

## **HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST?**

**19** <sup>17</sup>So [the soldiers] took charge of Jesus. Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place called "The Place of a Skull," in Hebrew it is called, "Golgotha." <sup>18</sup>There they crucified him along with two other men—one on either side of him with Jesus in the middle.

<sup>19</sup>Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read, JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. <sup>20</sup>Many of the Jews read this notice, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near to the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. <sup>21</sup>Therefore the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, Do not write, "The King of the Jews;" but that he said, "I am King of the Jews." <sup>22</sup>Pilate answered, What I have written, I have written. <sup>23</sup>When the soldiers had nailed Jesus to the cross, they took his clothes and divided them into four shares, one for each soldier. [They] also [took] his undergarment. Now this garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. <sup>24</sup>Therefore they said to one another, Let us not tear it; rather, let us cast lots for it, to determine whose it shall be. [This happened] so that the Scripture might be fulfilled that says, "They parted my clothing among them, and they cast lots for my garment." <sup>25</sup>Therefore the soldiers did these things.

Now Jesus' mother and his mother's sister, Mary the [wife] of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene were standing by his cross. <sup>26</sup>When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, Woman, here is your son! <sup>27</sup>Then he said to the disciple, Here is your mother! From that time on, the disciple took her into his own home. <sup>28</sup>After this, knowing that all things were now completed, so that the Scripture might be fulfilled, Jesus said, I am thirsty. <sup>29</sup>There had been set there a jar filled with wine vinegar. So they stuck a sponge full of the wine vinegar upon a hyssop [stalk] and lifted it to his mouth. <sup>30</sup>When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished. Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

<sup>31</sup>Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. So, because the Jews did not want the bodies to remain upon the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. <sup>32</sup>The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with [Jesus], and [then the legs] of the other man. <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>However, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and immediately there poured out blood and water. <sup>35</sup>The man who saw this has given his testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he is speaking the truth, [and he gives his testimony] so that you also may believe. <sup>36</sup>These things happened so that the Scripture might be fulfilled, "Not one of his bones shall be broken." <sup>37</sup>And again another Scripture says, "They shall look at the one whom they pierced." (Jn. 19:17-37)

### **Introduction**

The old Negro spiritual asks the question, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?"

In response to that question we would have to reply, “No.” Physically we were not there at the place called Golgotha on the day they crucified our Lord.

But what about those who were present that day? Those who were there when they crucified our Lord? What was the response of the Jews when Pilate identified the crucified Christ as the King of Israel? What was the response of the soldiers as they sat at the foot of the cross dividing among themselves the garments of the crucified Christ? What was the response of the Apostle John as he witnessed the final hours of the crucified Christ and saw the Old Testament Scriptures being fulfilled before his very eyes? If there had been such a thing as a roving reporter back in those days, going about interviewing eyewitnesses, what would have been the responses of those who actually were there when they crucified our Lord?

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Yet in a very profound way, you and I are confronted with the crucified Christ through the preaching of the gospel: *“Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was publicly presented as crucified”* (Gal. 3:1.) Thus, you and I also must consider the way we respond to the crucified Christ. Because we, too, encounter Him through the gospel, each of us must personally consider the question, “How do I respond to the crucified Christ?”

## **I. Like the Jews, Do You Reject His Kingship over You? (John 19:17-22)**

It was the common practice of the Roman authorities to post the name of the criminal together with his crime. So it was that Pilate inscribed on a placard the words, *“Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews,”* and then fastened the placard to the cross. Pilate had this inscription written in the three common languages of the day: Hebrew, Latin and Greek—thus he was proclaiming to the whole world the fact that Jesus is the King of Israel.

But when the chief priests saw what Pilate had written, and that it was being read by everyone who passed by, they protested to Pilate, demanding that he alter the words to read: *“He says, ‘I am a king of the Jews.’”* Their effort was an attempt to transfer the title, “King of the Jews,” from the realm of fact, “This is the King of the Jews,” to the realm of opinion, He is not necessarily the King of the Jews, that is only what He says, that is only His view. Furthermore, there was the effort to tone down the claim from that of absolute lordship, “the King of the Jews,” to one of lesser authority, “a King of the Jews.”

