

The Gospel of John

John 19:16b-17

9.10.2023



THE JOURNEY
CHURCH

SCRIPTURE:

John 19:16b-27

SERMON NOTES:

God doesn't do things according to conventional wisdom. What I mean by "conventional wisdom" is "the way we think He should do them." This is also true often in marriage. My wife thinks I take the longest routes to get to places (it's not true, I take the route the Lord leads me lol). I think it is unnecessary for her to slam her pretend brakes in the passenger seat when a car pulls out in front of us a mile ahead. We all think we know better ways people ought to do things. But this is certainly true in the case of God's ways of operating in the world.

We have no shortage of opinions on how we think God ought to rule the world. We have views on who ought to be punished, who ought to be blessed. Which nations should thrive, and which should suffer. Who should get the job and who should lose it. We have views on the timing of things, life and death, when the Lord should come, and on. Yet God doesn't tally up our votes when ruling the world.

God's ways often confound our minds. This is why the Lord tells us in Isaiah 55:8, "*My ways are not your ways. My thoughts are not your thoughts.*" He even says the gap between them is as far as the east is from the west. You often hear people comment on folks operating on different levels, and thinking several moves ahead, as "playing chess while everyone else is playing checkers." God's ways often completely counter our expectations. He surprises us, even offends us, with what He determines to do, especially when it runs counter to what makes sense to us. We see these mysterious ways of God in Scripture.

- God builds a nation through a married couple (Abraham and Sarah) in their 90s.
- God spares Jacob's family (Israel) of dying from famine by having Joseph suffer through cruel treatment, false accusations, and prison time. All to position him in a seat of power.
- God tells Jacob not to fear going into Egypt with Joseph, that He will build his family into a great nation. He fulfills that promise and the Israelites come out of Egypt during the

Exodus numbering in the millions. But He built them into a great nation in the context of suffering and slavery.

- God appoints a fish to swallow Jonah to get him to Nineveh, then pardons the city (against the prophet's wishes) when they repent.
- God chooses the runt of the family (David) to be Saul's successor as king.
- God uses foreign nations (Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans) as instruments in His hands to punish Israel.

We could keep listing the unconventional ways God often deploys to accomplish His purposes and fulfill His promises. Perhaps the greatest example of this counter-intuitive, mysterious way in which God operates, is the way in which He redeems sinners and restores the world.

- God becomes a man.
- The innocent One takes on guilt.
- The most powerful One humbles Himself to the weak.
- Dying brings life.
- Resurrection overthrows the grave.
- Those who lose their lives find it.
- Those who confess their guilt are pardoned from it.
- Sinners are made saints.
- Though we die, we never die (dying is gain)

These are the upside down, mysterious ways of God in the work of redemption. We see this mystery unfold in the events of Jesus' crucifixion today.

Exegesis of John 19:16b-27:

Remember last week, in the first 16 verses, we see Pilate has Jesus flogged and dressed as a mock king to humiliate Him. Pilate believes Jesus is without guilt, so he tries to evoke mercy from the Jewish leaders and crowds by turning them against him and his soldiers. It doesn't work. They want Jesus crucified. They declare that Jesus claims to be the Son of God and a King. Pilate is fearful, both at the uproar and problem this is causing, but also that this individual before him is no ordinary man (remember Pilate's wife has a dream about Jesus' righteousness). The crowds prevail with Pilate and he hands Jesus over to be crucified.

VS 16b-17 -- 16b So they took Jesus, 17 and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha.

Jesus was taken out from the sentencing with Pilate. The practice of crucifying people began with the individual carrying the horizontal bar on his back. The condemned individual would bear it on their shoulders to the place of execution where the upright beam would already be fastened in the ground. The victim was then made to lie on their back with their arms stretched out and either tied or nailed to the horizontal beam. The cross-member was then hoisted up, along with the condemned, and fastened to the vertical beam. Once again, the victim's feet were either tied or nailed to the upright. There was often a piece of wood nailed to the upright beam that served as a kind of seat that partially supported the body weight of the one on the cross. This made the process longer and more agonizing because it prolonged death as they used it to try supporting themselves.

Now John records Jesus carried his own cross. The other Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) also note that an individual named Simon of Cyrene that helped Jesus carry the cross because He was too beaten and weak to do so. So why doesn't John mention him? Is this a different story than the other Gospels? No, Jesus undoubtedly carried his cross-beam as far as the gate of the city, but He collapsed under its weight, prompting the soldiers to task Simon of Cyrene to carry it. Simon's role isn't central to the details John is trying to capture in his account.

Some have suspected John was trying to squash a Gnostic heresy promoted about Simon of Cyrene taking Jesus' place and dying on the cross in His stead. By the way, this is what the common view of Muslims is today. This heresy didn't emerge until the 2nd century, which would be after the time of John's Gospel. John likely isn't reacting to that at all. John's Gospel doesn't focus in as much on the sufferings of Christ (as Matthew, Mark, and Luke do), which the detail of Simon of Cyrene communicates, but he puts greater emphasis at each moment on the Father's sovereign plan and the Son's willing obedience.

