

The Bible can be an intimidating book, can't it? If you're honest, the Bible can seem to be a sometimes inspiring but often obscure anthology of random literature—some odd laws, lots of unusual stories, many inspiring characters, a few handy proverbs, some interesting songs, along with a bunch of amazing promises. What ties it all together?

OT scholar Bruce Waltke has compared the Bible to the Rainbow Bridge, which spans the Niagara River below the famous Falls. The Rainbow Bridge actually began its existence as a kite string. In 1847 the State of NY and the nation of Canada agreed on a joint effort to erect a bridge across below the Falls. Their first challenge was to establish a link from one bank to the other—the rocky bluffs, 800' width of the river, and swift current made it impossible to work from inside the gorge. So those building the bridge held a contest with a \$5 prize to see who could fly a kite across the river and land it on the other side of the gorge, linking the two sides with a thin string. Using the string, its builders carefully pulled thicker strings, then ropes, then cables, and eventually steel girders across the gorge. Over the years, one bridge replaced another until today's Rainbow Bridge was opened in 1941. ***The more the bridge changed, the more it became what it was always meant to be.*** Waltke concludes: "The kite string represents, you might say, Genesis' description of salvation, while the rest of Scripture represents the developing bridge—first strings, then ropes, then steel girders."

The Bible isn't a disjointed collection of diverse religious literature. No, the Bible tells one unified Story—the story of redemption. One plot: the gospel. One problem: sin. One solution: the resurrection. One hero: Jesus. In Genesis 3:15, the kite lands and one tiny string connects the two sides. Soon, ropes. Then girders. And in today's text, the finished bridge itself comes into view. This is what the whole Bible is all about.

***This text IS the gospel!*** It is an eyewitness account of the death and burial of Jesus of Nazareth. It is the central story of the Scriptures, the heart of Christian theology, and the focus of our church. ***We are a church that believes we need the gospel every day, and here it is.*** God has done something for us that we could never do for ourselves. We are

hopelessly eternally lost, but God has provided a rescue. This is how.

The chapter begins with Jesus in the custody of Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea. Pilate has no particular concern with Jesus. The only charge he's heard is that Jesus claims to be the "King of the Jews"—a matter he examines Jesus about (18:33-37) and then proclaims His innocence (v38). But the Jews are insistent. They absolutely want Jesus dead, preferring the convict Barabbas over the healer and teacher Jesus (vv39-40). Pilate, caught between upholding justice and quieting the mob, tries an intermediate solution:

**19:1** *Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him.*

Pilate's order would have been carried out by soldiers, who are amused to have a so-called "king" in their custody:

**vv2-3** *The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. <sup>3</sup> They came up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and struck him with their hands.*

Wanton abuse. No cause for it other than their own cruelty. Pilate has a slightly more respectable motive: he's hoping to placate the crowd so they'll be satisfied and he can let Jesus go.

**vv4-5** *Pilate went out again and said to them, "See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him." <sup>5</sup> So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold the man!"*

It's a pitiful moment. Pilate is trying to evoke sympathy. Jesus stands there, bloody from the flogging, wearing the mocking array from the soldiers. Yet even still, the crowd will not be satisfied with anything less than this Man's death:

**v6** *When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him."*

Pilate is becoming impatient. This is the third time he has affirmed Jesus' innocence. The problem is, the Jews cannot put Jesus to death themselves because the Romans removed their authority for capital punishment. He's obviously wondering, "Why is this crowd so insistent on killing this man over his claim to be their king?" But then the Jews bring a second charge, and this one stops him in his tracks:

**vv7-9** *The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God." <sup>8</sup> When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid. <sup>9</sup> He entered his*

headquarters again and said to Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer.

This new accusation unnerves Pilate, and He questions Jesus about it. It wasn't beyond belief in the Roman mindset for one of the gods to take on human form and visit this planet. His question, "Where are you from?" is seeking more than Jesus' hometown; but Jesus doesn't answer because the truth would never fit any of Pilate's paradigms.

His silence frustrates Pilate:

<sup>10</sup> So Pilate said to him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" <sup>11</sup> Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin."

As is so common in John's gospel, Jesus responds to a mundane question with a profound spiritual truth, but His audience lacks the spiritual insight to comprehend it. Pilate assumes Jesus is referring to the higher authority of Caesar. Jesus is actually referring to God's authority to raise up and to put down rulers.

Pilate is in a difficult position, and Jesus knows it. The Roman Empire expected regional rulers like Pilate to keep the peace. So Jesus says "He who delivered me over to you [i.e., the High Priest] has the greater sin." It's a revealing exchange particularly because of what is NOT said. If Jesus had wanted to be released, surely this would have been the time to appeal to Pilate. But He responds only with a statement of absolute resignation to His Father's will: "This has been given you from above."

