

HEAVEN'S ROUTE TO REDEMPTION

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By the Book™ A Chapter by
Chapter Bible Study Series
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Let's Begin

Most of us know what it's like to drive in an unfamiliar area where the street names sound like words you hear on a French channel. It's pretty intimidating. To make things worse, if you stop and ask someone for directions, you haven't a clue what he said. You just shake your head like you do under-stand, and then you get back in your car even more frustrated. Where do all these roads and streets go? Which one will take you to your destination?

It's really not much different when it comes to both spiritual matters now and eternal destination upon death. There are hundreds of religions and sects which claim to show you the way to Heaven. And, like the streets in a strange place, while they all look pretty good and obviously go somewhere, it's hard to detect if the road you're taking will get you where everyone wants to go when they die—Heaven.

In this study, we are going to consider Heaven's Route to Redemption and the Apostle John will serve as our guide. No mere human knew Jesus Christ more intimately than John. So we can rest assured he will not lead us into a dead-end street. Untold millions have safely followed the route he directs for over 2,000 years!

As we move through chapter 19, let's follow the outline provided:

- I. The Sinlessness of Jesus (vv. 1-6)
- II. The Silence of Jesus (vv. 7-11)
- III. The Scars of Jesus (vv. 12-15)
- IV. The Substitution of Jesus (vv. 16-18)
- V. The Salvation of Jesus (vv. 19-42)

I. The Sinlessness of Jesus (vv. 1-6)

As we noted in our study on chapter 18, Jesus moved from the high priests' quarters to the hall of judgment where Pilate would emerge to consider the matter (18:28). An exchange took place which led to Pilate's doubt that the Jewish leaders had a solid case against Jesus. Pilate explicitly stated, "I find in him no fault at all" (18:38). Not content with such a judgment, the leaders demanded more. Their "more" was death by crucifixion.

The opening scene in this chapter is a continuation of Jesus standing before Pilate in the judgment hall. John continues: "Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him. And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and they put on him a purple robe, And said, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' and they smote him with their hands" (vv. 1-3).

The way Jesus was treated by the very ones sworn to uphold justice astounds us. This scene makes us thankful to God for the justice, law, and order we have in America. But even our beloved nation at times wreaks of corrupt lawmakers and law enforcers. Our hearts fill with rage when we learn of a law officer committing crimes or a politician taking bribes. Anytime justice is trampled, it's a bad note on our keyboard. We innately believe people deserve better.

When this scene opens with Jesus being "scourged," we become a l m o s t speechless b e c a u s e of the sinlessness of the Son of God. We heard Pilate say Jesus was innocent in the last chapter (18:28). Pilate made this same judgment twice again (19:4, 6).

Jesus' sinless Person stands as one of the chief reasons He could be a divine sacrifice which would

Reflection Connection

What are some signs that Jesus' trial was not carried out justly? Be specific.



take away the sin of the world (1:29). Pilate found no fault in Him. Neither did others. Judas conceded, "I have betrayed innocent blood" (Matt. 27:4). Later, the thief who would hang on a cross not far from Christ would say, "This man hath done nothing amiss" (Luke 23:41). Even Pilate's wife could see through the Jewish scheme: "When he [Pilate] was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, 'Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him'" (Matt. 27:19).

We do not need to look long to find fault with other people. Sin is a blotch that indelibly marks out for us what we normally think of as being human. Neither is it difficult for me to find fault with myself. My conscience burns deep within me over the faults so easily detected.

But when it comes to Jesus, I am perfectly inclined to agree with Pilate: I find no fault in Him. No one ever loved me like Jesus loves me. No one ever accepted me like Jesus accepts me. No one ever forgave me like Jesus forgives me. He is without doubt the perfect, sinless Savior.

II. The Silence of Jesus (vv. 7-11)

Let's note next the *silence* of Jesus. It is in His silence that His sinlessness is so amazing. He knew He'd done nothing wrong; He knew He'd neither sinned nor committed a criminal act. Yet, even in the face of such injustice, Jesus remained silent.

When Jesus was before Caiaphas, the high priest remained uninterested in the true facts of the case. Listen to Matthew's account: "And the high priest arose, and said unto him, 'Answerest thou nothing? What is it which these witness against thee?' But Jesus held his peace, And the high priest answered and said unto him, 'I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God'" (Matt. 26:62-63). Jesus would not answer the charges. The Sanhedrin knew the charges were fake. In fact, they arranged for false witnesses to be brought to the trial and testify against Jesus (Matt. 26:59-60). The mockery stuns us.

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Even in the face of such injustice, Jesus kept His silence. Today, men condemn Jesus before they hear Him out. They dismiss the Bible before they read it. The church is written off as a group of fanatics before they've even gotten to know the people. The mock trials still take place.

The silence of Jesus is such a marvelous thing to behold. There is a lesson here for every one of us: Jesus cannot speak to those who will not listen. The real question is, are you willing to listen to what Jesus has to say? Will you open your ears to His message?

