son-in-law of Annas. A series of a sort of trial begins.

Verse 17: *"You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you?"* While the trial is going on Peter has managed to get himself into the High Priest's house. John was known in the house, he gets in easily. He comes back, so that Peter is let in. The girl at the door questions Peter, "You're not also one of them?" Later as he is warming himself by the fire he is asked again. In effect: was he a follower of Christ? Then a relative of the man who was, struck by Peter's sword claims to recognise Peter. Three times he denies the Lord. He denies that he has anything to do with Him. That he is a follower of Christ. Just as our Lord had predicted: three times and then the cock crowed.

Verse 21: ²¹ *Why do you ask me?* Our Lord here is being tried. The High Priest is asking Him about His disciples and His teaching and Jesus says, "I never taught anything in secret. What I taught everybody knows. Why don't you ask the people who heard me? Why ask me?"

¹ The translations acknowledge that the Greek was simply "I AM" and the the 'he' has been added. Also in verse 6 and 8.

One of the officials in the High Priest's palace, comes up and slaps the Lord, viciously. "Is that the way to answer the High Priest? *If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?* Is Jesus' answer. The man falls silent because his conscience is guilty.

Verse 28: Our Lord is taken to Pilate and in verse 29 Pilate puts this question: *What accusation do you bring against this man?* We note that they don't go into Pilate's residence because it is Passover. These hypocrites don't want to defile themselves by going into a Roman (pagan) house. Pilate therefore comes out to meet them. "What's your accusation?"

"Well if he wasn't a criminal we wouldn't have brought him here." is their haughty reply.

Pilate: "You go away and deal with him according to your law."

The Jews: "Your law won't let us put him to death!"

So Pilate interviews Jesus on his own.

Verse 33: Another question. "Are you the King of the Jews?" "Did you think of that question?" asks Jesus, "Or did some body else put you up to it?"

³⁵ *Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?"*

"My Kingdom is not of this world, if it were a political, earthly Kingdom my friends would have fought for me. My Kingdom isn't that sort of Kingdom. I was born and came into the world to bear witness to the truth and all who are of the truth hear my voice."

"Huh", says Pilate, "What is truth?"

Pilate then goes out to the Jewish authorities and in verse 39 asks: ... *do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?*"

It's Passover time: the Roman's magnanimously (in their view) offer to free a prisoner on such a day. "Shall I release to you the 'King of the Jew's'?"

"Not this prisoner. ... But Barabbas." A notorious, guilty, insurrectionist murderer! They would rather have this man than Jesus Christ!

Jesus is taken and scourged, mocked and a crown of thorns is roughly put on his bleeding brow. He's dressed as a king: "Hail King of the Jews."

He's brought out to the crowd. Pilate points to Him and says, "*Behold the man!*" His hope was presumably that in causing Christ to suffer, the people who were after His blood, would now be content. But they were not!

They say, "Crucify Him! What you have done to Him is not enough. We want Him crucified."

Verse 10 of chapter 19: Pilate takes Jesus inside again on His own. Pilate is afraid. The Jews have said that Jesus' crime is that He is making Himself to be the Son of God! And by Jewish law He should die. Pilate is a scared man. He is thinking about His position. So he asks Jesus where He's from. Jesus says nothing.¹⁰ *So Pilate said*

to him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" "Don't you know that your future is in my hands?"

¹ Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin." In other words Jesus isn't in Pilate's hands. Pilate is in Jesus' hands.

Lastly, as we look at the gist of the passage, by looking at some of the questions asked. Verse 15: *Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?"* To which the Jews reply that if Pilate releases this man he is no friend of Caesar. After all there is but one king: Caesar. They make it plain that if they don't get what they want it will go badly for Pilate with Caesar. Pilate, in his weakness, gives in. Handing Jesus over to be crucified.

There are now two main things to be learnt from this passage. We will start on the first this morning and continue next week.

- The passage teaches a great deal about the Lord Jesus Christ.

