

RUF Bible Study – John
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John 19 – Crucifixion

This week I finished an excellent book, *The Unlikely Disciple*, by Kevin Roose. Roose was a student at Brown University. He decided that, instead of taking a semester studying abroad like the rest of his friends, that he would go to an even more distant place. Not distant in miles but in ideology. He transferred to Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia, the college Jerry Fallwell founded in the 1970s.

He immersed himself in student life. When they prayed, he prayed. He did Bible studies. He sang in the choir. He went on a Spring Break cold turkey evangelism trip. He didn't drink, watch R rated movies or touch girls. He learned Old Testament, New Testament and the fundamentalist evangelical hot button agenda items.

Throughout the book, he is extremely kind to this culture, which may be the culture many of you grew up in. He disagrees with much of it, but he's gracious to the whole thing. He really likes the students there. He appreciates the community they have, the sense of purpose they have. He made good friends who seemed normal and fun.

Two parts drive him crazy. The first is the stance and vibe about homosexuality. He didn't like the innuendos, the course jokes, calling guys "faggot" and the suspicion of gayness that hung around the campus.

And he didn't like the scientific discussions for six, twenty-four hour day, young earth (10,000 years old) creation and the ideas resultant from it. He found that ludicrous, and it made the professors and students seem silly to him.

What he doesn't object to is Jesus. At the end of the book, Kevin doesn't convert. I hope that's not much of a spoiler alert. He says he's not sure God really is like they say at Liberty, or that Jesus did exactly what he says he did. He doesn't spend much time grappling with this topic personally, but it doesn't feel like he out and out rejects it. He's okay with Jesus.

It's easy to do – to get wrapped up in everyday life and miss the central issue. To have reasons why Christianity can't be true, shouldn't be true, and to attack the Bible – without really answering the big, big question of Jesus on the cross and his resurrection. If that is true, then we should go back and answer those other questions with a new framework. If it isn't true, then really who cares? Go ahead and hate the Bible all you want. I won't stop you.

What are you thinking about Jesus these days? Have you pushed him off to the side because of the busyness of your life (or your Christian life)? Are you distracted from the central issue by the positions Christians you know hold on social issues or scientific discussions? Are you keeping Jesus away because of something that has happened to you or someone who has hurt you? I understand, really. But I ask you to listen to the message of the text today, to think about this issue and if it's true or not.

So did Jesus really die on the cross? Did this happen? These next two chapters are the big sign that Jesus has been pointing to. We've been hearing about other signs. Here it is. The one. This is also the hour Jesus has been waiting for. The hour has come. The hour of his death is at hand. Let's look at what people say in this chapter, as a way to get into the passion

Others Say Behold the Man!

John 19 starts with: *Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him.* We're at the beginning of trudging painfully toward the cross, showing the ultimate pain and shame of Jesus. In chapter 18, the people had cried out, *Not this man, but Barabbas!* They had wanted Barabbas to be released instead of Jesus. So Barabbas went free. He received amnesty for his crimes. But Jesus stood there to take what was not due to him.

Pilate was not a good man. He had gained his position through shrewd dealing. He had gotten immense power by being the governor of Jerusalem, and by married Augustus Caesar's granddaughter Claudia, who by all accounts was a mean and ruthless woman. Pilate oversaw the carrying out of the sentence of death for this man charged with sedition by the Romans and blasphemy by the Jewish officials.

When they flog him they tear him open. They use a whip that splays at the end, which has bits of bone, rocks and shards embedded in it. These 39 lashes would kill most people. When they're finished the crowd can often see the inner organs of the person, and these actually may start to come out. It's brutal. As they do this, the soldiers make fun of him. They place a crown of thorns on his head to mock him.

Pilate is ready to be done. He presents Jesus back to the crowd, hoping this will be enough punishment. In his

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Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: By Doug Serven, © Doug Serven, 2009, website: www.ouruf.org. For this series, I used commentaries on John from Boice, Skip Ryan, Gary Burge, D.A. Carson, Hughes, Wright, Calvin and Leon Morris and listened to sermons by as many people as I can find, especially Tim Keller, Ricky Jones, Fred Harrell and Scott Sherman. The reader should assume that none of the ideas expressed are original to me.

dealing with Jesus, he has some question marks as to whether or not Jesus should be killed, if he is as dangerous as they say.

So he brings Jesus back out, ready for them to show some mercy, to say, Enough is enough.

