

The Glory of the Cross, John 18:28 – 19:42

The biggest part of John's Gospel is about the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Passion of Jesus as it's often called. As early as chapter 12 Jesus is saying (John 12: 23) "The hour has come for the Son of Man (Jesus) to be glorified" then he talks about wheat falling to the ground in order to produce wheat and how those who love life will lose it and in John 12:27 says "Father, glorify your name". It is fair to ask, where is GLORY in the violent horror of the Cross?

John 18: 28-40 Jesus had been arrested and dragged off to the Jewish court where he had undergone 2 trials already, one before Annas and one before Caiaphas. They had no authority to have Jesus executed, which was their ultimate aim, so they had Jesus taken to the Roman Governor's palace. Pilate, the Governor, couldn't find any fault with Jesus and he wanted to release him. The crowd gathered outside had been stirred up to shout for the release of Barabas, a local terrorist, instead.

John 19: 1 – 16 Pilate had Jesus flogged. The soldiers tortured Jesus and humiliated him verbally and physically. Once more, Pilate tried to set Jesus free but the Jewish leaders called for him to be crucified.

One of the things that really stands out in these verses is in vv 10-11, Pilate asks Jesus "Are you refusing to answer me? Don't you know that I have power to free you or crucify you?" And Jesus replies to him "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore, the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin".

When Jesus spoke of "power from above" Pilate might have thought he was talking about Caesar. Jesus was talking about the power of God, God we speak of as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Pilate thought that he had power, but he showed that he didn't because he had already let the Jewish leaders force him to punish a man he believed was innocent. The same Jewish leaders who didn't actually have the power to harm Jesus but were able to pull Pilate's strings to make him do the harm they were determined to do to Jesus.

Jesus, in vv 10-11, was confronting Pilate with his lack of power and making clear that what was happening had been ordained by God from the ancient days, recorded by the Prophets, and was to lead to a display of the Glory of God.

Here's how much power Pilate had when he tried yet again to set Jesus free, the Jewish leaders suggested that he'd be in trouble with Caesar if he did that and he finally handed Jesus over to be crucified.

John 19: 17 – 27 The charge sheet, displayed over the cross, said "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews". The Leaders disputed that, demanded it be changed, but Pilate stood his ground on this one small issue.

The soldiers crucified Jesus, took his clothes and divided them, as it had been written in Psalm 22:18 .

Last Sunday we celebrated Mothering Sunday and in vv 25-27 we have this tender, loving piece where Jesus turned to his mother, Mary, standing with him at the foot of the cross as he suffered and died. How deep must her suffering have been? And he

arranges for his closest friend, John, to take care of his mother once he has gone. He wanted to know that his mother would be cared for. How do we, how can we, care for mothers whose children have died?

John 19: 28-37 We find in v. 30 that Jesus said “It is finished” and he gave up his spirit, and died. What was finished? Was it the torture of the cross that was finished? In human terms yes. More profoundly, it was the act of sacrificial death which would ensure that the price of sin was paid, that new life and freedom and forgiveness would be available to “whosoever” will believe. Reconciliation with God, life in all its fullness. This is what Jesus had achieved on the cross. This was the glory of the cross. This is what was “finished”, completed, done.

The Jewish leaders asked for the legs of the 3 being crucified to be broken to hasten their death. (They had Friday night dinner to get home for!) When the soldiers came to Jesus they found that he was already dead. One soldier plunged a spear into Jesus’ side to make sure he was dead. This was important. The Jewish leaders would later claim that the disciples had stolen Jesus’ body and/or that he hadn’t really been dead and so escaped the tomb. The fact that an armed guard was placed on the tomb so nobody could get in or get out didn’t stop them spreading these rumours to deny the resurrection but it is important for the Gospel writers that we know that Jesus had actually, physically, died on that cross.

John 19: 38-40 A closet disciple, Joseph from Arimathea, took the body of Jesus with Pilate’s permission. He, helped by Nicodemus (who’d come to speak to Jesus in secret in the night) did their best to prepare the body for burial quickly and placed him in a tomb in a garden.

Then it was Sabbath so all the Jewish leaders who had plotted and planned and lied and caused the death of an innocent man went off to do their religious rituals.

Where is the glory in this? Jesus had said in John 12 “The hour has come for me to be glorified!, and in v.27 “Father, glorify your name”. Where is the glory in this gory display of violence?

“Glory”, from the Latin “Gloria” means fame or renown. It is used in the Bible to describe manifestations of the presence of God. The glory of the cross, the glory of Jesus on the cross, doesn’t mean that anyone thinks it was fabulous. It means that we see something of God in the death of Jesus on the Cross. Suffering is an inevitable part of the human condition. Jesus suffered and died for us, for our sake, for our freedom. God’s perfect will is accomplished through the suffering of God in flesh, Emmanuel, God with us.

The death of Jesus had been planned and prophesied. This was God’s rescue plan. When the resurrected Jesus came to visit with his disciples, and then later with Thomas who’d been out at the time, Jesus showed them his hands and sides, the wounds of the cross. I have always been captivated by the fact that the risen, living Lord Jesus who could have been raised whole and unharmed, actually bore the wounds of the cross in his resurrected body. Glory came through suffering. The power of God lies in giving, not in getting or grabbing.

Jesus died so that we might live. And all honour and glory is his (not ours). We express our devotion and thanks and praise in lives given and lived for his honour, in his service. Forgiven, free and restored we surrender all that we believe to be our power and we bow at the cross.