

JOHN 19.1-4: "LOOK! HERE IS THE MAN!"

[Chelmsford Word Alive 3 April 2011]

INTRODUCTION

This evening Outrageous are focusing on the Cross – ‘Outrageous Sacrifice’ is their theme. Tonight I too want us to focus on the Cross – and in particular upon the suffering of the crucified Lord Jesus.

The Cross is at the heart of Christian believing – not surprisingly the Cross is the symbol of the Christian faith.

- John Chrysostom, a 4th century Bishop of Constantinople, once said: *“By the cross we know the gravity of sin and the greatness of God’s love toward us”*.
- Stanley Jones, the great Indian evangelist, said: *“The cross is the key. If I lose this key I fumble. The universe will not open to me. But with the key in my hand I know I hold his secret”*.
- Martin Luther declared: *“If you want to understand the Christian message, you must start with the wounds of Christ”*.
- David Prior, an Anglican preacher and commentator wrote: *“We never move on from the cross of Christ, only into a more profound understanding of the Cross”*

Let’s hear John’s account of Pilate’s treatment of Jesus. John 19.1-18.....

This evening I wish to focus on one particular verse: **“Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them [the crowd], ‘Look! Here is your man!’”** (19.4)

LOOK!

Yes, look! Stop for a moment, and with your mind’s eye look at Jesus. Look at him as he stands there before the crowd - and what do you see? A bloodied and badly bruised young man. A man in great pain and in great agony.

1. His back and backside must have been hurting beyond.

For Jesus had been **“whipped”** (v1) - so reads the GNB. Other translations speak of Jesus being **“flogged”** (NRSV, NIV, REB). This ‘whipping’ or ‘flogging’ was a terrible punishment. Let me quote to you from one distinguished scholar (Blinzler):

“The delinquent was stripped, bound to a post or a pillar, or sometimes simply thrown on the ground, and beaten by a number of torturers until the latter grew tired and the flesh of the delinquent hung in bleeding shreds. In the provinces this was the task of soldiers. Three different kinds of implements were customary. Rods were used on freemen; military punishments were inflicted with sticks, but for slaves scourges or whips were used, the leather thongs of these being often fitted with a spike or with several pieces of bone or lead joined to form a chain. The scourging of Jesus was carried out with these last-named

instruments... It is not surprising to hear that delinquents frequently collapsed and died under this procedure... Josephus records that he himself had some of his opponents... scourged until their entrails were visible. The case of Jesus bar Hanan.. whom the procurator Albinus had scourged until his bones lay bare... also makes one realise what the little word”... whipped ...”means”

Can you imagine how Jesus must have been after such a flogging?

Jesus must have been in a terrible state.

No wonder he was unable to carry his cross to the place of execution.

No wonder he died so soon after being crucified.

To say that his back & backside must have been hurting beyond is an understatement.

He must have been racked with pain. I doubt whether he have stood up straight.

2. His head must have been hurting beyond

Jesus was wearing what GNB calls “**a crown made out of thorny branches**” (v1).

This was no laurel wreath that might decorate the brow of a Roman emperor.

This so-called ‘**crown**’ was made up of great jagged spikes from the date palm, the same plant that had supplied the fronds that had been laid on Jesus’ path as he entered Jerusalem a short time before them. The ‘spikes’ or ‘thorns’ of this plant could be up to 12 inches in length, and were notorious for inflicting pain.

Forget the pictures of popular piety in which Jesus is wearing a crown of twigs with some thorns.

The crown was more like an American Indian’s head-dress, with thorns as large as the feathers. Such long thorns or spike would have given the effect of a starburst around Jesus’ head, in imitation of the likeness of deified rulers on the coins of the period.

The soldiers had meshed together thorns from this plant & then rammed them on to Jesus’s head. Such a heavy crown of thorns must have hurt beyond.

Blood must have been dripping from his brow.

3. His face must have been hurting beyond

Prior to his being brought out to the crowd, Jesus had been abused by the soldiers.

John writes, “**The soldiers put a purple robe on him** (it could have been an old shaggy red rug) **and came to him and said, ‘Long live the King of the Jews’**”.

But instead of kneeling & giving him a kiss of homage, they “**slapped him**” (v2).

Indeed, Mark & Matthew tell us that they also hit him on the head with a rod.

It was not just his body which was badly bruised, his face would have been dreadfully swollen, and would have been black and blue with bruises.

Were even some of his teeth knocked out? We don’t know. One thing for certain.

He would have been a mess - and he would have been in great pain.

4. *His heart must have been hurting beyond*

Everybody was mocking him - ‘**Long live the King of the Jews!**’ (v2) the soldiers mocked - the religious leaders taunted him - the crowd bayed for his blood. Emotionally and psychologically it must have been a dreadful experience.

