

Matthew Henry's Commentary On John 19:16-18

**“Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led him away.
And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha:
Where they crucified him, and two other with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst.”
[John 19:16-18]**

In this passage of the Gospel of John - primarily the first half of verse 16, we will see some interesting details surrounding the fact that once Pontius Pilate sentenced Jesus to death, the Lamb of God was turned over to his accusers for execution... *“Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified”*. And it is interesting to note that the high priest (Caiaphas) was one of his accusers (see John 18:24&28). Due to the seriousness of the charges and the hatred of the Jewish religious leaders of Christ, it is very likely that the Lamb of God was being led to the slaughter by men who included the man who was high priest that year. How symbolic of the annual passover sacrifice.

And now for some further insight into the gospel of John, chapter 19 verses 16 to 18 by the renowned bible scholar Matthew Henry.

We have here the sentence of death passed upon our Lord Jesus, and execution done soon after. A mighty struggle Pilate had had within himself between his convictions and his corruptions; but at length his convictions yielded, and his corruptions prevailed, the fear of man having a greater power over him than the fear of God. Pilate gave judgment against Christ, and signed the warrant for his execution (verse 16).

We may see here...

1. How Pilate sinned against his conscience. He had again and again pronounced him innocent, and yet at last condemned him as guilty. Pilate, since he came to be governor, had in many instances disobliged and exasperated the Jewish nation; for he was a man of a haughty and implacable spirit, and extremely wedded to his humour. He had seized upon the Corban, and spent it upon a water-work; he had brought into Jerusalem shields stamped with Caesar's image, which was very provoking to the Jews; he had sacrificed the lives of many to his resolutions herein. Fearing therefore that he should be complained of for these and other insolences, he was willing to gratify the Jews. Now this makes the matter much worse. If he had been of an easy, soft, and pliable disposition, his yielding to so strong a stream had been the more excusable; but for a man that was so wilful in other things, and of so

fierce a resolution, to be overcome in a thing of this nature, shows him to be a bad man indeed, that could better bear the wronging of his conscience than the crossing of his humour.

2. How he endeavoured to transfer the guilt upon the Jews. He delivered him not to his own officers (as usual), but to the prosecutors, the chief priests and elders; so excusing the wrong to his own conscience with this, that it was but a permissive condemnation, and that he did not put Christ to death, but only connived at [with] those that did it.

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3. How Christ was made sin for us. We deserved to have been condemned, but Christ was condemned for us, that to us there might be no condemnation. God was now entering into judgment with his Son, that he might not enter into judgment with his servants.

Judgment was no sooner given than with all possible expedition the prosecutors, having gained their point, resolved to lose no time lest Pilate should change his mind, and order a reprieve (those are enemies to our souls, the worst of enemies, that hurry us to sin, and then leave us no room to undo what we have done amiss), and also lest there should be an uproar among the people, and they should find a greater number against them than they had with so much artifice got to be for them. It were well if we would be thus expeditious in that which is good, and not stay for more difficulties.

1. They immediately hurried away the prisoner. The chief priests greedily flew upon the prey which they had been long waiting for; now it is drawn into their net. Or they, that is, the soldiers who were to attend the execution, they took him and led him away, not to the place whence he came, and thence to the place of execution, as is usual with us, but directly to the place of execution. Both the priests and the soldiers joined in leading him away. Now was the Son of man delivered into the hands of men, wicked and unreasonable men. By the law of Moses (and in appeals by our law) the prosecutors were to be the executioners (Deu. 17:7). And the priests here were proud of the office. His being led away does not suppose him to have made any opposition, but the scripture must be fulfilled, he was led as a sheep to the slaughter (Acts 8:32). We deserved to have been led forth with the workers of iniquity as criminals to execution, Ps. 125:5 . But he was led forth for us, that we might escape.

2. To add to his misery, they obliged him as long as he was able, to carry his cross. (verse 17 - "and he bearing his cross"), according to the custom among the Romans; hence Furcifer was among them a name of reproach. Their crosses did not stand up constantly, as our gibbets do in the

places of execution, because the malefactor was nailed to the cross as it lay along upon the ground, and then it was lifted up, and fastened in the earth, and removed when the execution was over, and commonly buried with the body; so that every one that was crucified had a cross of his own. Now Christ's carrying his cross may be considered,

(1.) As a part of his sufferings: He endured the cross literally. It was a long and thick piece of timber that was necessary for such a use, and some think it was neither seasoned nor hewn. The blessed body of the Lord Jesus was tender, and unaccustomed to such burdens; it had now lately been harassed and tired out; his shoulders were sore with the stripes they had given him; every jog of the cross would renew his smart, and be apt to strike the thorns he was crowned with into his head; yet all this he patiently underwent, and it was but the beginning of sorrows.