The deity of Christ:

Verses 4 to 6 of Chapter 18. Here comes that mob into the Garden of Gethsemane, where our Lord (we read from other Gospels) has been praying. "Whom do you seek?" Then in verse 5: ⁵ *They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I AM".*² In this way He announces to this rabble the Name for God. Just for a moment the veil was drawn back and these creatures (as we all are: by God's creation of us) saw the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ – just for moment, they saw His identity. The One who had just been praying in the Garden to His heavenly Father, is revealed to be none other than God. He uses the Name of God and the revelation is so amazing that they are absolutely 'bowled over' – *fell to the ground* – as they catch a glimpse of the glory of Christ. They are thrown into the dust, as the 'creatures' they are, as they see just a glimpse of God's glory.

The passage tells us who Jesus Christ is. That's why we can read in verse 4 of Chapter 18 ⁴ *Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, ...* . Omniscient – all knowing. He knew exactly what would happen, because He is God.

Verse 9: ⁹ *This was to fulfil the word that he had spoken: "Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one."* Jesus appealed to those who had come to arrest Him that they should take Him and leave the others alone. That was a fulfilment of Scripture as was verse 32³ also of Chapter 18. Which made it clear that Jesus would have to be put to death by Gentiles. Which He had also predicted earlier on in His ministry. Who can read the future perfectly? None other than God!

2 The 'he' in some translations is in different print to indicate that it is not part of the original language. Jesus said to this crowd two words in Greek: *ego eimi* (ἐγώ ειμι) which are the very words of God used in the Old Testament (Exodus 3:14 – Septuagint Version). When Moses came to the burning bush, the bush that was ever burning but didn't burn away, God spoke to him from that bush, revealing God's Name, I AM that I am. The great Name for God in the Bible is, I AM – self existent, God. Who has always been and always will be. The fountain of His own being. Since Jesus is speaking in the common Greek of the time He uses the Greek translation of the original Hebrew of Ex 3:14.

3 ³² *This was to fulfil the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die.*

So we recognise that the One who walked the earth some 2000 years ago was God Himself.

The Humanity of Christ:

But it also teaches us about His humanity. Look at 18:7,
⁷ *So he asked them again, "Whom do you seek?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth."* There couldn't be a more human name than that. There were hundreds with the Name *Jesus* in Palestine then (it's a variation of Joshua). Surnames weren't used. To distinguish between those of the same name one might use one's occupation, father's name or town of origin. So our Lord was known as Jesus of Nazareth. It speaks of His humanity – a man with a common name, from an ordinary (unremarkable) town.

But there is a further and classic example of His humanity. Chapter 19:5: ⁵ *So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. (Cruelly mocked – how does Pilate announce this awfully disfigured victim?) Pilate said to them, "Behold **the man!**"*

So the great God, whose glory they had seen – for just a moment and were thrown into the dust – also is announced as 'the man'.

Isn't the Bible simple? In the same short passage you have the Deity and the humanity of Christ. And isn't the Bible profound? How can it be that one Person who walks the earth is God and man?

Not God-hood reduced to man-hood. Not man-hood to God-hood. Not a sort of mixture of both. He is God and all that that means. He is man and all that that means. So once more you are confronted with the sheer simplicity and unfathomable, immeasurable, profundity (intellectual depth) of the Gospel.

One Person truly God, truly man⁴. It is this Person who is described in this passage as suffering. In chapter 18:12 we read of His arrest and their binding His wrists. The Son of God! Then we see His unjust trial beginning. Then in verse 22 we see Him struck! God in the flesh struck by a creature – a being created by God. Further 19:1 we read of Romans flogging (a cruel whipping) Him. And plaiting a crown of thorns and ramming it on the brow of the only true eternal King. The crown of mockery which caused His brow to bleed.

Dressing Him up with mocking, despising and jeering. Then in verse 16 taking Him to be crucified.

His sacrifice was voluntary:

The One they do all this to, is the same One to whose feet they fell, when He announced His true identity – I AM. That stresses to you that His going to the Cross was voluntary. This is the great God: when He chooses He pulls aside the veil. They see His glory and are thrown to the ground. They could not possibly have taken Him against His will. Nor could they possibly take Him and mock Him and crucify Him against His will. He could easily have drawn back the

⁴ Two complete, perfect and separate forms of being, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in a single Person, without being changed, combined, or confused.. WCF 8:2

veil again and confuse them eternally.