The whole effort of the chief priests was to distance themselves from Christ’s rightful lordship over their lives. They refuse to acknowledge Christ as their King

and refuse to submit their lives to His sovereign Lordship. They desire to maintain their own position of authority in Israel, even though it meant submitting to the rule of Caesar, *“they shouted, Away with [him]! Away with [him]! Crucify him! Pilate asked them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar”* (vs. 15.) Furthermore, they had no desire to be identified with Christ in His suffering and humiliation—no desire to risk the loss of their status, their wealth, and even their lives.

How do you respond to the crucified Christ? Like the Jews, do you reject His lordship over your life? Do you find that you do not want to risk your status and sacrifice your pride to become identified with this King who willingly submits Himself to humiliation and humble service? Allegiance to Christ always causes ostracism from the world, because His kingdom and His ways are foreign to the world and a threat to all that the world holds in high regard:

*Jesus said to them, The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. <sup>26</sup>But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. <sup>27</sup>Who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. (Lk. 22:25-27)*

The writer of Hebrews gives the following exhortation to all who would belong to Jesus: *“And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. <sup>13</sup>Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore—<sup>14</sup>for here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come”* (Heb. 13:12-14.)

Do you find that you do not want to sacrifice your own will and submit your life to this King who demands to be the absolute Lord over all of your life? True faith in Christ always results in the surrender of our will unto Him, because He is the King who has a just and absolute claim upon our life both by creation (note Psalm 24:1-2) and by redemption (note 1 Corinthians 6:19b-20):

*The earth is Jehovah’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; <sup>2</sup>for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters. (Psl. 24:1-2)*

*You are not your own; <sup>20</sup>you were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God with your body. (1 Cor. 6:19b-20)*

In responding to the crucified Christ, let us not be like the chief priests and the Jews, rejecting His Lordship over us. To do so is to forfeit His blessing. Note that all the blessings enumerated in Psalm 23 are the result of knowing and accepting the LORD as our Good Shepherd and submitting our lives unto Him:

[Because] *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not lack anything. <sup>2</sup>He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, <sup>3</sup>he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. <sup>4</sup>Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. <sup>5</sup>You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. <sup>6</sup>Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.* (Psl. 23)

By rejecting His rightful lordship over us, we also make ourselves susceptible to incurring His righteous indignation and wrath. Jesus told this parable: *"A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then return ... <sup>14</sup>But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, 'We do not want this man to be our king.'"* Upon his return, the man declared, *"But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and kill them in front of me"* (Lk. 19:12,14,27.) By means of this parable, the Lord Jesus indicates the fate of those who defy and reject the rightful claims of the King of heaven over their lives. May we, by the grace of God, heed the counsel of the Psalmist:

*Serve Jehovah with fear and rejoice with trembling. <sup>12</sup>Kiss the Son [an act of homage], so that he will not be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.* (Psl. 2:11-12)

## **II. Like the Soldiers, Are You Only Concerned with What You Can Take from Him? (19:23-24)**

John next focuses our attention upon the soldiers and the scene they played out at the foot of the cross.

As was the common practice at the time of a crucifixion, the soldiers were dividing among themselves the victims' garments and personal belongings, apparently ripping the garments up into equal shares. But when they came to Jesus' undergarment, finding it to be a seamless garment and of some value, they determined not to rip it up, but rather to cast lots for it. So here sit the soldiers at the foot of the cross, oblivious as to the true identity of Christ, callously insensitive to His suffering, interested only in the garments they have stripped from His body.

How do you respond to the crucified Christ? Like the soldiers, are you only interested in what you can take from Him? The soldiers only saw value in Christ's garment, Christ Himself they treated with the utmost contempt and blasphemy. When we consider our own response to the crucified Christ, do we find that we treat Him in much the same way as did those Roman soldiers? Do we seek to derive a personal benefit from Christ's death on the cross while treating Christ

Himself with contempt and blasphemy? That is to say, do we look to Christ's death as the means of providing for us a source of forgiveness for our sins without any intention of giving up those sins and surrendering them to Christ? Do we view Christ's sacrifice as a means of providing for us a means of practicing "safe sin?" Do we wrongly and foolishly view His sacrifice as a convenient means that allows us to continue practicing sin without having to worry about the consequences of sin?