Jesus broke silence when Pilate assaulted God's glory. Pilate said, as a moral outrage, "Speakest thou not unto me? Knowest thou not that I have power

Reflection Connection

Do you think Jesus could have made a difference had He spoken up? How do we usually react when we are unjustly treated? Do you think there is a time when you should speak up? Why or why not?



to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?" (v. 10). Not knowing or even caring, Pilate uttered a direct blasphemy against the God of Heaven. Of course, the Jewish leaders stood by in silence. However, this would not go unnoticed by Jesus. While Christ held His silence when personally mocked, He could not sit idly by while evil epitaphs were flung against His Father: "Jesus answered, 'Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin'" (v. 11).

Pilate was no more than a cowardly person, a compromising politician, and a crazed pawn in the Devil's hand. He was powerless to do anything to Jesus. The Father allowed the circumstances; the Father controlled the circumstances; the Father would gain from the circumstances.

III. The Scars of Jesus (vv. 12-15)

Jesus broke His silence before Pilate when the puppet governor presumptuously indicated he had complete control over the situation. Our Lord quickly put Pilate in his place. Pilate might govern a few people, but God definitively governed Pilate.

After hearing Jesus' words, Pilate actually sought Jesus' release from the Jewish leaders: "And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, 'If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar'" (v. 12). Pilate's words were to no avail. The mold had been cast. Like a hungry jackal on the scent of blood, the mob relentlessly cried to Pilate, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend." Being the politically savvy type, Pilate wanted no trouble from the emperor. He brought Jesus before them, sat Him down and said, "Behold your King" (vv. 13-14).

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We must not forget that Jesus had already been scourged (v. 1). Scourging was the severest form of physical punishment at that time, short of death. It was reserved for the lowest type of criminal and forbidden as a punishment for Roman citizens. Sharpened pieces of animal bones and iron were affixed on whips made from long pieces of leather. When the leather connected with the naked skin of the victim's back, pieces of raw human flesh splattered at the whip's crack. The Prophet Isaiah divinely foresaw what took place at Pilate's hands: "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting" (Isa. 50:6). Roman scourging was called "the halfway death." Few remained conscious during this torture and some went absolutely mad. Some even died, though death was not the purpose, only pain.

With a punctured scalp from the thorns (v. 2) and a shredded back from the scourging (v. 1), Pilate stood Jesus before the hysterical crowd as their "King."

Reflection Connection

Without exception, no Gospel writer goes into the details of the physical suffering of Jesus. Most of what we know, we learn from other sources about how crucifixion was carried out in that day. Why do you think the Gospels do not focus on the physical torments Jesus suffered? Explain.



To this came the call for death: “But they cried out, ‘Away with him, away with him, crucify him.’ Pilate saith unto them, ‘Shall I crucify your King?’ The chief priests answered, ‘We have no king but Caesar’” (v. 15).

IV. The Substitution of Jesus (vv. 16-18; 18:39-40)

Substitution bears the definition of “a person or a thing acting or serving in place of another.” We’ve already seen this vividly illustrated. When Pilate offered to observe an established custom of releasing a prisoner for Passover observance, the mob refused: “Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber” (v. 18:40). Barabbas was released to the cheering mob and even the smiling faces of friends. On the other hand, when Jesus was presented, the hostile crowd went mad, shouting “Away with this man!” Thus, Jesus the sinless, silent Son of God was to die in place of a known insurrectionist and murderer.

Reflection Connection

Think of a modern parallel to illustrate the truth of substitution. Be prepared to share it with the group.

The soldiers took Jesus and led Him away: “Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led him away. And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha: Where they crucified him, and two other with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst” (vv. 16-18). As He was staggering toward Calvary, Barabbas was safely headed home. Of all men, Barabbas should have had the best idea of what the Bible means by substitution—*one man dying for another*.

One wonders if Barabbas ever realized that it should have been him carrying the cross, not Jesus. In fact, if he did not, that is positive proof that he was never converted. No Christian is ever absent the stark reality that he is guilty of the worst kind of sin and it is only by Jesus dying in his place that he is saved. Isaiah once again perceives this: “But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (53:5-6).

V. The Salvation of Jesus (vv. 19-42)

The *pathway* to Calvary began. Jesus commenced toward a hill right outside the city gate, carrying his cross (v. 17). What’s not mentioned in John is that because of Jesus’ scourging, His frail body was so drained from physical breakdown, Simon of Cyrene was enlisted by the guards to carry His cross (Matt. 27:32). Most criminals were given weeks to prepare before their sentence was carried out. Not Jesus. He went from His initial garden arrest, to one mock trial after the next until, only hours later, He hung on a bloody cross. The isolation Jesus experienced stuns us as He had to bear the cross alone.

We should keep in mind that the pathway to Calvary had a *purpose*. It was there that “they crucified Him” (v. 18). On that cross, we easily see the *shame*



of sin. Jesus was stripped naked to die in open shame. We also see the *severity* of sin. The cross was the cruelest form of punishment the world has ever known. Devised by the Phoenicians, the cross was chosen specifically because it prolonged death. Jewish culture preferred stoning which was a relatively quick death. Other forms of execution were boiling and burning. However, nothing slowly tortured the pitiful victim like crucifixion.