His Cross was voluntary as stressed in Chapter 18:11. ¹¹ *So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?"* Here Jesus describes His sufferings as a bitter cup which He will drink. The Father has given it to Him to drink. It hasn't been imposed on Him by this mob that has come to arrest Him. This is the cup which the Father has given Him to drink. As it's the Father's will that He will suffer and bleed and die. Will He not go ahead and do it? (All persons of the God-head are intrinsically of the same will and purpose!) He will – His obedience will be perfect.

His Kingdom:

The final thing that we learn about the Lord Jesus Christ in this remarkable passage is about His Kingdom. He IS a King. He's seen here as a King with a Kingdom. We have much to learn here: verse 36 of Chapter 18. ³⁶ *Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world."*

Jesus wasn't a politician or a 'freedom fighter'. He wasn't a liberator – in a political sense. He had no controversy with Caesar. He didn't have His guerilla troops in the background. If He had – if He were that sort of activist and King – then when He was arrested, troops would have appeared to overthrow the Romans, so that He wouldn't have been delivered to the Jews.

Our Lord isn't a political King. He hasn't come to set up any geographical territory, over which He is going to reign in a temporal sense. But a King none the less.

There are people over whom He rules. People who live under His Lordship. People who are governed by Christ – who are glad to be governed by Christ. He has given laws. People whom He supports and protects. Not a political Kingdom.

What sort then? Verse 37 makes it clear: ³⁷ *Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."*

That's the way it was then and now. There are those of you who hear the truth. You recognise it as the truth because you are of the truth. You submit to the truth – about God, Christ, the Holy Spirit and yourselves. You submit to the Lord Jesus Christ and belong to His Kingdom now and into eternity.

[2491]

May this be the case for all the saints gathered here today.

Teaching About Christ & Man – Pt 2

Per S Olyott

(Review of last time) -

Last week from these chapters we were guided to learn a great deal about Christ.

But there is a lot to learn about man(kind) as well!

Look at verse 18:12.⁵ They had come with their lanterns, staves, batons and swords, bursting into Gethsemane. Judas had marked out who Jesus is, but then all of them had been laid in the dust, because they 'saw' the Deity of Christ. From that position they all get up again; arrest Christ and cruelly bind Him; drag Him off to judgement. That tells us a lot about man: **there are those who know Christ to be God, but are still against Him.**

If you are one of them. You know Christ to be God. You know as surely as that crowd that fell before Him in Gethsemane. You are certain of it. Your conscience is as convinced as theirs. But you're still against Him.

Verses 22 & 23.⁶ All Jesus had said, when He had been asked about His teaching. "Why ask me ? I've always taught publicly. Plenty of people have heard me. If you want to know what I have said – ask them." The official strides across the court and slaps the Lord Jesus Christ. Clearly this official had **made up his mind about Christ even before he hears the evidence.**⁷

Some people today are the same. They've made up their mind about Jesus Christ. Not willing to listen to the evidence. Not willing to hear the case put, because they've already made up their mind! Wilful blind prejudice.

Perhaps you've come across this situation: You want to give a friend a Christian book. "Would you like to read this book?"

"I don't read things that I don't agree with", is the reply.

"But you haven't read it. How do you know that you disagree with it?"

He says, "I don't have to read it to know that I disagree with it."

There are people like that. They just don't want to hear the case put. They have made up their mind, on no ground at all, that Jesus Christ is not for them.

How wicked the human heart is. How obviously does this passage display that the human heart has to be changed – from outside itself, by grace.

Now read from verse 29: The Jews having disturbed Pilate very early – before six in the morning – he asks a perfectly reasonable question.⁸ "What's the charge?"

They snort back at Him, "*If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered*

5 ¹² So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him.

6 ²² When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" ²³ Jesus answered him, "If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?"

7 In fact the rules of those courts required that witnesses be heard before any questioning of the accused.

8 ²⁹ So Pilate went outside to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?"

him over to you.”

That's how they answer the question: “What's the charge?”

They have no charge. No charge is put in this chapter (18), and then in 19:7 the best they can do is: that He made Himself the Son of God. **No actual charge is put against Christ** but they are determined to get rid of Christ although they have no grounds to do so.

There are men and women in our country who are determined to get rid of Christ. Although they have no grounds to do so! Yet these people continue to enjoy so much, even in their unconverted state, from Christ. The blessings and the liberties. The privileges that they enjoy every day which came to them only because the Gospel was preached in our society in past Centuries.