Such a view of Christ's atoning death is not only a horrible misunderstanding of the purpose of Christ's sacrifice, but it demonstrates blasphemous contempt for Christ Himself. The purpose of Christ's sacrifice is not merely to save us from the consequence of our sins, but to save us from the sins that merit the awful consequence of the righteous judgment of God. At the time of Jesus' birth, the angel Gabriel declared to Joseph, *"She shall bear a son, and you shall name him JESUS; for it is he that shall save his people from their sins"* (Matt. 1:21.) The purpose of Christ's sacrifice is not merely to save us from the consequence of our sins, but also to save us for a life of holiness and devotion to God: *"[Jesus Christ] gave himself for us, so that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people for his own possession—[a people who are] zealous for good works"* (Titus 2:14.) The benefits of Christ's sacrifice cannot be received apart from Christ Himself, they can only be enjoyed *"in Christ"*—that is to say, in a living relationship with Christ and by entrusting yourself into His hands. As the Apostle Paul points out in Ephesians 1:7, *"in whom [i.e.; in Christ] we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses."*

In responding to the crucified Christ, let us not be like the Roman soldiers who were only interested in what they could take from Christ. To do so will mean missing out on the very benefit you seek—for forgiveness and redemption are only found *"in Christ;"* note Romans 8:1, *"There is ... no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* To respond to the crucified Christ in the manner in which the Roman soldiers did, is an unconscionable abuse of Christ's sacrifice, for which the LORD will finally hold you accountable. In Jeremiah 7:9-10, 15a, the LORD declares,

*Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, <sup>10</sup>and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, We are safe—safe to do all these detestable things? ... <sup>15</sup>I will thrust you from my presence. (Jer. 7:9-10, 15a)*

This was the LORD's warning to Old Testament Israel when they abused His grace. How much more does this apply to those who abuse His ultimate expression of grace as it is offered in the sacrificial death of His Son Jesus Christ upon the cross of Calvary!

### III. Like John, Do You Recognize and Receive Him as the Promised Savior? (Jn. 19:25-37)

In beholding the crucified Christ, John sees the Scriptures of the Old Testament being fulfilled before his very eyes.

John records the Jews' request that the bodies be removed from their crosses (vs. 31.) It was contrary to Old Testament law to allow the dead bodies of executed criminals to hang exposed upon a tree after sunset:

*If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree,<sup>23</sup> you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse. You must not desecrate the land Jehovah your God is giving you as an inheritance. (Deut. 21:22-23)*

All the more imperative was it to remove the bodies because this was the day of preparation for the Sabbath. Therefore, at the command of Pilate, who was acting in response to the request of the Jews, the soldiers proceed to break the legs of the two criminals executed on either side of the Lord Jesus (vs. 32.) But when they come to Jesus, they find that He is already dead, and therefore they refrain from breaking His legs (vs. 33.) But perhaps as a means of insuring the fact of His death, one of the soldiers takes his spear and thrusts it into Jesus' side (vs. 34.)

In solemn astonishment, John see the Old Testament Scriptures being fulfilled before his very eyes, and he records his testimony:

*The man who saw this has given his testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he is speaking the truth, and [he gives his testimony] so that you also may believe. <sup>36</sup>These things happened so that the Scripture might be fulfilled, "Not one of his bones shall be broken." <sup>37</sup>And again another Scripture says, "They shall look at the one whom they pierced." (Jn. 19:35-37)*

John is referring to such passages as Exodus 12:46 (a reference to the Passover Lamb,) Psalm 34:19-20 (a reference to the Righteous One of God,) and Zechariah 12:10,

*It must be eaten inside one house; take none of the meat outside the house. Do not break any of the bones. (Ex. 12:46)*

*A righteous man may have many afflictions; but Jehovah delivers him out of them all. <sup>20</sup>He protects all his bones; not one of them is broken. (Psl. 34:19-20)*



*I will pour out upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication. They will look at me, the one they have pierced, and mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. (Zech. 12:10)*

John is now fully aware of the fact that he is standing in the presence of the promised Savior—the divine Son of God sent into the world by God the Father to offer up this most sacred sacrifice of His own holy body for the redemption of all who believe in Him, the One promised by the prophet Isaiah:

*... he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup>We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and Jehovah has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isa. 53:5-6)*

How do you respond to the crucified Christ? Like the Apostle John, may we recognize Him to be the promised Savior and entrust our lives unto Him:

*... for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (Jn. 3:16)*

*... as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God. (Jn. 1:12)*