As children we may have recited that ditty: ‘*Sticks & stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me*’ What rubbish! Words can hurt as much if not more than physical blows. That would certainly have been true for Jesus.

For *Jesus was a sensitive soul* - he must have been, for he was sensitive to the needs of others - & sensitivity toward others entails an acute capacity to be hurt oneself.

Some people may have the skin of a rhino - but not Jesus.

He had no special divine layer of protective, pain-resistant armour.

Words did not bounce off him - they must have penetrated right into his heart.

The words, the insults, the taunts, must have hurt him beyond.

5. *His soul must have been breaking with hurt too*

For death was imminent - what’s more death by crucifixion.

Mark tells us that as Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane began to consider the prospect of his imminent death, he said to his disciples: “**The sorrow in my soul** [*psuche* - tr by GNB as heart] **is so great that it almost crushes me**”.

Surely this must have been true all the more as Jesus was formally handed over to be crucified.

In many an account we find Christian martyrs facing death with apparent joyful serenity - but not Jesus. “*No one*”, wrote Luther, “*ever feared death so much as this man*”.

But it wasn’t simply the prospect of dying, which Jesus feared. It was surely *the prospect of dying on a cross*, and experiencing all its refined torture of crucifixion.

Listen to one vivid description of crucifixion:

“The Assyrians invented it, but their method was too quick. They merely impaled you on a sharpened stake, up the anus, through the body, and out through the mouth. You didn't last long. so the Romans perfected it, dragged it out longer, refined it, in order to let you have a little time to meditate upon your crimes. By the second or third day, four fifths crazed as the crows peck your eyes out, maybe (or so the Romans calculated) you'll act as a fairly effective deterrent to other would-be opponents of the regime”.

(Michael Saward, Don't Miss The Party 41ff).

It was a ghastly way of dying. Listen to another description:

“The physical effects of crucifixion were appalling. Of all deaths it is the most lingering and agonising. the unnatural position of the body made every movement a pain. The suspension of the whole body on jagged iron nails driven through the most sensitive nerve centres of the wrists and ankles, ensured constant exquisite torture. The wounds of the nails and the weals from the lash soon became inflamed and even gangrenous. the body's position hindered circulated and caused indescribable pain in the chest. A raging

thirst set in, brought on by the burning sun. The flies were thick around the victim. The agony of crucifixion was terrible beyond words" .
(M.Green, The Empty Cross of Jesus 23).

"It was, said Cicero, the "*most cruel and most terrible punishment*".
Jesus wasn't being squeamish - he would not have been human, if he hadn't shuddered at the thought.

Or was Jesus shuddering at the thought of the physical pain of crucifixion?
It is an interesting fact that the Gospels themselves make nothing about the physical pain of crucifixion - rather the emphasis is on *the spiritual pain of expiation*.
Certainly in Gethsemane it is the thought of drinking the cup of God's wrath which Jesus feared - *God's wrath* against all that is wrong in the world.
When Jesus cried out on the cross, he expressed not the physical agony, but rather the spiritual agony which was his: "**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**".
As Jesus stood before Pilate, almost certainly he experienced again the "**distress and anguish**" of the Garden, when, in the down-to-earth language of Eugene Peterson, he had "*plunged into a sinkhole of dreadful agony*".
What lay ahead of him was truly appalling.

John Milton, once wrote an exquisite poem on the birth of Jesus, and entitled it, "*An Ode On The Morning of Christ's Nativity*". He planned a companion poem on the death of Jesus. But only a few lines were written and have come down to us. With them is the significant comment:

"This subject the author finding to be above the years he had when he wrote it, and nothing satisfied with what was begun, left it unfinished".

Have you now got the picture?

"**Look!**" Dressed in clothes that made him look more like a clown than a king, bleeding profusely, badly bruised & in great pain of heart & soul, Jesus must have been a shocking sight, enough to horrify any who knew him.

- The words of Is 53 come to mind. "**He had no dignity or beauty to make us take notice of him. There was nothing attractive about him, nothing that would draw us to him. We despised him & rejected him; he endured suffering & pain.**" (2b,3)
- Similarly the words of Lam 1.12 are often ascribed to Jesus: "**Look at me! No one has ever had pain like mine, pain that the Lord brought on me in the time of his anger**"

Pilate said to the crowd: "**Look! Here is your man!**"

HERE IS YOUR MAN!