One additional note, the early church theologians likened Jesus' carrying of His cross to Isaac carrying the wood to the place of sacrifice (seemingly his own). Even some Jewish scholars thought the Isaac episode mirrored crucifixion, saying that Isaac carried the wood, "like one carries his stake (cross) on his shoulder."

Jesus arrives at Golgotha, which is Aramaic for "Place of a Skull." The Latin for skull is "calvaria," which is where we get the word "Calvary." Why is the place called that? It may come from the appearance of the site (show pic). On our Israel trip, we came to one tomb that scholars think Jesus could have been buried. One of their reasons is that it is beside

a mount that looks like a skull. However, most scholars doubt this is the site, and locate this place (Golgotha, Calvary) to where Church of the Holy Sepulcher sits today (just outside the northern wall of the city and not far from the road).

VS 18 -- *There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them.*

They crucified him. Jesus was hung suspended between two others, one on both sides of Him. This is all John does in dealing with the two beside Jesus. He doesn't capture the ridicule from them, or the conversion of the one.

VS 19-22 -- *19 Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." 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. 21 So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" 22 Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."*

Pilate had an inscription placed above Jesus. This was not uncommon at all. It was a standard practice to have a placard or tablet that stated what the condemned was found guilty of. It often hung around their necks or was carried until they were on the cross, then it was nailed above them.

Pilate had Jesus' inscription state: Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. It was written in Aramaic, the language most common in Judea at the time. In Latin, the language of the Roman army. And Greek, the language of the Empire. The reason for the charge in multiple languages was to make sure to publicize the nature of the crime to every segment of the populace.

John has carefully developed the theme of Jesus' kingship in this Gospel. The last two chapters in particular showcase this theme. John highlights elements in the placard above Jesus' head that no other Gospel records. We see the religious leaders petition Pilate to change what the sign said. They didn't want the sign to read as a declaration. They wanted it to read that Jesus said this about Himself. But Pilate refuses. He wrote what He wrote. A few things to understand about what is happening here, because there are levels and layers of meaning. First, the sign declared what Jesus' charge was: sedition. Second, Pilate is absolutely digging at the religious leaders who refused to relent and forced Pilate's hand with threats about him not being a friend of sinners if he didn't deal with Jesus. But their protest shows that the statement rubbed them wrong because of its message. Third, Pilate's jab at the religious leaders was serving God's

purposes. The sign serves to declare Jesus as the King of the Jews to the nations in three languages.

One of the favorite phrases of 2nd century Christians and theologians was the description of Jesus "reigning from the tree." It came from the Greek Septuagint, the Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures, Psalm 96:10, 'Say to the nations, "The LORD reigned from the tree."'

VS 23-24 -- 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. 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 fulfill the Scripture which says, "They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." So the soldiers did these things,

John takes a moment to highlight what is happening at the base of the cross as Jesus is hanging there. His garments are being divided up. This is practical (they wanted dibs on free stuff). But even more so, this is a scramble for souvenirs from the now famous Rabbi of Israel being crucified. These are the garments of the 'King of the Jews'.

This scene also fulfills what was written in the Scriptures in Psalm 22, a Messianic psalm. We read in Psalm 22:16-18:

**16 For dogs encompass me;
a company of evildoers encircles me;
they have pierced my hands and feet—
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.**

John doesn't record Jesus' words "My god, My god, why have you forsaken me," but the others Gospels do. It is not an acknowledgement of abandonment, it is an appeal to Psalm 22. A psalm that begins with suffering (vs 1-2), **"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest."** But it ends in victory. (vs 27-28), **"All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you. For kingship belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations."**

John points us to the Psalm 22 connection but focuses it again on the kingship and victory of Jesus, even as He hangs suspended on a cross. John says, *“that the Scripture might be fulfilled.”* This doesn’t mean the soldiers willingly complied with Scripture, but that God’s mysterious sovereignty operated in such a way that it occurred in this way, in order to fulfill Scripture.

VS 25-27 -- 25 but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” 27 Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

The scene at the base of the cross also includes four ladies. Mary the mother of Jesus. Mary's sister. Mary, wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. Jesus, in agony and minutes from death, bearing the wrath of God for sin, looks at His mother and tends to her needs by calling His disciple John to treat her like a mother. And for His mother to treat John like a son.

The Roman Catholic Church tried to interpret this scene as John coming under the care of Mary and made it symbolic of all disciples of her Son coming under her. This cleared the way of making Mary the mother of the church. The fact that John took her into his home from that point forward favors the view that he was commissioned to look after her, not the opposite.

Jesus demonstrates a love for His mother at an hour of unbelievable devastation for her. He provides for her a son in John. This is a manifestation of the promise Jesus made in Matthew 19:29, “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.” In Christ, Mary is receiving a son, though she is losing one because of His role in redemption.

Consider God's mysterious ways in our passage today.

- The One who could have depended on His divine strength to carry the cross to Calvary gave Himself over to the weakness of the flesh in suffering for sins
- Though a King, He did not seek for His humanity to be seen as one with royalty like Caesar, but with outcasts like two condemned criminals. For those walking by, they would have seen three men hanging on crosses, not realizing that the One in the middle was the King of glory. The Messiah didn't come as a Powerful Ruler, but as Suffering Servant and was numbered with the transgressors (Isaiah 53:12).