Here is Jesus. Beaten. Bruised. Broken. He is presented to the watching world. Behold the man. Look at him.

What is the response to the man? Crucify him! Crucify him!

Kill him! Go for it! No mercy! Finish him!

They want him dead. They hate him and want him punished. They want him gone.

Pilate wants to release Jesus (v. 12) capitulates to their demands. He is afraid of their threats when they start to talk about how they'll turn him if he doesn't kill Jesus. They wield what little influence they have. And Pilate caves to them. Jesus must die. The moment to which the whole narrative has pointed has finally come.

Others Say Behold Your King

What's interesting and ironic here is something we've been saying all along through the book of John. Jesus has been pushing his disciples and all who hear him to consider whether or not he is the Son of God.

If so, then he should be crowned and worshipped.

If not, then he should be stripped and killed.

Crucify him or crown him. That has been the dilemma. He doesn't want people in the middle positions or in other places along the spectrum. He doesn't want people to think, Well he's a great guy and all but I'm not exactly sure about the miracles, and the savior stuff is a little much.

So here in one chapter are these two concepts coming together. He is being crucified. AND he is being crowned. But the crowning is a demeaning, patronizing crowning, isn't it?

Pilate doesn't care if he's called the King of the Jews. So he uses that term to stick it to the Jewish officials. It infuriates them that he would call Jesus by this title. They hate it. But he sticks with it to the end. He even writes a plaque that sits on the top of the cross that says in Aramaic, Latin and Greek – the three languages used by the people in the known land – Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.

So at the very moment they're pushing one end of the dilemma and are killing him, they are also unintentionally pushing the other end by crowning him. Pilate stands by it, and he won't change it.

God's people and their leaders have a king, and they're killing him.

In 19:15, Pilate asks them, "*Shall I crucify your King?*" *The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar."* That should make us shudder.

Others Say Let's Take His Stuff

This is a small part of the text, but I wanted to point it out. They don't say Let's take his stuff, but they say "*Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be.*" That's a bit too cumbersome to make a point out of, so I've reduced it to taking his stuff.

Let's back up a bit. The other gospel narratives fill in the picture more fully than John does. John is in a hurry to get Jesus up and on the cross, but the others paint a fuller story.

Jesus, after having been flogged and beaten, would have been forced to carry his horizontal cross beam to the place of the crucifixion. This would have been quite a ways, winding through the city, so more and more people could see the humiliation of the this man. He would have been near death already. He would have been stripped almost naked. He had a crown of thorns jammed on his head. He would be pushed through the pressing crowd. They would be jeering at him. He had to carry this heavy wooden beam up and down through the streets. In fact, he couldn't do it and had to have help. That's how far gone he was at this point because of what they had done to him.

I'm sure you have heard about crucifixions. They were a common punishment reserved for the worst criminals. The death was brutal.

Jesus arrived at the site outside the city, which would have been a prominent crossroads. This would serve as a warning to people coming and going to the city about what they did with extremely bad people.

People would be milling around to see this gruesome event, much like we see in movies when a crowd would come out to a beheading or a hanging. Only this would be much worse, and it would take much longer.

They would nail Jesus' arms to the beam, right through his wrists so his hands wouldn't tear off. They would place one foot over the other and nail his ankles together to the upright beam. They would have given him a little seat to sit on so he wouldn't be sliding off and so he could prop himself up with his feet onto something.

They would raise the cross high in the air, and the agony would either continue or begin. As if getting your hands and feet nailed weren't enough, it was the effect of gravity on the body that killed you. Because you were pulled down by gravity, your lungs would constrict and you would start suffocating. So you would have to pull your body up – using the force with your legs and wrists – to get a breath. You would do that again and again. The Romans had perfected the art so you found the "perfect balance" between dying and living. This would prolong the experience, giving you the most pain possible for the longest time possible.

If it simply took too long, they would eventually come by and break your legs so you couldn't push up any more –

then you would suffocate and die quickly.

You did not want to die this way. Many have said this is the absolute worst way to die.

While this is happening, the Roman guards (who have surely experienced this many times) gather beneath him to get Jesus' stuff. Jesus wouldn't have had much – sandals, a belt, a tunic, an undergarment. So they gambled for it.

John tells this detail to remind us something – everything is happening according to plan. John writes a short commentary, “*This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, ‘They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.’*” This is from Psalm 22:18.