This phrase - "**Here is your man!**" - has a variety of nuances

1. *What a pathetic man!*

For Pilate the emphasis was on the pathetic sight which Jesus presented.
What a pathetic fellow! What a joke of a man!
Pilate was not seeking to gain sympathy for Jesus.
He was mocking Jesus - and mocking the Jews too.
Is this your king? What a joke!

The truth is that Jesus must have presented a pitiable sight!
He was a wreck of a man, bent double there in his purple.
He was quite literally a 'pathetic man' - i.e. any one with any feeling would have experienced deep sadness in looking at him.

2. *What a noble man!*

Yet paradoxically there was *something admirable if not noble about him*.
Certainly John's words can mean not only "*Look at the poor fellow*" - they can also be pronounced in wonder: "**What a man!**"
Compared to the other characters involved in this drama, Jesus made a truly noble showing.

a) Look at the Jewish leaders

What a contrast Jesus made to that blood-thirsty lot.
They hated him, but he refused to hate back
They railed at him, but he refused to hit back
As one eyewitness later wrote: "**When he was insulted, he did not answer back with an insult; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but he placed his hopes in God, the righteous judge**" (1 Pet 2.23).
What a man!

b) Look at Pilate

What a contrast Jesus made to that weak & vacillating figure!
Despite all his physical weakness, Jesus was strong.
Jesus was determined to carry out his Father's will, & carry it out he did
Phil 2.8: "**He walked the path of obedience all the way to death - his death on a cross**". Many a man would quite understandably have shied away from the cross - but not Jesus!

"**Look! Here is the man**" - man at his best - man as God intended him to be.
In the language of John Henry Newman, Jesus was the "*2nd Adam*" who "*to the fight and to the rescue came*":

*"O wisest love! that flesh and blood/Which did in Adam fail,
should strive afresh against the foe,/Should strive and should prevail"*

3. *What a God-man!*

For John there may have been another nuance.

For John knew that Jesus was more than simply 'man at his best' - he was God's man.

Jesus was not simply the Son of Mary, he was also the Son of God.

Indeed, when Pilate said to the crowd, **"I find no reason to condemn him"**, **"The crowd answered back, 'We have a law that says he ought to die, because he claimed to be the Son of God'"** (v7)

Jesus was God's man. He was God incarnate.

In the words of one commentator, *"The declaration 'the Word became flesh' has become visible in its extremist consequence"* (Bultmann).

What a man! What a way of God identifying with us!

God became one of us - and in so doing became our companion in suffering and pain.

- In sharing our flesh & blood, ***Jesus knew what it was to suffer physically.*** What a difference that thought can make. Joni Eareckson Tada, a Christian paraplegic, once wrote: *"I discovered that the Lord Jesus Christ could indeed empathise with my situation. On the cross for those agonising horrible hours, waiting for death, he was immobilised, helpless, paralysed. Jesus did know what it was like not to be able to move - not to scratch your nose, shift your weight, wipe your eyes. He was paralysed on the cross - Christ knew exactly how I felt"*
- In sharing our blood, ***Jesus knew what it was to be abused, emotionally & physically.*** What a difference that thought can make. Jesus can identify with those women and children who are the daily victims of abuse in our society - and they in turn can identify with him.

What a man! What a God-man!

"The Word became a human being and... lived among us" (Jn 1.14)!

"Our High Priest", said the author of the Letter to the Hebrews, **"is not one who cannot feel sympathy for our weakness... Let us have confidence, then, and approach God's throne, where there is grace. There we will receive mercy and find grace to help us just when we need it"** (Hebs 4.15,16)

4. *What a Son of man!*

There is possibly yet another allusion present. *'What a man - this Son of Man!'*

Many equate the word **"man"** here with Jesus self-description as **"the Son of Man"**.

Certainly in Jewish & Christian writings the terms 'man' and 'son of man' could be used synonymously.

What's more, when John writes of the Son of Man, he always writes of him as a Saviour figure. *'What a man - what a Saviour!'*

Three times in this Gospel Jesus speaks of the Son of Man being lifted up, and on each of those occasions there is an allusion to the Cross

- **"As Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the desert, in the same way the Son of Man must be lifted up. so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life"** (3.14,15)

- **“When you lift up the Son of Man, you will know that ‘I Am Who I Am’** (8.28)
- **“When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself”** (12.32: see v34)

“Here is the man!” said Pilate. Within a matter of hours Jesus was lifted up on a cross to die. ‘What a man! What a Saviour!’

“Look” said Pilate, **“Here is the man”**

When you look - do you see just a man in great pain? - or do you see God’s man?

Do you see Jesus, the Son of Man & the Saviour of the world?

Look and see the one, who for your sake & for mine went the way of suffering & death that we might be forgiven, that we might have life?

Look - and see this man!