Yet they will use those very liberties to do what they can to eradicate the Name of Christ from every conversation. Many are highly educated people. They forget that Education was brought to ordinary men and women, because the Gospel was preached. In today's places of education they will try to get the Name of Christ removed completely. They are determined to get rid of Christ although they have no grounds to do so!

The human heart (in its fallen state) is foul and wicked.

Consider now verse 33 - 40 of Chapter 18:⁹ We see Pilate in action. We are learning a great deal about man. In this case through the actions of a particular man.

At verse 33 Pilate starts asking all sorts of questions. About the King of the Jews; am I a Jew; are you king; what is truth. He's curious. But he has no desire to submit to the truth. He's simply curious. Eventually he will ask: where does Jesus come from. The other Gospels add even further things.

Pilate is just putting question after question. Though he gets wonderful answers to them, he doesn't benefit from these answers. He is just curious. There is no clue that he has **any desire to submit to Christ**.

You've met people like this. Don't be side tracked by them. They ask you question after question, about Jesus Christ. But there's not a hint anywhere that they have any desire to follow Him or that their lives will be changed in any way by the answers that you give.

Isn't that amazing: to be curious about Christ and have no desire at all to submit to Him. Perhaps in church there are people like this. Curious about Christ. They really

⁹ ³³ So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” ³⁴ Jesus answered, “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?” ³⁵ Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?” ³⁶ Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.” ³⁷ Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” ³⁸ Pilate said to him, “What is truth?”

After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, “I find no guilt in him. ³⁹ But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover. So do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?”

⁴⁰ They cried out again, “Not this man, but Barabbas!” Now Barabbas was a robber.

want to know some of the answers. But that's all they want. They want to go away and just live as they did before. And think just like they thought before, but they would like to have a few answers to the questions. Just as long as they won't affect them. No thought of change. Just be the same. They don't want Jesus Christ as their Lord. They just want to get a few facts straight in their mind. That's the full extent of their interest. Just Curious!

Now, chapter 19:8:¹⁰ His fear characterises the rest of the narrative. He is controlled through his fear. Then in verses 15 & 16 he eventually **gives in to that demand to crucify the Lord.**

It's possible. There are many like it. To be one of those whose treatment of Christ is in the final analysis decided by other people. This curious Pontius Pilate, had no desire to submit to Christ. However, for a while he was prepared to release Him. Alternatively scourge and then release Him. But ultimately his treatment of Christ was **decided by the pressure of the group, which was controlling him.**

Maybe you're one of those. All things are revealed in this passage about the human heart. For yourself you've got no burning anger against Jesus Christ. You're even curious about Him. For yourself you've got no real animosity against the Lord, but in the final analysis you're going to treat Him just the same way as every body else. Because it's the thing to do.

Verse 19:10 onwards:¹¹ Isn't it a shame that two thousand years later the world is still filled with people like Pilate. They really do think that Jesus Christ is in their hand. And they can do with Christ just what they like. The facts of the matter are the total opposite. That Jesus Christ can do with them what He likes: at last there will be the judgement, the voice that decides who has everlasting life, and who has everlasting damnation, and announces the verdict, is the **voice that spoke in Pilate's hall, two thousand years ago.**

The last comment in this section comes from verses 5 & 6 of Chapter 19:

⁵ *So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns (think of it: the blood running down His face; His back with the flesh laid bare from the scourging.) and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold the man!" (Oh what a man He looks – frailty and human weakness seen as never before, that hour. If you saw somebody in that condition you would be moved, but not these people.)* ⁶ *When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him!" (His suffering left them totally unmoved. When at last they had their will, as we will read next week, He was crucified. The horrendous treatment of the Son of God. Even then they walked past His Cross and mocked Him! They were completely unmoved by it.)*

But were there hearts harder than ours?

We who from childhood have heard the story of the crucifixion of Christ, many times. We know all the details. But we don't really imagine it. We've become desensitised –

¹⁰ ⁸ *When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid.*

¹¹ ¹⁰ *So Pilate said to him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?"* ¹¹ *Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above.*

immune – to it. Completely unmoved: that the great God should have been cruelly murdered at Calvary. Unmoved! Never a tear being shed. Never a sigh – not so much as that.