It's not just this part that is fulfilling the Scripture. It all is. This is not some random event in the universe.

People were crucified all the time. It was a common event. There were famous criminals, prisoners of war and just common everyday killings. So this wasn't anything unusual on the face of it.

But this one was different. John wants you to know this isn't another random crucifixion. This is what the Scriptures have pointed to from all of time. This is fulfilling prophecies from hundreds of years ago. This one is different. Behold the Man! Behold your King! Look at him. Notice! Watch! Pray! The skies go dark. The wind blows. Something is happening here.

What do you think about the cross? Why do you think this happened? Many people think Jesus got caught in an unfortunate circumstance and was the unfortunate victim of political and religious machinery. Yes, he was crucified, but it was no different than the thousands of others performed that year. Except Jesus shouldn't have been because he was really a good guy in the end.

Is that what you think? Do you think this really happened? Can you picture it? Does it matter to you?

Jesus Says Here Is Your Mother

In order to answer that question of importance, let's consider what Jesus said on the cross. If you put together the other gospel accounts, you come up with seven sayings on the cross. John only shares three of them, but we're going to confine ourselves to these three since we're studying John.

The first one comes right after John's comment about the prophecy being fulfilled. Jesus looks down at those gathered around him and sees several women. The women continue to love Jesus, to be faithful to him and there for him when the men again show themselves to be mostly cowardly and absent.

He looks at his mother Mary and also to John (the disciple whom he loved) and basically he puts them together. He tells Mary John will take care of her, and he tells John that Mary is to be like a mother to him. This is one way we know that Joseph, Jesus' father (stepfather actually) has died. He's not around to take care of Mary. Mary's other sons are gone too – we know they rejected Jesus when he was alive and so we can suspect that they also would not be there for Mary since she loves Jesus so much.

Jesus transforms our relationships. He changes our affiliations. We become family to each other. Mary had born Jesus. She had nursed Jesus. She had raised Jesus. Jesus though was no longer really her son – he was her savior. He was dying for her, for her sins. He was being punished for her transgressions.

When Jesus looks out on the cross he doesn't just see you. He doesn't only see me. He doesn't see millions of individuals out there. He sees us. He sees his people. He died for his church, his people, his “us.” Jesus broke the barriers between us and forms us together in love, in family. We are adopted by God as sons and daughters and that means we're now in a family with other adopted sons and daughters.

The person next to you is your family. The Christians in your Bible study are your sisters. The Christians in other campus ministries are your brothers. The Christians in other churches throughout the world are your brothers and sisters – you should care about them. Pray for them. Give money to help them. Spend time to go and visit them.

We are not so individualized in our faith. Our culture pushes us this way. You have your own iPod with your own playlists so you can plug in, stick in your ear buds and get away from everyone else. You can watch your own movie without bothering another soul in the car on the trip. You are bombarded with your own choices. Everything is for you, you you.

Jesus rips that apart. He forces you to be in brotherhood and sisterhood with each other.

John 13:35 says, *A new commandment I give you – love one another. As I have loved you so must love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples – if you love one another.*

John 15:12-13 says, *This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this that someone lay down his life for his friends.*

Are you loving other people? Are you seeing your relationships transformed? Or are you just as irritable, defensive and easily upset-able as you always have been?

Are you taking time to be with others or are you doing your own thing all the time? Do you care about other people? Are you asking questions in their lives? Do you ever rearrange a part of your day so you can minister to and love someone else? Do you ever go to something you wouldn't normally attend because you love someone? Do you have Christian brothers and sisters who know you and are know by you?

I want to see our relationships transformed by the cross, changed by Jesus. That the gospel would radically alter the way we do things. That at the foot of the cross, we would see our true kinship and rejoice.

Jesus Says I Thirst

In the next paragraph we read: *After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), “I thirst.”*

Jesus was up on the cross, and he was about to die. One of the few things he says was “I am thirsty.” Why does he say this?

At first glance, it seems like a natural thing to say. It was hot. This is the Middle East after all. He’s been through hell. He’s dehydrated. He’s lost a ton of blood and fluids. He can barely breathe. Each breath is labored. So he’s thirsty.

But notice that he never complains about anything else along the way. When they cram the crown of thorns on his head, he doesn’t say, “Ow! That hurts.” He doesn’t say a word about the flogging or the carrying of the cross or the nailing of his feet and hands. He says he’s thirsty.