Things go downhill quickly for Jesus from this point:

**v12** From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar." <sup>13</sup>

The Jews cleverly bring up the conflict between Jesus' claim and Caesar: there can be only one king! This last statement finally convinces Pilate. Jewish delegations had been known to travel to Rome to complain about the work of their Roman governor, putting whole political careers in danger. Pilate is powerless, and his resolve breaks.

**vv13-14** So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha. <sup>14</sup> Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It

was about the sixth hour.

The "day of Preparation of the Passover" (cf. vv31,42) was Friday. "Passover" was both a meal and a weeklong feast. They had already observed the meal the night before, so this reference is to the weeklong festival of Passover. "The Day of Preparation" refers to preparation for the Jewish Sabbath day of rest (Mt 27:62, Mk 15:42, Lk 23:54, Jn 19:31). So, the "Day of Preparation of the Passover" means "the Day of [Sabbath] Preparation [which fell during] the Passover [Feast]."

The sixth hour would have been about noon. Pilate mocks the Jews:

He said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" <sup>15</sup> They cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." <sup>16</sup> So he delivered him over to them to be crucified.

The Jews hated being under Roman rule, yet they are so opposed to Jesus they'd rather claim Caesar than Him. Yet they aren't just rejecting Jesus; they are self-consciously rejecting God Himself. Jewish law made very clear that Yahweh was Israel's only king (1 Sam 8:7, 10:19) and that any human king over the nation was there only by God's appointment. Their statement rejects all of this, and it confirms Jesus' earlier statement: "He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him" (5:23).

**vv16-17** So they took Jesus, <sup>17</sup> and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called the place of a skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha.

The "cross" Jesus would have carried was just the horizontal beam; the vertical post remained in the ground. John spares us the violent details of the actual crucifixion itself, stating the fact in four words:

**vv18-22** There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. <sup>19</sup> Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> 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.'" <sup>22</sup> Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

The inscription would have hung around Jesus' neck as He walked from Pilate's hall to the cross, per the custom for condemned criminals to display their crimes. Pilate's dialogue with the Jews shows he meant the label as a way of mocking them, but we know he spoke better than he

realized. It this tri-lingual sign, he has placed Jesus' kingship on public display in a way that all the world could read.

**vv23-24** *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, <sup>24</sup> 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."*

We might read this detail and see only the callousness of the soldiers – gambling for Jesus' clothes. John sees fulfillment of Scripture (Ps 22:18). He also sees a contrast between these unfeeling soldiers and the tenderness of Jesus:

**vv24-27** *So the soldiers did these things, <sup>25</sup> but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. <sup>26</sup> When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" <sup>27</sup> Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.*

In spite of His pain and humiliation, is still focused on others.

**vv28-29** *After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." <sup>29</sup> A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth.*

Dehydration was an effect of crucifixion, but John wants us to see more here than physical thirst. **Bearing sin has made the Well of Living Water run dry.** John sees a connection to Psalm 69:21: "for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink."

**v30** *When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*

With His last breath, Jesus declares NOT that He was a victim but that He is the Victor. He's finished what He came to do.

John uses a particularly unusual word here for "gave up." Literally, it's better rendered "handed over" (cf. v11 "given you from above," v16 Pilate "delivered him over to be crucified"). Nowhere else in Greek literature is this word used of someone's death. Perhaps it's simply a reference to Jesus' absolute control even up to the moment of His death, finally surrendering His spirit to the Father. Matthew (27:50) and Luke (23:46) both make that point, but with a different verb. Could this

be another case of John's intentional double meaning, conveying something more than just Jesus surrendering His spirit in death?

Next, John records an important detail not mentioned in the other gospels, a detail he emphasized he knows for certain because he was there to witness it himself:

*Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away. <sup>32</sup> So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. <sup>33</sup> But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. <sup>34</sup> But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. <sup>35</sup> He who saw it has borne witness- his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth- that you also may believe. <sup>36</sup> For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken." <sup>37</sup> And again another Scripture says, "They will look on him whom they have pierced."*

Two more Scriptures fulfilled: unbroken bones (Ps 34:20, cf. Ex 12:46, Num 9:12) and a pierced side (Zech 12:10). Significant effort has gone in to explaining the medical causes for "blood and water" coming from Jesus' side, demonstrating that John's claim is certainly true. Certainly, John took it as proof positive that the spear through Jesus' heart meant He was really and truly dead.