Any different from the Chief Priests and Scribes?

Who is the Christ to be treated like that? He is God.

Isn't the human heart perverted! Wicked. Spiteful. That's the way it is in its natural condition. None would believe in Jesus Christ. Not you. Not me. If not for verse 18:36. "... . **But my kingdom is not from the world.**" He has a Kingdom. He IS a King! Only because He is the ultimate King that He can conquer, those who are wicked and spiteful towards Him, with the truth, so that their minds are changed. Only by God, His Spirit, is the hardened, human heart repaired and softened.

Before we leave the passage a few other comments:

So far we have seen the perversion of the human heart, but two further sidelights about believers.

Look at Peter.

Verse 18:10. The scene. In the Garden. The great mob arrives. Jesus and the 11 are obviously outnumbered. We read in another Gospel that they only had a couple of swords between them. Peter has one of them. Nobody is going to touch his Lord Jesus Christ. He's going to take Christ's side even if nobody else does. Whoever else runs away he's not. Out the sword comes. He's not very good at it, but he does get the ear right off. We read in another Gospel that our Lord has to repair this injury.

Peter has decided that he's on Christ's side and he doesn't care who notices it or even if he dies in defending his blessed Lord.

But that's not the way to go about things.

But some of you will. This week when you hear your Lord spitefully spoken about. You'll be spiteful back, When you hear His Name dragged through the dust, all you'll seek to do is to injure the person who did it.

Just the same. (Thank God that you are at least decided.) But it's not the way to go about it. Fortunately the hand of our Lord can heal those injuries, but we're not to go about injuring and hurting people simply because they are who they are – resulting in their being spiteful towards our Lord. That's not the way to take His side.

But Peter occurs again in the chapter. The same Peter, notice. It's the High Priest's palace, This little girl opens the door. "Oh", she says, "Aren't you one of His disciples?"

"I'm not!" Same fellow with the sword, of just a few minutes before.

Then warming himself before the fire: "Aren't you one of His disciples?"

"I am not!"

Then there is one of the relatives whose ear was cut off. "Didn't I see you in the garden with Him?"

“No you didn't!”

The same Peter. But we can't judge Peter, because we've been just like it ourselves.

People put the heat on us and ask if we are Christians. To our utter amazement and shame we've found that we backed off; been silent; walked somewhere else. Or even on occasions said what wasn't true.

Our hearts were on Christ's side. Oh, so much on Christ's side. What a let down and we haven't denied Him only three times, but again and again. When it should have been made obvious to people that we are Christ's.

Instead we do everything in our power to try to make it clear that we are the same as they are. Poor Peter and poor us!

The only explanation the the Kingdom of God extends is not in the strength of Christ's servants. Oh, they are so weak. The only explanation is that Christ says “It's **my** Kingdom.”

So set before us now is Jesus Christ. The question is – are you against Jesus Christ like the High Priest? That priest had power. He was popular. Since whatever he shouted every body else shouted. It looked like he had won at the end of the day. Christ on the Cross – the High priest walking and swaggering past. But that isn't the last day of the world's history. At the last day of the world's history the question will be put to Annas and Caiaphas. The charge will be put: You have crucified the Lord of Glory.

If today you're one of those who are not against Christ, but you're not for Him. Neither for or against. If the question's asked what do you say? Just like Pontius Pilate? Nobody respects Pontius Pilate. He was sympathetic to Christ, but in the end he crucified Him just as much as anybody else. Because he just fitted in with what the majority wanted. If that's what you do you're as guilty as the High Priest. As guilty as a person who is arrogantly opposed to Jesus Christ. You also will face the charge that you have crucified the Lord of Glory.

So hope that you are like Peter: he makes mistakes but he is clearly on Christ's side; he's filled with failure and faults; he even has such a thing as denial in his life – over which he wept bitterly. But his heart never ceases to follow Christ. Note: Christ didn't disown him! Verse 18:9 “*Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one.*” Christ didn't disown Peter. On the last day it will be better to be Christ's failing, friend than to have been His enemy.

[2331]

May this be the case for all the saints gathered here today.

The Darkest Hour in History

Per S Olyott

We've seen that the Lord Jesus Christ spent the hours, before His arrest alone with His eleven disciples. During the last few weeks we have studied what He had to say and we've seen the prayer that He prayed in the presence of those disciples during His last hours. Last week we saw how our Lord was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. Then He was unjustly tried and then in the morning He was delivered to be crucified.

