

## THE PASSION (SUFFERING) OF CHRIST

John 18 - 20

When our Lord finished His prayer, He led His disciples out of Jerusalem through the eastern gate, descended the slope to the brook Kedron, crossed it, and ascended the mountain to a garden called Gethsemane. On many occasions, they had gone to that garden for peace, quietude, and prayer.

### I. The Betrayal Of Christ. John 18:3-11.

Knowing that it was the habit of the Saviour to go to Gethsemane for prayer and meditation, Judas decided that it would be easier to engineer His arrest there than elsewhere. He secured a band of temple police and Roman soldiers and went there to find Him.

Instead of hiding, when they arrived, Christ stepped out and greeted them with the question, "Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he." When Christ identified Himself, the armed soldiers stepped backwards so quickly that they tripped and fell to the ground. Due to their hesitation to arrest Him, Christ again offered Himself to them, but requested that His disciples be given liberty. He did not want to endanger them because of what was happening to Him.

When Peter saw the officers move forward to take Christ, he drew his sword and attempted to cut off the head of Malchus, a servant of the high priest. Malchus dodged so successfully that the sword only cut off his right ear. Christ rebuked Peter and told him to put up his sword, assuring him that He did not need his protection from His enemies.

### II. The Arrest Of Christ. John 18:12.

Inasmuch as Christ surrendered without a struggle, His arrest was somewhat of an anti-climax for the armed soldiers.

### III. The Trials Of Christ. John 18:12 - 19:16.

#### 1. The Ecclesiastical, or Jewish Trial. John 18:12-27.

##### (1) Before Annas. John 18:13-14, 19-23.

Annas, who had been high priest from A.D. 6 to 15, was still the power behind the throne in Jerusalem. Four of his sons had also held the high priesthood, and Caiaphas, who was then the high priest, was his son-in-law. The family of Annas was immensely rich, and one by one they had intrigued and bribed their way into office. When Christ cleansed the Temple of those who sold animals and doves for the sacrifices, the income of Annas was greatly diminished thereby. With Annas gloating over his opportunity to get revenge, the examination before him was a mockery of justice.

##### (2) Before Caiaphas. John 18:24.

When he was unable to get any information from Christ, which would enable him to accomplish his purposes, Annas sent Him on to Caiaphas.

##### (3) Peter's denials of Christ. John 18:15-18, 25-27.

As His captors led Christ to the palace of the high priest, Peter followed Him timidly in the rear. John entered the palace with the others, but Peter remained on the outside. Because of his influence with the portress, John easily obtained admission for Simon Peter into the courtyard.

Left to shift for himself, Peter stealthily walked over to the center of the court where the fire was burning. Around this fire were the servants of the household and the soldiers. They were laughing and jesting as they warmed themselves. Along with them Peter stood and warmed himself, then sat down to see and to hear, at the same time hoping to escape notice. So there he was in a place of compromise like many modern Christians who mingle with the enemies of Christ and seek to hide their identity. Such a place is always one of peril.

Meanwhile, the portress watched him as he sat there warming himself, with the light of the fire shining in his face. Gazing intently at him, and concluding that he was one of the disciples, she asked Peter if he was not a follower of Christ, whereupon he denied that he was. When others joined in identifying him as a follower of Christ, Peter again denied that he was one of His disciples. That is one of the troubles about lying: one lie calls for another to cover up the first one. Peter had been recognized as a follower of Jesus Christ, the very thing he had tried to avoid, and the fact of his recognition had led him to deny twice that he had any knowledge of the Saviour.

Among the causes of Simon Peter's fall were self-confidence, blindness to danger, neglect of communion with Christ, bad associates, and lack of courage. Being afraid of criticism, he followed the path of least resistance and did that which he thought was easiest at that time.

When he realized that he had made a terrible mistake, Peter was sorry for his sin, and wept bitter tears of repentance. After his repentance, he was transformed into an humble, compassionate, zealous and courageous servant of God.

## 2. The Civil, or Roman Trial. John 18:28 - 19:16.

### (1) The first phase. John 18:28-32.

#### a. The procurator.

Pontius Pilate was appointed procurator or governor of Judea by the emperor Tiberius in 26 A.D. Of all the subjects of Rome, the Jews were the most difficult to govern. To them Pilate was a loathsome stranger and detested barbarian. Pilate was an unjust, corrupt, cruel and merciless ruler. He was a champion fence-straddler. He knew what he ought to do, but he was too cowardly to do it. He wanted to satisfy both the enemies and friends of Christ by adopting what is sometimes called a "middle-of-the-road" policy.

#### b. The procedure.

Pilate condescended to go out into the open court and occupy the chair as judge. Pilate honorably asked, "What accusation bring ye against this man?" They refused to name the crime with which he was charged. Assuming an injured air, and posing as being infallible, they took the bold stand that they would not have brought Christ to Pilate if he had not been an habitual evildoer. Desirous of getting this case off his hands completely and provoked at his accusers, who simply wanted him to authorize the killing of Christ, Pilate said, "Take ye him and judge him according to your law," knowing full well that the Romans had taken from them the power to execute anybody for any crime.

