



BIBLICAL RESOURCES

John 18:1-19:42 (John 19:17-42)

“It is finished.” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

John 19:17 Carrying the cross by himself, Jesus went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. 18 There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. 19 Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” 20 Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. 21 Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’” 22 Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.” 23 When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. 24 So they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.” This was to fulfil what the scripture says, “They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.” 25 And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.” 27 Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

John 19:28 After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture), “I am thirsty.” 29 A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. 30 When Jesus had received the wine, he said, “It is finished.” Then he bowed his head and



gave up his spirit.

John 19:31 Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. 32 Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. 33 But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. 34 Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. 35 (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) 36 These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, “None of his bones shall be broken.” 37 And again another passage of scripture says, “They will look on the one whom they have pierced.”

John 19:38 After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear

Thought for the day

At the centre of our faith stand “the great events that give us new life in Christ.” *How* these events have been understood has naturally changed over time, depending on experience, culture and the questions being asked at any particular time. Traditionally, redemption (lit. buying back) was completed once Jesus had died. The Fourth Gospel is very helpful in this regard because it does not separate the death from the resurrection. John’s uses a single expression to convey the one integrated saving event: the lifting up. At its heart, this is a therapeutic metaphor taken from the story of Moses and the bronze serpent.

Prayer

Saving God, we are all in need of your healing in Christ. Send us again your gifts of forgiveness, victory over death and freedom from fear. Amen.

of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. 39 Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. 40 They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. 41 Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. 42 And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

All the accounts of Jesus’ death tell fundamentally the same story. However, the details vary considerably and are highly significant. It is not just a question of what people remembered. The added stories and words consistently reflect the understanding each Gospel writer offers of the meaning of the cross and resurrection. The primary frame in this Gospel is new creation.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

(i) New Creation: In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. (Gen 1:1–3) And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation. (Gen 2:2–3)

(ii) Psalms: On you I was cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me you have been my God. (Ps 22:10) I can count all my bones. They stare and gloat over me; they divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots. (Ps 22:17–18) They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink. (Ps 69:21)

(iii) Passover: Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood in the basin. None of you shall go outside the door of your house until morning. (Exod 12:22) It shall be eaten in one house; you shall not take any of the animal outside the house, and you shall not break any of its bones. (Exod 12:46)

KIND OF WRITING

This is a combination of a fundamentally historical narrative enriched with symbolic details to carry the interpretation of the evangelist.

NEW TESTAMENT FOREGROUND

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. (John 2:1)

Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. (John 18:15–16)

One of his disciples—the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining next to him; Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking (John 13:23–25)

ST PAUL

For it is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Cor 4:6)

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! (2 Cor 5:17)

For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything! (Gal 6:15)

BRIEF COMMENTARY*(i) 17-25a Discussion [with Pilate]*

In this Gospel, Jesus always used “lifted up” to refer to his death. Jn 3:14; 8:28; 13:32, 34. Simon: important elsewhere and surely historical – here deleted on account of Jn 10:17 and 17:19. Psalm 22:16 – see Jn 10:8; Three languages – commerce, culture and religion. Nazareth: Jn 1:46; 7:41; 7:52.

(ii) 25b-27 Mother and Beloved Disciple

One for each soldier: headdress, cloak, belt, and shoes (i.e. four soldiers). Instead of underlining the mockery of the soldiers, John underlines their *unwitting* fulfilment of scripture—Psalm 22:18; Mother / woman: symbolic of the daughter of Zion. Beloved disciple: symbolic of discipleship. The words have a deeper meaning: an appeal to mother Judaism to recognise the legitimacy of her offspring Christianity and an appeal to Christianity to recognise the maternity of Judaism. From that hour – see especially Jn 16:32.

(iii) 28-30 Death of Jesus

“Finished” frames the scene; also perfected as in 13:1; Vinegar: Ps 69:21. “I thirst”: Psalm 63:1; Jn 4:7. See also Jn 18:11. Hyssop: stick elsewhere; hyssop here because: Num 19:18; Ex 12:22; cf. Heb 9:19; Finished / perfected: Gen 2:2. Cf. In the beginning in Jn 1:1 and Gen 1:1; “Handing over the spirit (*pneuma*)” is likewise unusual. It is interesting to note that the Synoptics usually avoid using the ordinary terms for dying of Jesus (*apothneskō* and *teleutaō*):

Mark and Luke: he expired (*exepneusen*)
Matthew: he let his spirit depart (*apheken to pneuma*)
John: he handed over his spirit (*paredoken to pneuma*)

Also, the words of the Risen Lord in John: receive the Holy Spirit. Cf. Jn 7:39; 16:7; 20:22.

(iv) 31-37 Discussion [with Pilate]

Nor breaking legs: Passover symbolism. Ex 12:46; Num 9:12; Ps 34:20. Blood and water: Jn 7:37; 4:14; 16:7; 19:30. Pierced: Zech 12:10; cf. Rev 1:7.

(v) 38-42 “Royal” Burial

Joseph of Arimathea suddenly appears; likely to be historical. Nicodemus—representing the more difficult journey of the Pharisee to faith—illustrates reconciliation / inclusion? Aloes and myrrh? Psalm 45:8; Prov 7:17; Song 4:14 especially (i.e. a resumption of the nuptial symbolism from John 1-4); Garden – echo of Eden and an anticipation of the “gardener” in Jn 20?

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. “The Good Shepherd lays down his life” (John 10). What has been my experience of being loved? Who has made sacrifices for me? Do these human experiences help me approach the death of Jesus, for me? Prayer of being loved.

2. “God so loved the world” (John 3). The leap of faith in the cross and resurrection is not so much to believe a doctrine but to trust God, as God of living. What is my experience of trust and being trusted? Prayer of faith and love.

3. “This is the Lamb of God” (John 1). Jesus’ death sets us free. How am I unfree? Have I ever experience release? Who helped me? What was it like? To what in me is the Risen Jesus speaking a word of liberation today?

4. There was always God’s Spirit in the world. Yet, after Jesus death and resurrection the role of the Spirit has so changed that we can speak of a new gift of the Spirit. What is my own experience of “before and after” events? What have been the “before and after” events in my life as a believer?

PRAYER

From the throne of grace, O God of mercy, hear the devout prayer of your people.

As your Son is lifted high upon the cross, draw into his exalted life all who are reborn in the blood and water flowing from his opened side.

We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Passover and our peace, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, holy and mighty God, for ever and ever. Amen