The passage we have just read tells us about the crucifixion and the burial of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's important that we don't glamorise this record. What our Lord did in His Cross is magnificent and the benefits of the Cross to Christian men and women are unfathomable and eternal. But we must never forget that this Cross was the darkest hour in the history of the world. The darkest moment since the world began. So dark that the spiritual darkness was matched by a physical, miraculous darkness¹² for three hours whilst our Lord hung on the Cross. And an earthquake which shook Golgotha. So we have come to the darkest hour in history.

If Jesus did not die physically. If He did not die then He did not die in your place and therefore you are un-saved. If Jesus did not die He didn't finish what the Father gave Him to do. If Jesus did not die the Bible is a lie!

But Jesus did die. Verse 33 – John clearly reports: ³³ *But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.* How He died and what His friends did with the body is what we come to study this week and next. John 19:16 to the end of this Chapter.

The Gospels do not give us any dramatic description of crucifixion. No details. The record that we have here is very modest. Very brief but very weighty. What John, – now an old man, remembering by the specifically designated power of the Holy Spirit – gives us, are six brief portraits. He expects us to examine them and then meditate upon them so that we might really see what happened on that Friday so long ago.

- The first portrait starts at verse 16 & goes to 22: **Jesus' Identity Recognised.** ¹⁶ *So he (Pilate) delivered him over to them to be crucified.* We saw last week that Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent and yet he delivered Jesus to be crucified. He signs the warrant of execution. Only the Roman Procurator in that jurisdiction of Judea could sign such a warrant. Nobody else had that power in that part of the Roman Empire. The signature is now on the document and Jesus Christ is to be delivered to be crucified. Pilate was trying to dampen down his conscience. He wasn't pressing for the crucifixion of Jesus. The Jews were pressing for it. Pilate might have said to

¹² Some surmise that the darkness was an eclipse of the sun: This occurs predictably when the moon is exactly between the earth and the sun. However this was Passover time (which is determined by the phases of the moon) and this is always at the time of the full moon. A full moon occurs when the earth is between the sun and the moon, and so an eclipse of the sun (so called) cannot occur. Draw a diagram!

himself, that he was not responsible for Christ's death. "They're pressing for it. I'm only giving them what they want". The fact still remains that it is his signature upon the warrant. Pilate never once admitted that the Lord Jesus Christ was guilty! But none the less he signed Him away.

Pontius Pilate is still with us. Millions of people will never admit that Jesus Christ is guilty. But they will sign Him away. They'll write Him off.

So in verse 17 we see our Lord being led away to the place of execution. We've already seen His awful sufferings: seen Him harassed; bound; beaten; scourged – an unspeakable punishment; the awful crown of thorns pressed upon His head; He's been up all night without meals or drink; He's tired and exhausted. Now they lay upon Him – to complete His anguish – the Cross itself. Which He has to carry from the centre of Jerusalem out to Golgotha – outside the City gates.

It must have been an awful agony. In fact another Gospel tells us that the Lord was so weak that He could not carry the cross. Simon of Cyrene was requisitioned to come and help carry it. It was common Roman practice – the final humiliation – to take the victim through the streets, either carrying the big cross bar of the cross or the whole cross itself. He would be jeered at and spat upon and mocked as He went. We see our Lord going this awful way to Golgotha, where in verse 18 we read of His crucifixion.

Crucifixion was one of the most refined tortures ever known to men. Sometimes a person could be on the cross for many days. It was not just the excruciating agony of being nailed to a cross, but as the cross was lifted up and dropped into its socket, usually all the bones of the victim would be dislocated. The person would hang up there sometimes for days in awful heat, with the flies. The agony was accompanied with suffocation. As the victim hung down. The lungs were constricted. To breathe He would have to push up with His legs against the cross in his feet where the nails were driven. But this could only be done for a short while. Then He would sag again and not be able to breathe. The Romans had this torture off to a fine art! To create the maximum anguish and pain.

Here is our Lord, who predicted this would happen. "When I be lifted up." He had seen 'this hour'.