(2.) As answering the type which went before him: Isaac, when he was to be offered, carried the wood on which he was to be bound and with which he was to be burned.

(3.) As very significant of his undertaking: The Father having laid upon him the iniquity of us all (Isa. 53:6), and he having to take away sin by bearing it in his own body upon the tree (1 Pet. 2:24). He had said in effect, On me be the curse; for he was made a curse for us, and therefore on him was the cross.

(4.) As very instructive to us: Our Master hereby taught all his disciples to take up their cross, and follow him. Whatever cross he calls us out to bear at any time, we must remember that he bore the cross first, and, by bearing it for us, bears it off from us in great measure, for thus he hath made his yoke easy, and his burden light. He bore that end of the cross that had the curse upon it; this was the heavy end; and hence all that are his are enabled to call their afflictions for him light, and but for a moment.

3. They brought him to the place of execution. He went forth, not dragged against his will, but voluntary in his sufferings. He went forth out of the city, for he was crucified without the gate (Heb. 13:12). And, to put the greater infamy upon his sufferings, he was brought to the common place of execution, as one in all points numbered among the transgressors, a place called Golgotha, the place of a skull, where they threw dead men's skulls and bones, or where the heads of beheaded malefactors were left — a place ceremonially unclean; there Christ suffered, because he was made sin for us, that he might purge our consciences from dead works, and the pollution of them. If one would take notice of the traditions of the elders, there are two which are mentioned by many of the ancient writers concerning this place:

(1.) That Adam was buried here: and that this was the place of his skull, and they observe that where death triumphed over the first Adam there the second Adam triumphed over him. Gerhard quotes for this

tradition Origen, Cyprian, Epiphanius, Austin, Jerome, and others.

(2.) That this was that mountain in the land of Moriah on which Abraham offered up Isaac: and the ram was a ransom for Isaac.⁴ There they crucified him, and the other malefactors with him (verse 18 – “where they crucified him”).

Observe:

(1.) What death Christ died: The death of the cross, a bloody, painful, shameful death, a cursed death. He was nailed to the cross, as a sacrifice bound to the altar, as a Saviour fixed for his undertaking; his ear nailed to God’s door-post, to serve him for ever. He was lifted up as the brazen serpent, hung between heaven and earth because we were unworthy of either, and abandoned by both. His hands were stretched out to invite and embrace us; he hung upon the tree some hours, dying gradually in the full use of reason and speech, that he might actually resign himself a sacrifice.

(2.) In what company he died: Two others with him. Probably these would not have been executed at that time, but at the request of the chief priests, to add to the disgrace of our Lord Jesus, which might be the reason why one of them reviled him, because their death was hastened for his sake. Had they taken two of his disciples, and crucified them with him, it had been an honour to him; but, if such as they had been partakers with him in suffering, it would have looked as if they had been undertakers with him in satisfaction. Therefore it was ordered that his fellow-sufferers should be the worst of sinners, that he might bear our reproach, and that the merit might appear to be his only. This exposed him much to the people’s contempt and hatred, who are apt to judge of persons by the lump [the group they are associated with], and are not curious in distinguishing, and would conclude him not only malefactor because he was yoked with malefactors, but the worst of the three because put in the midst. But thus the scripture was fulfilled, He was numbered among the transgressors. He did not die at the altar among the sacrifices, nor mingle his blood with that of bulls and goats; but he died among the criminals, and mingled his blood with theirs who were sacrificed to public justice [and public disgrace].

And now let us pause awhile, and with an eye of faith look upon Jesus. Was ever there sorrow like unto his sorrow? See him who was clothed with glory stripped of it all, and clothed with shame – him who was the praise of angels made a reproach of men — him who had been with eternal delight and joy in the bosom of his Father now in the extremities of pain and agony. See him bleeding, see him struggling, see him dying, see him and love him, love him and live to him, and study what we shall render unto him.
