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November 30th, 2025

**John 19:16b-42**  
**The Cross of Christ**

In the early fourth century, about 300 years after Jesus died, the Christian world erupted into controversy and was almost torn apart over this question: is Jesus fully God *and* fully man? A new view, called Arianism, was becoming popular. A pastor named Arius argued that Jesus was fully God but that he only *appeared* to be human, and therefore, did not truly die, but only *appeared* to die. A pastor named Athanasius, from Alexandria, Egypt, rose up to argue against this false view and defend the Biblical faith: that Jesus is both fully God *and* fully man, and that He had to be fully human *and truly die* in order to save us. He wrote a famous, classic book called “on the incarnation,” arguing that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God who also took flesh as a human, becoming fully man in his birth - in what we call the *incarnation*. The glorious event we celebrate at Christmas, the birth of Christ. Athanasius began this book by saying that the reason why Jesus was born and became fully human is out of love, “for the salvation of us men.”<sup>1</sup> A little later, he writes, “it was our sorry case that caused the Word to come down, our transgression that called out his love for us so that he made haste to help us, to appear among us.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, Christ was born for this very reason: *to save us from our sins*. And how does He do this? By living a perfect, human life that we couldn’t live, and then *dying on the cross for our sins*, in our place. He assumed our human nature in order to *redeem and save* our fallen human nature, by taking our place and paying the penalty we deserve for our sins: death and the wrath of God. What is not assumed cannot be redeemed. And God cannot die. So God became Man, in the person of Christ, to truly live *and truly die* for us, in our place, as one of us. Christ was born to die. The goal of the Incarnation was the Cross. Christmas happened so that Easter could happen.

So it’s fitting that as we begin the season of Advent today that we focus on the Cross of Christ, the goal of the birth of Christ, the center of the Biblical storyline, and the very foundation of our salvation. Here in the passage, John 19:16-42, we see Christ’s crucifixion, death, and burial, showing that He is the true King who selflessly, sacrificially died as a sacrifice to save us if we will repent and believe in Him. We’re going to walk through the passage together, looking

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<sup>1</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation*, Fig Books, 2012, p.9.

<sup>2</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation*, p.12.

at His crucifixion, death, and burial in detail, and then we'll end with a few points of application. But as we walk through this text, I want to go ahead and highlight a few themes that are interwoven throughout the whole passage, and that I think are emphasized here so that we'll see them clearly: 1. First off, that Jesus is the true Passover Lamb who died so that we can be saved by believing in Him; 2. Secondly, Christ is our King and the Cross compels us to serve Him; 3. Thirdly, that Christ has set an example of selfless, sacrificial love here for us to follow; and finally, 4. That every bit of this is in accordance with God's plan, as shown by the constant fulfillment of Scripture. So let's keep those four themes in mind as we walk through the text, and then we'll come back to them in our points of application later.

**Let's walk through the text together (I have an outline on the slide to help us)**

**A. (vv.16b-27) Jesus's crucifixion**

In verses 16-27, Jesus is led to Golgotha, the Place of the Skull, and crucified by Roman soldiers between two criminals - two robbers and insurrectionists, most likely killers. And Jesus bore his own cross, carrying the instrument of his own execution on his back, out of the city, and up the hill to the gallows. We don't expect rich and important people to carry their own luggage; we don't expect a king to carry his own burdens. And yet here is Jesus, the very Son of God and Prince of Heaven, the true King of the world - and he's carrying his cross! That would be like someone carrying their own electric chair on their back. He's literally carrying the burden and shame and guilt and penalty of sin. Yet not his own sin, for He has none; He is sinless, spotless, perfect and righteous. No, he's carrying the burden and penalty and weight of *our* sin, of our guilt and shame, to go and die the death that *we* deserve.

Yet it is precisely in this moment of weakness, humiliating, suffering, shame, and judgment that the glory and Kingship of Christ is made known. As they nailed Jesus's hands and feet to the wood, and hoisted him up off the ground into the air on the cross, Jesus was being lifted up and exalted in *glory*, being pronounced as the King of Kings! And we see this in another masterful piece of irony that, under God's sovereign providence, shows us what's really going on here. We see this in v.19: "Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.'" It was common Roman practice to place a sign listing the charges against a criminal on the cross as he was being executed, to show everyone why he was being killed. Here, Pilate makes clear that Jesus is being executed because He is the King of the Jews. The Jews object in the next two verses, saying, "Do not write, 'King of the Jews,' but

rather, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’ They want Jesus to be branded a false king. Yet Pilate, knowingly implying that Jesus is dying because He is the *true* King of the Jews, replies in v.22, “What I have written, I have written.”