(2) The second phase. John 18:33 - 19:6.

Pilate was wise enough to retire into his palace, where he knew the Jews would not enter, for fear of ceremonial defilement, and to have Christ brought into his palace to avoid a public examination. There, in a private interview, he asked Christ, "Art thou the King of the Jews?" Aware of Pilate's motive in asking the question, our Lord parried with another, namely, "Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it of me?"

Defiantly and sarcastically Pilate asked, "Am I a Jew?" As if to say, "Since I am a Roman, Am I to know everything about the ideas and politics of the Jews?" Confused and somewhat incensed at the whole procedure connected with the delivery of Christ into his hands by the Jews, Pilate asked Him harshly, "What hast thou done" to create this situation? In perfect poise Christ affirmed the fact of His kingship. His answer, "My kingdom is not of this world," convinced Pilate that he was dealing with One Who was more than an earthly king.

Thoroughly convinced of the innocency of Christ and concluding that Christ was only an harmless enthusiast, and not a rival of Caesar, Pilate returned to the multitude and announced that the Accused was not guilty. His verdict, "I find no fault in him," met with howls of rage.

Still trying to get out of his predicament, Pilate ordered the Lord Jesus scourged. When a person was scourged he was tied to a whipping-post in such a way that his back was fully exposed. The lash was a long leather thong, studded at intervals with pellets of lead and sharp pieces of bone. It literally tore a man's back into strips. Few remained conscious throughout the ordeal; some died; and many went raving mad. The brutal scourging was a part of Satan's plan to exhaust Jesus Christ before His reaching the cross. Scourging was the utmost limit of brutality. Thirty-nine stripes were the limit of the Roman law because that number brought a man to the very verge of death. Christ had His back laid open, perhaps the flesh hanging in shreds thereon.

The soldiers then made a crown of thorns and put it on His head. Throwing a purple robe about Him, they mocked Him and slapped Him. Then Pilate led Him out for the crowd to see. He reaffirmed Christ's innocence, and cried, "Behold the man! Instead of Christ's appearance inciting pity, the Jewish rulers cried, "Crucify him." Pilate replied, "Take ye him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him." This was the prided Roman justice at its worst.

(3) The third phase. John 19:7-12a.

Pilate was in a worse quandary than before. Knowing that Christ was innocent, Pilate did not want to sentence him to death. Neither would he displease the Jews by releasing Him. When he questioned Christ again, he did not receive an answer from him, and this irritated Pilate. He said, "Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?" Christ told him that he could not do as he pleased with Him because He was in the hands of His Father. Neither Pilate nor anyone else had any power except that which God gave them. Pilate actually wanted to release Christ, but he was too cowardly to do so.

(4) The fourth phase. John 19:12b-16.

Pilate "kept on seeking" to release the Lord Jesus, but the Jews cried out that, if he did so, he was not Caesar's friend. This was an implied threat

to report to Caesar the evil deeds of Pilate. In a final effort to release the Lord Jesus, Pilate brought Him outside and said to the Jews, "Behold your king!" Declaring that they had no king except Caesar, the Jews cried out again for his crucifixion. Pilate surrendered and turned Him over to the detail of soldiers to carry out the sentence, and they led Him away.

#### IV. The Crucifixion Of Christ. John 19:17-42.

##### 1. The Cross. John 19:17-22.

The picture of Christ passing along the most frequented streets of Jerusalem carrying His cross, knowing that ere long He would be nailed to it, is a scene for meditation rather than exposition. He did not bear the cross very far until His strength failed. Exhausted from the tortures to which He had been subjected, the Saviour staggered under the weight of the heavy cross, and near the city gate He fell. The soldiers laid the ghastly burden on the shoulder of Simon of Cyrene and compelled him to carry it. In due time the procession ascended the skull-shaped hill overlooking the city, which was the common execution ground for felons and outlaws.

##### (1) The crucifixion. John 19:17-18.

The executioners laid Christ on His back on the cross which was lying on the ground. Then they drove the cruel spikes through the palms of His hands, fastening them to the ends of the crosspiece, and they nailed His feet to the upright piece. Half-way down the upright piece was a peg, known as the seat, which gave a degree of support to the body; otherwise the weight of the body would have torn it from the cross. While Christ's blood was flowing, a hole was prepared in the ground, the cross was lifted on end and dropped into the hole with a thud, leaving Him to suffer a lingering and painful death as the blood dripped from His head, His hands, and His feet.

##### (2) The Charge. John 19:19-22.

It was customary to place an inscription over the cross, stating the crime for which the victim suffered. Pilate wrote the inscription which revealed the reason for the death of the Saviour. It was written in the three languages then in common usage--Hebrew, the language of religion; Greek, the language of culture; and Latin, the language of government. The charge was written in these three languages, and placed above His head, so that all who passed by could read it for themselves. "And the writing was, Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews." Because Pilate labelled the dying Saviour "the King of the Jews," the Jews became furious. They demanded that he alter what he had written to the effect that it was Christ's claim that He was "the King of the Jews." Pilate refused to comply with their demand saying, "What I have written I have written." Thus he fastened upon the Jews the stigma of crucifying their King.