As a final insult see what they did in verse 18: ... *and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them.* We are told in another Gospel that these people on either side of the Lord of Glory were thieves. They were criminals. Even murderers. A final insult – it's as if they were saying, "He spent His life with sinners, so let Him die with the worst sort. He came to call such people to repentance, so let Him spend His dying hours in the company of such people. May He be publicly paraded with the worst sorts of all."

But in their spite they didn't realise that they were fulfilling Scripture: 712 years before our Lord's birth, Isaiah had put pen to paper and had spoken about the

coming Christ and His death, saying, “He was numbered with the transgressors.” (Isaiah 53:12 and quoted by Luke in 22:37)

Pilate put an inscription over Christ's head. (verse 19) It was intended as a reproach: Uh! This person from Nazareth says He is the King of the Jews. It was a sneer. Nazareth was almost a dirty word in first Century Palestine. “Could any good thing come out of Nazareth?” It was a despised, rough and ready, northern town in Galilee. The accent of Galileans was despised and Nazareth in particular was reckoned to be the worst slum in the land. So Pilate puts up: “Jesus of Nazareth. The King of the Jews.”

This must have been the only time in Roman history, where an inscription over a crucified person carried no mention of a crime. There's no mention of a crime there! As people would have walked past the Cross they would have seen the inscription, which normally was a list of all the crimes that the person had committed and the charges levelled against him on which he had been found guilty. But this inscription simply declares His innocence: Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews. In His dying moments our Lord is actually set forth in His dignity and royal honour.

That was a marvellous providence of God. (verse 20)¹³ Multitudes read this inscription. Golgotha although outside the city wasn't far away. Multitudes! And whoever they are they can all read the inscription, because it's in vernacular Hebrew, Greek and Latin. In all the commonly spoken languages. As He was dying, Jesus Christ was being proclaimed as King. A pledge was being displayed.

Six weeks later, at Pentecost, Peter preached Christ as King. Then also every man discerned it in his own language.

The great triumph of the Gospel today is that in almost every tongue today, there are men and women everywhere praising and worshipping Christ the King of glory! That pledge displayed on the Cross confirmed at Pentecost and realised throughout the ages even to this day.

But (verse 21) these Jewish elders: Chief priests and Scribes – the prosecution – they can't bear the thought that Jesus Christ is announced as King. They nurse their spite and malice right to the last moment. They scorn the thought that Jesus is their King. So they go to Pilate (verse 22) to get the wording changed. But with his answer (perhaps the only time in this sorry incident) he was firm: “*What I have written I have written.*” Pilate refused to change the words and so when our Lord died, He died with that marvellous inscription over Him declaring to the world: not “What He said He was.” But what He was.

This Crucifixion abounds with examples of the great prophecies of the Messianic King being fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ!

¹³ ²⁰ Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek.

The Great King for whom the Jews looked! These prophecies were being fulfilled. He WAS the King of the Jews. He didn't come to bring a political kingdom like they had expected, but a spiritual Kingdom reigning in people's hearts. And He didn't come just to save the physical Jew – because the New Testament tells us that the 'true' Jew is inwardly, the one who worships God in spirit.

Jesus Christ dies as King of the Jews. That's what He is! He is the Great Saviour of God's true Israel. This then the first portrait John gives us: Jesus' true identity recognised.

- Verses 23-25¹⁴. The second portrait: **Jesus' Goods Confiscated**. Four soldiers were employed in the crucifying of our Lord. When they nailed Him to the Cross and had 'lifted Him up' with a system of ropes and pulleys to drop the cross shudderingly into its socket, dug in the earth, those four men would have nothing more to do except to watch the criminals until they died.

They spent the hours gambling. (We know from another Gospel.) Here they divide Christ's clothes, between them. Don't be misled by crucifixes (and associated paintings of the crucifixion) our Lord was naked on the Cross. People were never crucified any other way. That was part of the shame of the punishment.

Nakedness carries shame ever since the 'Garden of Eden'. Our Lord when He was 'made sin for us' bore that shame. They looked and stared at Him, in His nakedness. While He hung there – the Great God – the only thing that these four men recognised as having any value was this pile of clothes. Tremendous spiritual blindness! All they can think about is dividing these clothes up between the four of them. But they come to this lovely woven garment¹⁵. No seams. How will they divide it? Being gamblers they cast lots for it.