Note also, the *slavery* of the cross. Jesus was nailed to the instrument of His death. That cross took hold of Jesus and held Him tight. Sin does exactly the same to us.

Thus, just as we behold the *awfulness* of sin, we also learn of the *unchanging justice* of God. God is too holy to look upon sin. Jesus became sin's substitute. Furthermore, God's amazing love beamed from the cross at Calvary. We would never know how much God really loves us if it had not been for Jesus' death on the cross.

Reflection Connection

The shame Jesus experienced on the cross as the on-lookers—including His own mother—stood below is stunning. Have you ever experienced public shame? How? If you are able, using Christian discretion, share your experience with the group.

A quick sound bite is recorded by John of the tender nature of His love: "When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, 'Woman, behold thy son!' Then saith he to the disciple, 'Behold thy mother!' And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home" (vv. 26-27). Not thinking of Himself and the shame, as He hung naked before the jeering crowd, Jesus could not hide the affection He had for both His disciples and His earthly mother.

His love also cost Him physical anguish as His body continued to drain its limited resources: "I thirst" (v. 28). Fulfilling the prophetic Scriptures the leaders themselves had learned as children, Jesus expresses His need for moisture to relieve His parched mouth from being cooked by the red-hot sun. Indeed, out of the seven sayings Jesus uttered from the cross, this was the single one indicative of His physical torment. Yet such is sufficient to signify the horrors of a scorching hell that await all sinners who refuse to place their faith in God's sacrifice for their sin—Jesus hanging on a cross.

Even more, what happened next may answer why Jesus so needed His mouth moistened. It had nothing to do with relief from His anguish *per se*. John writes: "Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is

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finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost." (vv. 29-30). So, Jesus received a single swallow from the sponge. But why? There was a proclamation to be made; an *accomplishment* to acknowledge; and for Jesus to speak it, His mouth and tongue must be moistened. That for which Jesus came and for which He was then dying was complete! "It is finished," Jesus proclaimed!

The most profound words that could ever be uttered about man's separation from God are "It is finished." Through these words, the *atonement* was provided. Jesus paid the price for human sin. *Atonement made, redemption accomplished!*



Reflection Connection

John records that two men were secret disciples of Jesus. What do you think of being a secret disciple today? Do you think there are exceptions? What about the underground church in China? In your discussions, be very sensitive to our missionaries serving in hostile countries.

After Jesus uttered completion of the Eternal God's salvation plan, John records Jesus' dying breath: "...and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost" (v. 30). When Romans crucified a person, normally the body stayed on the cross to rot for days as a reminder to all of the seriousness of breaking the law. However, because the Jewish leaders had a part in Jesus' execution, they had some influence in getting the bodies down.

God had prepared two men in particular to seek the body of Jesus in order to give Him a proper burial—Joseph of Arimathaea, a secret disciple of Jesus (v. 38), and Nicodemus, a Pharisee who came to Jesus at night and probably was also a secret follower (v. 39). Nicodemus's conversation with Jesus is one of the most popular gospel stories told (3:1-20). He came *seeking* Jesus out (3:2). This is a perfect picture of the way God works to save so many people. Nicodemus simply was attracted to Jesus and His message and had to investigate for himself: "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him" (3:2). Jesus instructed Nicodemus in the finer spiritual realities about which he should have known as a leader in Israel but did not (3:10).

Nicodemus walked away from Jesus that night never forgetting his encounter. Nor did he quit *seeking* Jesus. We find him later *searching* the Scriptures concerning the Messiah whom he had met (7:45-53). Here, Nicodemus is openly *serving* the Lord Jesus. Neither Nicodemus nor Joseph are among the secret followers of Christ any longer. How about you? Do you possess an admiration for Jesus or an attraction to Jesus but never have gotten to the point of openly confessing Jesus or serving Jesus?

Joseph successfully begged Pilate for His body (v. 38) and he, along with Nicodemus, took the body of the Lord. They quickly prepared His remains with spices and myrrh (vv. 39-40), and laid Him in Joseph's own tomb (v. 41). *Atonement made, redemption accomplished!* But the story is certainly not over!

Golden Greek Nugget

Jesus cried "It is finished!" (v. 30). The term "*Teleo*" is used and it means to "accomplish," "expire," "finish," or "fulfill." It is the same word used in verse 28 when Jesus referred to all things were now "accomplished." Why? In order that Scripture might be fulfilled. Jesus uttered in final, fixed terms that the eternal salvation scheme that God had planned for sinful man was complete.

Wrap Up

The route to redemption can get long and complicated—especially if you listen to the wrong directions. The Apostle John is a sure guide. He's successfully steered us through who Jesus is and what Jesus did. He has shown us God's greatest picture of love by recording the death of God's Only Son for our sin, which thereby guarantees that whoever trusts in Jesus Christ will never perish for their sin but possess eternal life.