##### 2. The Witnesses. John 19:23-27.

##### (1) The Corroboration. John 19:23-24.

Utterly insensitive to the fact that they were doing so, the soldiers corroborated the prophetic scriptures in detail. Blindly ignorant of the contents of the Word of God, they were fulfilling them to the letter. According to the law they could claim the garments which Christ wore. After dividing all of them except His seamless robe, they proceeded to gamble for it. "They parted my

garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture." Psalms 22:18. This is an illustration of how hard and callous men may be in scheming and acting for personal gain under the very shadow of the cross.

(2) The Consolation. John 19:25-27.

The first word that Christ spoke from the cross was a prayer for His enemies: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." The second word was an answer to prayer: "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." This third word was spoken to Mary, His mother, and to John, His beloved disciple: "Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother!"

The presence of His mother, along with the other two Marys, Salome, and John, during those horrible mockeries must have brought great comfort to the heart of Christ. It required great love and genuine courage to stand there. At the time of His greatest anguish, in an act of tender thoughtfulness, Christ provided for His devoted and faithful mother the best of care in the home of one whom He knew He could trust to do his very best for her. What marvelous compassion it was which led Him to forget His own sufferings and to think of the needs of His dear mother!

Home is more than a place to live; it is a place in which we love and are loved. Christ knew that Mary would feel more at home in the house of John than anywhere else, and that John would understand her and sympathize with her more than others would. John had the privilege of taking the place of his Lord in the service of one whom Christ loved so dearly. There is never a day in which we cannot represent our Lord, and do something for Him by helping somebody whom He loves.

3. The Culmination. John 19:28-30.

While hanging on the cross in indescribable suffering, Christ said, "I thirst." This was the only cry of physical pain that was ever heard from His lips, while on the cross or elsewhere. Had He chosen to exercise His power, He could have satisfied His need readily. But Christ never performed a miracle for His own comfort or for His own personal benefit. For hours He had gone without rest, sleep, food and drink. He had been tortured until every drop of moisture had been sapped from His fevered body. Every cell of His body cried out for water. Breathing was becoming more and more difficult, and yet the Saviour bore it all without complaint. He endured the pain for our benefit.

A great dramatist said, "The words of dying men enforce attention." How much more the words of the dying God-Man! Christ uttered a sea of truth in the drop of a single word, "tetelestai," which is translated, "It is finished." This is probably the greatest and most momentous word that was ever spoken on earth. We marvel at the richness of its meaning, and rejoice in its message to our hearts. No other person could have said "tetelestai" as Christ said it. He had lived a perfect and complete life in which there were no mistakes, no omissions, and no shortcomings. This was an exclamation of supreme satisfaction. Over His teachings, His life, and His works He had a sweet and wonderful satisfaction. His sufferings, His life, and His atonement for our sins were finished. His death was sacrificial, substitutionary, and sufficient. The redemptive work of Christ stands finished.

4. The Requests. John 19:31-42.

(1) The request of the Jews. John 19:31-37.

According to Jewish law it was necessary to remove from sight, before sunset, the bodies of executed criminals. The enemies of Christ were the more eager to obey this law because of the sacred character of the day which was soon to begin. In order to hasten the death of the three sufferers, permission was received from Pilate to have their legs broken. But when they came to Christ, and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. One of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and straightway there came out blood and water.

(2) The request of Joseph of Arimathaea. John 19:38.

Joseph of Arimathaea, a man of position and influence, went to Pilate and requested the body of Christ in order that he might bury the Saviour in his own tomb.

V. The Burial Of Christ. John 19:38b-42.

There were those who loved Him enough to remove the cruel nails from His tender hands, wash the clotted blood from His head, His hands, and His feet, prepare His body for burial, by wrapping it in a profusion of rich spices, and place it in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathaea. "He was buried."

VI. The Resurrection Of Christ. John 20:1-10.

From Friday night until Sunday morning Christ's body lay in the tomb. Early on Sunday morning the angels of the Lord came down, the soldiers fell away, the seal was broken and the stone was rolled away from the entrance to the tomb. Christ arose from the dead, laid aside His grave clothes and walked out of the tomb, a living Lord and a living King, triumphant over death and the grave. By His resurrection He recovered His challenged rights, regained His waning influence and resumed His miraculous power.

Certain women observed where Joseph and Nicodemus had placed the body of Christ in the tomb, and then returned to their homes and rested on the Sabbath. Before sunrise on the morning after the Sabbath, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb to anoint the body of Christ as a token of her love for Him. Upon her arrival there she was amazed to find that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance, and that the body of Him whom she sought was not there. She ran quickly to Peter and John and informed them that the body of Christ was not in the sepulcher, hoping that this disturbing news would arouse their interest and efforts to locate it. Peter and John ran hastily to the tomb. Being the younger, John outran Peter and reached the tomb first, but his reverence caused him to stop on the outside, whereas Peter's impulsiveness and perhaps courage caused him to rush through the entrance. Then John followed him inside the tomb. Convinced that His body was not in the tomb, they returned to their homes.