- Pilate is simultaneously the person who passes Jesus' death sentence and the first evangelist (even if unintentional) to declare Jesus' kingship to the peoples from all nations gathered for the Passover.
- Mary is losing a son, but because He is the Eternal Son dying to redeem sinners and create a new family, Mary is gaining a spiritual son (and John a spiritual mother).
- Jesus turns an instrument of shame and torture into a throne of glory

God's mysterious ways in this whole scene is never more apparent than the fact that a Righteous man died for the unrighteousness. A righteous man was condemned as a sinful one so that sinners could be counted as righteous ones.

1 Peter 3:18 -- For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit

Here's a mystery today: though you are guilty of sin and have a past or present worthy of the wrath of God, if you recognize Jesus' death for sinners as a death for you, and call upon His name, you can be forgiven and made new.

Maybe your life has been a series of difficult circumstances: absent parent, divorce, physical or sexual abuse, financial stress, physical sickness, anxiety or depression, or addiction.

Romans 8:28 -- And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

God is at work in all things. All things include those struggles, trials, afflictions, and pains. He's in the crosses and losses. The mysterious ways of God cannot be comprehended, but they can be trusted.

William Cowper, "God Moves In A Mysterious Way"

1 God moves in a mysterious way
his wonders to perform;
he plants his footsteps in the sea,
and rides upon the storm.

2 Deep in unfathomable mines
of never-failing skill
he treasures up his bright designs,
and works his sov'reign will.

3 Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
the clouds ye so much dread
are big with mercy, and shall break
in blessings on your head.

4 Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
but trust him for his grace;
behind a frowning providence
he hides a smiling face.

5 His purposes will ripen fast,
unfolding ev'ry hour;
the bud may have a bitter taste,
but sweet will be the flow'r.

6 Blind unbelief is sure to err,
and scan his work in vain;
God is his own interpreter,
and he will make it plain.

Never look on the surface of what is happening in your life or in the world to make determinations about what God is or isn't doing. We see throughout Scripture that His ways are not our ways, nor His thoughts our thoughts. Had you been present to watch Jesus beaten and mocked, struggling to carry His cross, hanging suspended beside two criminals, and breathing His last, you would have been hard pressed to evaluate the situation as the working of God's plan to redeem His people. But in the mysterious working of God's ways, He was bringing forth life from death, beauty from ashes, and salvation from judgment. Jesus' death was for our life.

The scene at the cross reminds us that God is still at work even when things look bleak or dire. He is at work in your life. You are not forgotten or forsaken. Blind unbelief will err and scan His work in vain. But those who walk by faith, and take God at His Word, can remain steadfast because we know God fulfills His Word and promises, even when we

can't see how. We walk by faith, not sight. We trust the God whose ways are not our ways.

REVIEW:

- ❖ Read John 19:16b-27
- ❖ What is significant about Jesus carrying His own cross in verse 17?
- ❖ Why did Pilate have the King of the Jews written on a sign and hung above Jesus?
- ❖ Compare what is happening on the cross to what is happening below it (verses 23-27).

REFLECT:

- ❖ Discuss the unconventionality of how God operates and why you think He does so.
- ❖ What are some unconventional ways that God has worked in your life?

RESPOND:

- ❖ Who do you know that is going through a hard time that you can help take care of or minister to this week?

MEDITATE:

- ❖ John 19:17 -- *and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called the Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha.*

MEMORIZE:

- ❖ Romans 8:28 -- *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*

PRAYER FOCUS:

- ❖ Lead Ministry Assistant - **Becca Depolitte**
- ❖ Ministry - **For the City - Foster & Adoption**
- ❖ **Pray for our long-term families:**
 - The Wilsons
 - The Grays
 - The Starks (departing in October)
- ❖ **Pray for our mid-term sent ones:**
 - Kaesi
- ❖ **Pray for our short-term teams:**
 - Indonesia Team departed 8/31
 - Central Asia Team departs in September
- ❖ **Pray for the lost - Unreached People Group (UPG):** Ucayali-Yurua Asheninka in Brazil
 - **Population in country:** 1,000
 - **Global population:** 10,100

- **Christian Adherent:** 1.00%
- **Evangelical:** 0.30%
- **Primary Religion:** Ethnic Religions
- **Primary Language:** Asheninka, Ucayali-Yurua
- **Summary:** The Ucayali-Yurua Asheninka live a subsistence lifestyle, connected to the land with only enough food for one or two days. They must work hard to produce enough to eat, and their hunters do not find enough meat. To make matters worse, the lands of indigenous peoples are often exploited by loggers and other outsiders.
- **Prayer Focus:** May the few believers grow strong in the Word, resulting in a people movement to Christ. Pray for the Lord to improve their lives physically, economically and spiritually. Pray for the Lord to prepare and raise up Christ followers who will lay down their lives for the Ucayali-Yurua Asheninka people. Pray for the Holy Spirit to prepare their hearts to hear of the savior of all mankind.
- Want to keep up with other Unreached People Groups? Download the Unreached of the Day App
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