

Connecting Minds

"These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31)

The Gospel of John

Chapter 19:17-22

"And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called The Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha, where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, one of either side, and Jesus in the center. Now Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross. And the writing was: Jesus of Nazareth, The King of the Jews. Then many of the Jews read this title for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Greek and Latin. Therefore, the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, 'Do not write, "The King of the Jews" but, "He said, I am the King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, 'What I have written, I have written.'"

"And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called the place of a Skull..." None of the gospel writers describe the actual crucifixion. John simply states "They crucified Him..." Needless to say, crucifixion was not a pleasant way to die. Bruce Milne tells us that crucifixion was "invented by the Persians, developed by the Carthaginians [and] perfected by the Romans. Josephus refers to it as 'the most wretched of deaths'. Cicero called it 'a most cruel and terrible penalty... incapable of description by any word, for there is none fit to describe it.' "¹

"Where they crucified Him, and two others with Him..." John does not go into detail about these other 2 men who were crucified with Jesus that day. But he does note them and he also notes that Jesus was in the center. Though these three were all dying the same horrible death there is a huge difference between them. The two on either side of Jesus were dying for their own sin - possibly they were co-members of the same crime as Barabbas. Jesus is dying for the sin of His people, for no sin was in Him by nature.

"Now Pilate had wrote a title and put it on the cross..." The point of this title was to tell all who witnessed the death what the crime of the criminal was. But there are some unique things about this title. First, though it was a crime in

¹ The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of John, Bruce Milne, pg. 277.

Roman law, the "crime" that is written above Jesus was in fact the truth - Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. The Puritan John Flavel writes "The end of it [the title] was to clear the equity of their proceedings, and show the people how justly they suffered those punishments inflicted on them for such crimes. But lo, here is a title expressing no crime at all, and so vindicating Christ's innocence."²

Second, not only is this a title of vindication, but it is also a title of declaration. We could say Pilate was unwittingly doing evangelism. It was written in three languages. God not only vindicated the righteousness of His Son, but also declared it to the world. Christ is a King and the world read of it.

Third, it is a title that is unchangeable. Pilate has now grown some backbone to stand up to the religious leaders. He will not remove the title. Flavel writes again, "He that was His judge, shall be His herald... When all the disciples had forsaken Him, and were fled... Then doth the providence of God as strangely, as powerfully, overrule the heart and pen of Pilate, to draw this title for Him, and affix it to His cross."³

But Pilate certainly did not intend the title to be honouring to Jesus. His intent was to ridicule the Jewish leaders - "Is this your King, dying on a cross?" And it worked for they came to him enraged at the title. However, Pilate says to them, "What I have written, I have written..." Pilate is resolute in his declaration, he is unwavering. When the enemies of Christ demand that we change our position about who Jesus is, we need to remain firm and unchanging. Let us not have a pagan ruler to be a witness against us at the judgment for standing firm.

There is one last thing to look at, and that is the invisible title that was affixed above Christ's head on that cross. For the title that Pilate gave Him was a title of honour. But Jesus did carry sin to that cross that would be punished. Paul says in Colossians 2:13,14 that our sins are nailed to the cross and that is the crime for which Christ is punished.

TableTalk

Read Deuteronomy 21:22,23 and Galatians 3:13. What is the significance of Jesus being crucified?

²The Works of John Flavel, vol. 1, John Flavel, pg. 334

³Flavel, pg. 334