And then He was buried:

**vv38-42** *After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body. <sup>39</sup> Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. <sup>40</sup> So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. <sup>41</sup> Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. <sup>42</sup> So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.*

John makes much in this gospel of faith that begins well but fails to persevere. Here, he shows an example of the opposite: two previously secret disciples – Joseph and Nicodemus, whose faith in Christ has grown to the point where they are willing to risk all by publicly identifying with Jesus to ensure that He has a proper burial.

Those are the facts of the matter, the bare details. But what do they mean? What is all this for? This is John's unique description of Jesus' death, and we shouldn't just harmonize it with what we know from the other gospels. John includes no mocking crowds, no Simon of Cyrene, no cry "My God, my God, why?" He gives us different prophecies, different words, different details like the Jews' annoyance over what Pilate put on Jesus' sign, the tender transfer of His mother Mary to John's care, Jesus' unbroken legs, and the soldier's trust of the spear. What does he want us to see?

### Jesus as King

John claimed in the prologue that "the light shines in darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (1:5). This chapter looks very much like the darkness is overcoming the light; yet John includes certain clues to help readers anticipate the triumph of chapter 20.

- the inscription above the cross – not merely king of Israel but the world, written in all the major languages of the Med World
- fulfilled Scripture – vv24 (garments), 28 (thirst), 36 (bones), 37 (piercing). These are not the final acts of a dying man – John sees them all as fulfilling Scripture. Nothing in this story was left to chance. As Scotty Smith writes (*Gospel Transformation Bible*), "Jesus is not only the main character in this drama...; He is also its writer, director, and producer."
- "It is finished" = Jesus is accomplishing all He intends. He is not a victim but a servant, fulfilling His Father's will
- king's burial (costly tomb, vast amount of spices, buried in a garden)

Jesus is King despite what His enemies are doing to Him, despite their failure to recognize Him. For Pilate and the Jews, this is an hour of darkness, the worst moments of their lives; for Jesus, this is the hour of His glory. He is not a victim being led to the slaughter; He is a king, taking His throne. Yes, this is a story of tragedy, but not Jesus' tragedy. The only tragedy here is the futility of self-protective people too blinded by their own interests to see the King of kings in their midst.

God will accomplish His purposes!! Whenever your circumstances tempt you to say, "This could not possibly end well," look to the cross.

### Sacrificial Lamb

From the beginning of this gospel, John casts Jesus as the atonement for sins: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."

- carrying cross – since the early centuries of Christianity, interpreters have seen a hint of Isaac, Abraham's only son, carrying the wood for his sacrifice up the mountain. "God Himself will provide the lamb" (Gen 22:8) → basis for future lamb sacrifice as a substitute
- hyssop branch (v29)
- flow of blood – a requirement for Passover, to demonstrate this animal died right here (not previously dead), acceptable sacrifice
- unbroken legs

The blood of the Passover Lamb saved Israel from certain death and led to freedom from captivity; so too Jesus' blood brings protection and freedom. Salvation and eternal life depend on Jesus' death, not merely His teaching.

"It is finished" What is "it"? Everything necessary for salvation. **The bridge is in place**, never to be moved, never improved upon. Your sins are atoned. real reconciliation. peace with God. Forgiveness, adoption, life, inheritance. No part left for you to fulfill. Nothing to add.

### Jesus and the Spirit

John links the cross and the coming of the Spirit

- Jesus doesn't "give up" His spirit as much as He "hands over" the Spirit (same word as v
- water and blood from His side – "born of water, even the Spirit" Jn 3, rivers of living water = the Spirit Jn 7

Jesus' death is not only a sacrifice for sins; it is the dawning of a new age, an age of life and renewal, the age of the Spirit. The irony of His thirst: all thirst of this age, every lack, every hurt, every need, every loss supplied in the death of Jesus.

Jesus is, if you will, like a ceramic piggy bank, filled with all the riches and abundance of God, not available until the bank is shattered. His

death brings transformation and renewal—life, not merely freedom from judgment

The cross of Christ is the great sign of John's gospel. Every other sign in the book points forward to this event, the hour for which Jesus has come. This is the greatest sign of all, the only sign that truly and permanently accomplished what all the other signs portrayed.

- age of new wine, celebration of life with God
- crowds were hungry again, but now Jesus gives His life as heavenly bread, consumed by all who will feed on Him by faith
- Lazarus remained mortal, but now Jesus brings true resurrection and life

Every other sign in this gospel is a shadow, pointing to the reality of this. This sign achieved a work which would never need to be repeated.

Pilate sensed something bigger was going on, but he lacked the courage to believe. Will you?

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