We saw last week how Pilate was convinced that Jesus was innocent; he doesn’t think Jesus has done anything wrong or is trying to start an insurrection or rebellion. He tried to get out of crucifying him, yet gave in because of the pressure of the Jews. Whether Pilate wrote this because he truly believes it, or whether it was just because he wanted to spite and shame his Jewish opponents, the priests, either way, the point is clear: Pilate is speaking the truth, far more truly than he realizes. Jesus really *is* the King, not just of the Jews, but of the whole world, and this is *exactly* why He’s dying and what is being shown in His death, His hour of glorification. Jesus is inaugurating His Kingdom and ascending to His throne through the grave; He is establishing His reign by conquering over Sin, Satan, and Death, crushing them to death through His own death on the cross. Can you imagine a more humble, sacrificial, selfless act for a King?

While Jesus is hanging on the cross, the soldiers, meanwhile, are gambling over his belongings. They divided up his clothes, but there was a seamless tunic He had; rather than split it up, they cast lots to see who would get it. This was a common practice for a Roman execution squad, but John shows us there is much greater significance going on here: we’re seeing the fulfillment of Scripture. In v.24, he quotes Psalm 22:18: “They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.” Psalm 22 is all about the righteous, messianic King suffering unjustly at the hands of wicked men. Here, that is *exactly* what is happening: there is no greater injustice than Jesus, the only perfect, innocent person and truly deserving King ever to live, being brutally mocked, beaten, slandered, and crucified! And yet, this is the fulfillment of Scripture; this is all part of God’s plan to bring about redemption and salvation.

But there aren’t just mocking Pharisees and soldiers here; there’s also a group who knows and loves and supports Jesus, standing with him even at the foot of the cross. In vv.25, we see that Jesus’s Mom, Mary, is there with her sister, and two other Mary’s, women who believe in and supported Jesus’s ministry. And there’s *one* disciple mentioned here, even though the others have fled away: the disciple whom Jesus loved, John the author of this gospel. In v.26, Jesus says, “Woman, behold your son!” Then, in v.27, he said to the disciple, “Behold your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.” This is a remarkable little passage. You can just imagine how heartbreakingly painful and agonizing it had to be for Mary to stand

there, watching her beloved, perfect son being unjustly executed before her very eyes. Yet while Jesus is hanging on the cross and dying, suffering great agony and bearing the weight of the sins of the world and the very wrath of God, even *then*, He is still selfless, not focused on Himself or wallowing in self-pity, but selflessly focused in love on others. Here, He thinks not of his own needs, but of the needs of His mother, Mary. Joseph, His father, most likely had already passed away; Mary's a widow, having been dependent on Jesus as her eldest son; but now he's dying. Yet Jesus loves His mom, He honors His father and mother, for this is right, and so He makes arrangements for her to be cared for, telling His disciple John to care for her as his own mother. See Christ's selfless, sacrificial love on display, even in death! Which is exactly why he died.

### **B. (19:28-37) Jesus's death**

We see this in vv.28-37. In vv.28-29, when Jesus knows that His mission is finished and He's coming to His end, He says, "I thirst," and so they dip a sponge into some sour wine and pass it up to him to wet his lips and sate his thirst a bit. Jesus does this to fulfill scripture again, fulfilling Psalm 69:21: "For my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink." He's also alluding again to Psalm 22: "My tongue sticks to my jaws," or the "roof of my mouth," (Psalm 22:15). Interestingly, the soldiers put the sponge on a hyssop branch to raise it to his mouth. This was not a common practice or anything; I believe we're meant to see it not as just a weird detail or strange coincidence, but continued fulfillment of scripture. In the Passover, when God delivered Israel from slavery out of Egypt, they were told to slaughter a lamb, a sacrifice in their place, and to cover the blood of the lamb over their doorpost; all who were inside the house and covered by the blood were saved from the angel of death: God's judgment passed over them in mercy. And they were to spread the blood using a hyssop branch. I think this is a subtle nod to this, another piece of this scene tying Jesus's cross to the Passover.

After this, Jesus cried out, in v.30, "It is finished," and he bowed his head up and gave up his spirit." This a profound moment. It shows us, yet again, that even in His death, Jesus is not powerless; He is in control here. He dies on His terms, on the Father's timetable. He lays down His own life willingly. When he declares, "It is finished," He is declaring that His mission of salvation and accomplishing redemption for His people as a substitutionary sacrifice in our place is *complete*. Atonement has been secured! The Lamb of God has been slain for the sins of the world, to secure salvation and forgiveness for all who believe in Jesus.