I think he really is thirsty, but he’s says, I thirst because he’s talking about a deeper thirst. Thirst throughout the Bible (the image of hunger is this too) is a word picture for the deepest longings of your life and soul. Thirst pictures deep spiritual emptiness and need.

We talked about thirst before when we looked at John 4 and his discussion with the woman at the well. He discussed her deepest longings in regards to power, sex, security and relationships. You should go back and look at it if you can’t recall it. Jesus says we will never satisfy our thirsts with the things of this world. You can drink and drink – but you’ll never ever get enough.

What makes you thirsty?

If it’s a relationship, then you have to be in one. You cannot be alone. You hate not having a boyfriend or girlfriend and you’ll do anything to have one.

If it’s power, then you’ll try to get positions and get on committees and be “in.” You might have to know everything that’s going on with people, so you gossip about them. You have informational power when you know about them.

If it’s closeness, then you will do anything to feel close to people. You will find yourself in situations doing things you don’t agree with because you cannot handle being and feeling apart from that person. This will often work itself out in physical ways through sex or intense making out, etc.

What are you longing for? What do you feel like you have to have? A marriage? Law school? A 4.0? A great MCAT score? A great job? An awesome wardrobe? An iPhone?

Whatever it is down in there – and we all have something/s – it is what you thirst for.

God is gracious to you when he gives you not what you want but what you need. When we start praying Thy will be done instead of My will be done. “Heaven is a place where man says to God, ‘Thy will be done’ and hell is that place where God says to man, ‘Thy will be done.’ Hell is the place where we get more and more of what we have been seeking to quench our thirst. Hell is the place where we get more than we ever wanted of those things that we are trying to stuff into our souls.”²

What’s interesting here is that Jesus didn’t have things like that. His overwhelming thirst and passion was for the Father, to do God’s will. In that he was always satisfied with loving the Father that way. He never got swayed off course or distracted from his purpose.

So he was satisfied, and yet he was thirsty? Why was that?

He was taking your thirst so you could be filled. He was forsaken so you could be accepted and forgiven. Jesus took the dehydration so you could be hydrated with the spring of water welling up to eternal life. He was burned to a crisp so you could wash in the refreshing water of his love.

Friends, where do you thirst? What are you looking for to fulfill your deepest needs? Look to the cross instead. Look to Jesus and his life and death for you. Look to his thirst so you can drink.

Jesus Says It Is Finished

The last thing we read in John right immediately before Jesus dies is, “*It is finished, and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*”

This is one word in the Greek – tetelestai. It really could better be translated as “It has been accomplished” or “I have finished and accomplished it” or “Let’s finish this!”

This is interesting because what can Jesus finish? What can Jesus do? He can’t scratch himself. He can’t “do” anything, can he? He is the ultimate picture in being defeated, in losing everything he has, at being at the absolute bottom of the heap. What can someone like that do? But here he is saying, “I have done it. It is finished.”

What is Jesus talking about?

Here’s why this is important. Did you watch Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ* movie? It was a huge deal a few years ago. One of its distinguishing features was the detail Gibson put in when he portrayed the crucifixion scene. Many thought it was too graphic and realistic for people to watch. And it truly was gory and gross. But the crucifixion was those things and more. It was a terrible, terrible thing, and to depict it would mean you would have to enter into that realm.

² Ryan, 339

So we watched. Maybe you didn't see the movie, but you have seen something about the cross on some Easter week through a play or a musical or a video or even just reading it.

You cannot understand the gospel by looking at this man dying on a cross. Like we said, there were thousands of men who died on crosses in history. You cannot understand what this is about by watching the Passion of the Christ and seeing Jesus die that way.

You have to see what lies behind it. You have to see why this man died on the cross. You have to listen to what he said and consider why he said it. You have to see how this death of this man fits into the rest of the narrative of the Bible.

So when Jesus says "I thirst" and "It is finished" he is saying something important. When Jesus says "It is finished," he's talking about the gospel. He's talking about the good news. He's talking about redemption and forgiveness for you. I Peter 3:18 says, *Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.*

Hooray for that! When *this* man died on the cross, he was doing it to pay for the sins of others, not for himself. When *this* man died on the cross, he was finishing something for others, not for himself.

We could talk about famous last words.