Yet another fulfilment of Scripture. This time from Psalm 22:

If read for the first time, knowing the details of the Crucifixion of Christ, and knowing that a 1000 years earlier King David, writing from the point of view of the forth-coming Messiah Himself (as He did in several Psalms – 110 for example) made this prophesy, you would be struck by the infallibility of God's recorded Word: the Scriptures.

Verse 1: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* The very words Christ spoke from the Cross. One of the reasons He cried those words

¹⁴ ²³ *When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic.[a] But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, ²⁴ so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfil the Scripture which says, "They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots."*

So the soldiers did these things,

¹⁵ Translated here as 'tunic'. However in the Greek: *chiton*, a long garment worn under the cloak next to the skin. Alternatively in the NIV it is described as an undergarment. While specially woven in one piece it was not an uncommon item nor was it of any significant value, the significance here is to underline the depth of Christ's humiliation: everything was taken from Him in His supreme self-offering

was to direct out attention to this psalm.

Now consider: Verses 14 – 18¹⁶

verse 14: A graphic description of a crucified person.

Verse 18: There are no other references in the Old Testament to casting lots for clothes!

As the Jews passed that spot and saw the soldiers dividing the garments and casting lots for the indivisible woven garment worn next to the skin, any Jew who knew His Bible should surely have thought of Psalm 22. Not to mention: the piercing of hands and feet; the bones out of joint; and the people staring and gloating. It should have struck them. They should have seen! But nobody saw.

Perhaps there are people right now somewhere in a Church or a few weeks ago at a Good Friday Service, who can't see it. (In the words of 'death' in Horrible Histories, "Let's hope it isn't you!") When our Lord hung there He was the fulfilment of all Bible prophesy. Can't you see the book you have in your hand is a book that is true. That those words written 1000 years before the event could only have been written under an inspiration from God. When you handle this book, with all its records, you are handling Holy Words.

Jesus' Goods Confiscated.

There are still 4 portraits to go. So that next week's lesson will not be too long we will make a start on the next one now.

- Verses 25-27. The third portrait: **Jesus' Mother Cared For.** All the disciples had fled, except John and here at the Cross, standing near the Cross – sometimes moved on, but coming back whenever they can, – is the Apostle John and 4 named women. They identify themselves with this bleeding, shamed King. They can't rescue Him. But they will stand with Him.

What would Mary (the mother) have thought. She would have thought back to the wonderful time when Gabriel announced that she would be 'with child' of the Holy Spirit. The miracle of His birth and the angelic announcement of who He is. The arrival of the shepherds. Eventually the Wise Men. His perfect life in her

¹⁴ *I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;
it is melted within my breast;
¹⁵ my strength is dried up like a potsherd,
(a broken piece of clay)
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.
¹⁶ For dogs encompass me;
a company of evildoers encircles me;
they have pierced my hands and feet[^b]
¹⁷ I can count all my bones—
they stare and gloat over me;
¹⁸ they divide my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots.
b. Psalm 22:16 Some Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, Vulgate, Syriac; most Hebrew manuscripts like a lion [they are at] my hands and feet*

home. The words He had spoken with the miracles He had performed. Hungry fed, dead raised, sight given!

As He bled there her heart bled as well.¹⁷

She doesn't engage in the false wailing of funerals in those places. She stands by the Cross.

Jesus sees her. Even in His agony and shame. No trace of self pity in the Lord. Seeing her He knows that as a widow she is defenceless in that society. He is the responsible eldest son (the others at that point don't believe as she does). So He directs her to look upon John as her son. And for John to look upon (and protect her) as his mother.

The tender care of our Lord in this the most extreme of circumstances.

The tender care of Christ is also there for all believers. It was His tender care that took Him to that Cross to save those God had given Him, before the world began. To save you and to save me.

[2487]

May this be the case for all the saints gathered here today.

17 In particular, she would have remembered that when the Boy was very young, she went to the Temple and as she went in an old man came over and took Jesus in his arms and said: Luke 2: ²⁹“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,

according to your word;

³⁰for my eyes have seen your salvation ... “

Then the old man turned to Mary, say many things, but in particular:³⁴ And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed ³⁵(and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

Delivered Sunday 27th May 2018