Vv.31-37 make this very clear, where we see that Jesus is dying as the true Passover Lamb and fulfilling scripture. V.31 says that since it was the day of Preparation, the prisoners' bodies needed to be taken down, because they would defile the Sabbath. Now, we need to pause a bit and understand the historical context for what's going on here. The "day of preparation" referred to the day right before the Jewish Sabbath. On the Sabbath, Jews were not allowed to do any work at all, even menial tasks around the home. So on the day before, they needed to take care of everything so they could rest on the Sabbath. The Jewish day began at sundown, not at midnight. That means the Sabbath began Friday evening, when the sun went down, at dinner time. Friday during the day, then, was the Day of Preparation. This was true of every Friday, but *especially* true of a feast Day Sabbath, like on the week of Passover, like this one was making it a high day, a feast day. So here, and back in v.14, when it says "the day of preparation of the passover," it basically means Friday during the week and feast of Passover. Passover began the night before, that Thursday night, and marked the beginning of the Passover feast, the first day of the feast of Unleavened Bread. We see this, for example, in Mark 14:12, where we're explicitly told that the lambs were being slaughtered for the passover on *Thursday* afternoon, and that night, Jesus and His disciples ate the Passover together, transforming it into the Lord's Supper. But this day, Friday during the day, is *still* Passover Day, and the feast will continue that night, on the special Passover Sabbath.<sup>3</sup> This is why the Priests and Pharisees wanted to remain ceremonially clean, and also why they want the bodies off the crosses quickly, to not defile the Sabbath. So to speed up the process, the soldiers broke the legs of the criminals, to speed up their suffocation, which normally took a long time. But when they came to Jesus, he was already dead: He died on his own terms, not theirs. To make sure he was truly dead, they pierced his side with a spear, and water and blood flowed down. John saw and witnessed this, speaking of himself in v.35, so that we can believe with certainty that Jesus really died, and did so as our sacrifice.

Vv.36-37 tell us that these things happened, yet again, out of fulfillment of scripture. The first is Psalm 34:20: "Not one of his bones will be broken." And here's *why* this was important: because part of the requirement for a lamb to be worthy of being slaughtered and served as a Passover Lamb was that it had to be spotless, without blemish, having no diseases *or broken bones*. Jesus was pierced, as other scriptures prophesied he would be, as v.37 tells us, quoting Zech. 12:10. But none of his bones were broken. He was the spotless, blameless, perfectly

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<sup>3</sup> Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, pp.589-590, 603-604, 622.

righteous lamb of God, the substitute for our sins, dying in our place as the true Passover Lamb, so that we can be saved - *if* we believe in Him.

### **C. (vv.38-42) Jesus's burial**

The passage concludes somberly, with Jesus's burial, in vv.38-42. We see a moving picture of two guys who *do* believe in Jesus, responding to the Cross with reverent faith. Strikingly, it's two unlikely guys: Nicodemus, a Pharisee, and Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews. Both of these groups just conspired to put Jesus to death! Yet Nicodemus and Joseph *believed*. They had done so quietly, out of fear. But now they are moved to put their faith into action. They ask for Jesus's body from Pilate, to show Jesus honor, giving him a proper burial and putting him in a tomb - a nice, new one, belonging to Joseph in a garden nearby. This was risky, because they were defying the Jewish leaders *and* because Romans did not allow for criminals executed on charges of sedition and treason to be honored with a burial like this. Yet Pilate agreed. And they served Jesus. Here we see the fulfillment of more scripture, Isa. 53:9, as Jesus is buried in a rich man's tomb. Just as the passage closes with the call to believe and the example of two men responding in faith, so we must ask: how do we respond to this passage in faith and apply it to our own lives today? First...

#### **I. The Cross demands that we believe in Jesus as the true Passover Lamb who sacrificially died to take away our sins**

This is overwhelming the main point of this passage and the most important point: we must see and believe that Jesus died in our place, as a sacrifice for our sins, so that we can be forgiven and saved by repenting and believing in Him, trusting in Christ's perfect, life, death, and resurrection for our salvation! Jesus is the lamb of God, the true Passover Lamb. Just as the Lamb was sacrificed so that all who were covered by the blood of the lamb were saved from the wrath of God and death in Egypt, and then freed from slavery to head into the promised land, so Jesus is our true and greater Passover Lamb, the fulfillment of what the Passover was always meant to represent! Jesus lived a perfectly righteous life, as our spotless lamb of God. He took our place on the cross, bearing the burden, guilt and shame of our sin, being cursed and stricken in our place, bearing the penalty of death that each of us deserve, even the very wrath and judgment of God! We have all sinned against God, we are sinners and rebels, and deserve death and Hell, and will one day all stand before the judgment seat of God. Yet Christ died as a sacrifice in our place! He laid down His life so that we can live! He paid the penalty so we can

be forgiven! He died and rose again to free us from sin and death and bring us to the Promised Land of eternal life in glory with Him, in His perfect Kingdom and paradise!