Author Louisa May Alcott said, "Is it not meningitis?" (1888)

PT Barnum said, "How were the receipts today at Madison Square Garden?" (1891)

Beethoven said, "Friends applaud, the comedy is finished." (1827)

Humphrey Bogart said, "I should have never switched from Scotch to martinis." (1957)

Charles Darwin said, "I am not the least afraid to die." (1882)

Princess Diana said, "My God. What happened?" (1997)

Douglas Fairbanks said, "I've never felt better." (1939)

We could keep going. Perhaps more poignant is Buddha's last words: "Strive without ceasing." This is the picture of natural religion. Keep on trucking. Press on. You are not done. There is more to do.

But Christianity is something different. It's main leader died when he was in the prime of his life. He died an awful death as a criminal on a cross, bleeding and naked. His last words in such a death – It is finished! It is done! It is paid for! I have accomplished it!

Jesus was the Passover Lamb pointed to in the Old Testament. The one who releases the captives from captivity, appeases God's wrath, atones for the people's sins, and makes payment to God for unrighteousness.

He had done it. There is nothing more to do. You cannot add to his work. He didn't say I have almost done it or I have mostly done it. He has done it. He has finished the work set out for him to do.

Some of you are depressed often. You think you are not good enough. You're not a good enough Christian. You're not a good enough person. Don't you see that you are arguing with Jesus' words on the cross? That you're saying, "It's not finished. There is more to do. That wasn't good enough for me. I'm worse than what that pays for." You're wanting to add to Jesus' work because he didn't pay enough for you. Jesus tells you to look not to your unrighteousness, but to the cross where he paid for you.

Others of you are prideful and arrogant. You think you are a good person. You're proud of your morals, your stances, your decisions and your life. Don't you see that you too are arguing with Jesus. You're saying in effect, "It is not finished. I must add to your work. I am the one who finishes the payment, the redemption and it's based on what I'm doing that God accepts me." You're wanting to add to Jesus' work because he didn't pay enough for you, because he didn't have to. You are concentrating on your works for God and not his. Look to the cross, not to your own righteousness, because that is where you'll find humility and the gospel.

Jesus' cry wasn't a cry of desperation, but one of victory. Don't rob him of his victory by saying it wasn't good enough for you.

Tetelestai is something you would write on the bottom of bill – paid for. It's been paid for. Your life has been redeemed by the blood of the lamb, by the blood of Jesus on the cross. The king has come and died for his people. How deep the Father's love for us – how vast beyond all measure. That he should give his only son to make a wretch his treasure. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, his son.

Jesus loved to the very end those whom the Father had given to him. This is the gospel message. This is the focus of the Bible. Jesus. Don't get sidetracked with these other issues. I'm not saying don't talk about them. They are and can be important. But this is the central issue. The main issue. The dominant issue. Answering this question should be the priority. Figuring out Jesus should be your main goal.

I want to go back to Kevin Roose and his book, *The Unlikely Disciple*. People talked to Kevin about Jesus. They would ask his testimony. They would tell him some version of a gospel tract. But I don't think they were really engaging his heart about this. They weren't getting into his life. They were busy doing their own thing, and that's fine. They were trying to live life and get grades and girls, and that happens. Plus, Kevin was acting like he knew and believed this stuff.

Do people see your life being transformed by the cross? Do they see a genuine love in your life? Do they see you pursuing community and loving others? Or do they see you consumed with certain issues, whether they be theological or social or political ones? I pray you will reflect on, meditate on and be changed by the cross, and that that will change others. People

are watching what you say and do. They are listening to you, whether you know it or not. Kevin Roose didn't hate it when they were talking about the Bible or about Jesus. He was listening. He enjoyed prayer. He enjoyed the community and comradery. He even enjoyed the chastity. People are willing to hear about Jesus. Let's have Jesus be ever ready on our lips. His grace. His forgiveness. His thirsty. His payment for our sins. His love for us.

*How deep the Father's love for us,
How vast beyond all measure
That He should give His only Son
To make a wretch His treasure*

*How great the pain of searing loss,
The Father turns His face away
As wounds which mar the chosen One,
Bring many sons to glory*

*Behold the Man upon a cross,
My sin upon His shoulders
Ashamed I hear my mocking voice,
Call out among the scoffers*

*It was my sin that held Him there
Until it was accomplished
His dying breath has brought me life
I know that it is finished*

*I will not boast in anything
No gifts, no power, no wisdom
But I will boast in Jesus Christ
His death and resurrection*

*Why should I gain from His reward?
I cannot give an answer
But this I know with all my heart
His wounds have paid my ransom*