Just like the Israelites of old had to heed the warning of God's Word and show that they believed by spreading the blood of the lamb over the doorpost of their house to be saved, so we must be covered by the blood of Jesus by believing He is the only sacrifice we need! We must confess our sins, repent, and believe! We must acknowledge that we are sinners deserving judgment and then turn in faith to the cross! We must look up and see Christ hanging there in our place, trusting and believing that He has indeed died *for us*, that our own sins were the cause for the price of His life being paid, and that the Father accepts Christ's sacrifice in place of all who trust and believe in Jesus! We must trust in the water and the blood, which from His wounded side did flow, to be of sin our double cure, save from wrath and make us whole!

We can have faith and trust in Him to save us because what He said is true: It is *finished*. He has done *everything necessary* for our salvation! There's nothing left for us to do other than trust and rest in His glorious, gracious sacrifice in our place. "The righteous life has been lived. The greeted demonstration of humility of humility and love has been accomplished. Exact obedience to every righteous requirement of the Father has been maintained. The full measure of the Father's wrath has been poured out. The cup has been drained to the dregs. The penalty for sin has been paid. The substitute has taken the place of his people. Atonement has been made for every one of their innumerable transgressions. The stains have been made clean, the Father's wrath propitiated, the laws demand fulfilled, the pains of the people taken, guilt forgiven, old made new, salvation accomplished, love demonstrated, truth upheld, mercy lavish, brokenness healed, evil unplugged, Satan defeated, the promise of life made. It is finished."<sup>4</sup>

If you are covered by the blood of Christ by trusting and believing in Him alone, then this is true of you, brothers and sisters! And if you're not a Christian, this is how you become one: realize that you're a sinner, confess that you deserve death, but that you believe Jesus died *in your place*, bearing your sins and the punishment from God that you deserve! Trust in Christ's sacrifice in your place; trust that His blood is sufficient to wash away all your sins so that you can be forgiven and saved! Cry out to God to forgive you, accepting Christ's sacrifice in your place, and you, too, will be covered by the blood of the Lamb and saved!

## **II. The Cross compels us to serve and obey Jesus as our glorious King**

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<sup>4</sup> James Hamilton, Jr., *John*, ESV Expository Commentary, p.286.

As we see Jesus dying on the Cross, we are seeing Jesus exalted in glory as our King, through the most unlikely of circumstances. He ascends His throne and establishes His victory through death, crushing our enemies of Sin, Satan and Death through His own death, so that we can live and be part of His Kingdom! This should capture our hearts in awe, wonder, and gratitude. It should make us hate our sin as we that it was our sin that drove the bitter nails through his hands and feet. It should move us to repent. It should move and compel us to see and believe that Christ alone is King, and move and compel us to love, worship, and obey Him all the more. We should be moved by the cross to worship and glorify Christ, to honor, serve, and obey Him with our *whole lives*. After all, He is our King! The perfect King, who humbly put us before Himself and gave up His own life for us, that we may live! The only proper response to this is that we live *for Him*, for His sake and glory, not our own. So how do we honor, glorify, serve, and obey our King? By following in His example. Which brings us to point 3...

### **III. The Cross sets the example for how we are to follow Christ: in selfless, sacrificial love**

Christ sets the ultimate example for how we are to live as His people right here in His death on the cross. Over and over again throughout this passage, we saw His sacrificial, selfless love. And so we are called to pick up our cross and follow Jesus; to die to self, to set aside our own desires, and live out of selfless love for others, putting others first just like Jesus did. We are to love one another and wash one another's feet; to lay down our lives for each others' sake, like Christ did for us. The cross is our example, our standard, for what Christian love looks like.

We know this is the right response because the New Testament is absolutely *full* of commands that are rooted in the example of Christ. Over and over again, we are commanded to obey and be like Christ *because of His selfless example of sacrificial love in dying for us*. For example, what does it look like to be a godly husband? It looks like sacrificially loving your wife even as Christ loved His people so much that He died for us (Eph. 5). How are we to endure hardships, temptations, and suffering as Christians? The same way that Christ did, being obedient unto death, resisting sin even to the point of shedding blood, enduring for the joy set before us, like Christ did on the cross (Heb. 12). What does it look like to love fellow Christians? Like humbly putting one another before our own interests, like Christ did in coming down to die for us (Phil. 2).

This passage shows us just how sacrificially loving and selfless Christ was, even in His worst moment. Look back again at Jesus loving His mom and putting her first even in His agonizing death. It also shows us how Jesus's death on the Cross establishes a new family: the family of believers, His Church. Here, as Jesus is dying for His disciples in our place, He asks one of His disciples to step into his place in his family, caring for his mother as his own. This should make us think of Jesus's teachings about how those who believe in Him and do His will are His family members: His mothers and sisters and brothers. Or how He taught in Matt. 19:29 that whoever loses parents or siblings or children for Christ's sake will gain a hundredfold by joining the family of God! As Mary loses a son in the death of Christ, she gains a son - and many more to come, just as John gains a mother.

Maybe following and obeying Jesus has cost you relationships, even with your own family. Maybe you've had to make some decisions since becoming a believer that have put you at odds with family members, strained your relationship with them, or has even made it where you aren't able to be around them physically anymore. That is such a hard, and painful thing, and it can feel so lonely. But you aren't alone. God loves you so much that when He calls you to Himself, He also calls you to a new family: to His Church. He has given you a new family, a new home! Have you lost a brother or sister, a mother or father, a son or daughter, or grandchild, for the sake of Christ? Be encouraged: God has given you a hundredfold in Himself.

Look around the room at your fellow Christians: Behold your mothers and fathers in Christ! Behold your sons and daughters in Christ! Behold your brothers and sisters! We are a *real family* because the Cross of Christ has bound us together in a new life, a new family, with bonds that go far deeper and will last far longer than natural family relations. The waters of baptism are thicker than blood. So let us selflessly, sacrificially serve and love one another as Christ's own family, following the example of Christ.

And let us sacrificially, selflessly love and serve non-believers and even our enemies, loving and praying for them, forgiving them, and sharing the gospel with them, in the hopes that they, too, might be saved. But following the selfless, sacrificial example of Christ is hard; it will be costly and difficult at times. But thankfully, the cross gives us an incredible, profound message of hope in such times, bringing us to our final point...

#### **IV. The Cross shows that God is sovereignly working out His plans of redemption, even through the most tragic, wicked injustice ever committed**

We see over and over again in the passage the Jesus died on the Cross in fulfillment of the Scriptures. It shows us that not just Christ's death, but even the small seemingly menial details were significant, fulfilling scripture. And the point is to show us God's sovereignty over the whole process, to see God's providence meticulously at work in every single detail, even over the wicked injustices of men. To bring about His good purposes of redemption. The death of Christ was the plan of God, and every single part of it was meticulously, sovereignly orchestrated by God in fulfillment of ancient prophecy, showing us that this was God's plan of redemption, and even God's enemies were unwittingly carrying out God's purposes of salvation. We should take great encouragement in this: nothing can stop God's sovereign grace and providential plans of redemption. God rules over all, is working all things together for the good and salvation of His people, and even the worst sins and tragedies, even the greatest sorrow and acts of rebellion from His enemies, even the death of His people and even the death of His precious Son, are all part of His good and glorious plan, which cannot be thwarted. The best efforts of the wicked to thwart the plans of God only bring them about.

And if that was all true in the *worst imaginable* moment of injustice, tragedy, and suffering - the death of the innocent Son of God, Jesus Christ - then we can trust that He is sovereign over the sins and sorrows and sufferings of our lives, too. God is sovereign even over the worst moments of our lives, using them to bring about unimaginable good. The Cross reminds us that we can know and trust that this is true today, in our lives, because it was true in the death of Christ, who died in our place. So when you question why your life is so hard when you're trying to do the right thing; if you're wondering why God is letting bad things happen to you, and if He is mad at you or loves you at all, look to the Cross and be encouraged: He gave His own Son to save you from your sins! That's how much He loves you! Look at how much He endured for you! He is treating you like His Son, inviting you to take part in the sufferings of Christ *for your good*. You can trust Him with your life because He gave His life for you.

So let us come and declare our faith in Christ, our Passover Lamb, through taking the Lord's Supper. If you're a baptized believer in good standing with a gospel believing church, we invite you to come to the Table with us in just a moment. If that doesn't describe you, we invite you instead to believe in Christ and follow Him. If you have any questions about that, we would love to speak with you after the service. Until then, let's have a moment of silence as we prepare to come to the Table.