

J. C. RYLE'S NOTES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN  
19:17-27

17. And he, bearing his cross, went forth into a place called *the place of a skull*, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha, 18. where they crucified him, and two others with him, one on either side, and Jesus in the center. 19. And Pilate wrote a title and put *it* on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. 20. Then many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city; and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin. 21. Then 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. 22. Pilate answered, What I have written I have written. 23. Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also *his* coat. Now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. 24. They said therefore among themselves, Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be, that the scripture might be fulfilled which says, They divided my raiment among them, and for my clothing they cast lots. Therefore the soldiers did these things. 25. Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the *wife* of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26. When Jesus therefore saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing by, he said to his mother, Woman, behold your son! 27. Then he said to the disciple, Behold your mother! And from that hour that disciple took her to his own *home*.

17.--[And He, bearing His cross.] It was the Roman custom to compel criminals, sentenced to crucifixion, to carry their own cross. Our Lord was thus treated like the vilest felon. "Furcifer," was the Latin name of ignominy and contempt given to the worst criminals. It means, literally, "cross-bearer."

Besser observes that our Lord, when a workman in the carpenter's shop at Nazareth, had willingly carried pieces of timber in the service of His foster-father. Here, with no less cheerfulness, He bears to Golgotha the timber of the cross, in order to raise the altar on which He is to be sacrificed and to do the will of His Father in heaven.

Whether the "cross" that our Lord bore was a straight piece of timber with another transverse piece fixed across it for the hands of the criminal to be nailed to, or whether it was a tree with two forked arms, admits perhaps of some little doubt. The almost universal tradition of the Churches is that it was the former, a cross made of two pieces. Yet it is worth remembering that it was very common to crucify on a tree such as I have described, that the Latin word for "cross-bearer" means literally "forked-tree-bearer," and that our Bible translators have four times spoken of the wood on which our Lord was crucified as "the tree." (Acts 5:30; 10:39; 13:29; 1 Peter 2:24.) The matter therefore is not quite so clear as some may think, though of course it is one of no consequence. The cross of two

pieces at right angles is certainly more picturesque than a common tree shaped like the letter Y, and the habitual use of the cross in Christian art and the general tradition of ecclesiastical history have combined to make most people regard the question as a settled one. Yet the undeniable use of forked trees in crucifying criminals, and the equally undeniable difficulty of carrying a cross of two transverse pieces compared with a forked tree, are points that really ought not to be overlooked. The matter, after all, is one of pure conjecture. But, to say the least, it is quite a disputable point whether the cross with which Christendom is so familiar (on the gable ends of churches, on tombs, in painted windows, in crucifixes, or in the simple ornamental form which ladies are so fond of wearing), the cross of two transverse pieces at right angles, is really and truly the kind of cross on which Christ was crucified! There is no proof positive that the whole of Christendom is not mistaken. Of course, if the cross itself had been preserved and found, it would settle the dispute. But there is not the slightest reason to suppose that it was preserved or treated with any respect either by Jews, Romans, or disciples. The famous story of the "discovery or invention of the cross" by the Empress Helena in 326 A.D. is a mere apocryphal legend invented by man, and deserves no more attention than the many pretended pieces of the true cross which are exhibited in Romish churches as sacred relics.

Ambrose says, quaintly enough, that the form of the cross is that of a sword with the point downward--above is the hilt toward heaven, as if in the hand of God, and below is the point toward earth, as if thrust through the head of the old serpent the devil.

One thing only is very certain. Whatever was the shape of the cross on which Jesus was crucified, it could not have been the huge, tall, heavy thing which painters and sculptors have continually represented it to be. To suppose, for instance, that any man could carry such an enormous weight of timber, as the cross is made to be in Rubens' famous picture of the "Descent from the Cross," is preposterous and absurd. A cross was manifestly not a larger thing than could be lifted and borne on the shoulders of one person. Some get over the difficulty by maintaining the theory that the transverse piece was the only part of the cross which the criminal carried. But there is no sufficient evidence that this was the case.

It is noteworthy that John is the only Evangelist who says that our Lord bore His own cross. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all say that Simon the Cyrenian was compelled to bear it. The explanation is probably this. Our Lord bore the cross for a short part of the way, from the judgment-seat to Golgotha. Weakness and physical exhaustion, after all the mental and bodily suffering of the last night, rendered it impossible for Him to carry it all the way. Just at the moment when His strength failed, perhaps at the city gate, the soldiers saw Simon coming into the city and pressed him into the service. As on other occasions, John records a fact which the other Evangelists for wise reasons passed over. It is interesting to remember that the circumstance is one which John must have seen in all probability with his own eyes.

That our blessed Lord, who had a body like our own and not a body of

superhuman vigor, should have been unable to carry the cross more than a little way need not surprise us at all, if we consider all that He had gone through to try His physical strength and tax His nervous system to the uttermost in the eighteen hours preceding His crucifixion.

It is hardly necessary to remark that the type of Isaac--bearing the wood for the sacrifice on Moriah in which he himself was to be the victim--was here fulfilled by our Lord. It is, moreover, a curious circumstance, mentioned by Bishop Pearson, that one Jewish commentator of Gen. 22:6 speaks of Isaac carrying the wood for the burnt offering "as a man carries his cross upon his shoulders."

[*Went forth.*] This expression shows clearly that our Lord went out of the city to be crucified. He was condemned in the open air; and "went forth" cannot mean out of Pilate's house, but went outside of Jerusalem, without the gates. Trifling as this incident may seem to a careless reader, it was a striking fulfillment of one of the great types of the Mosaic law. The sin offering on the great day of atonement was to be carried forth "without the camp" (Lev. 16:27). Our Lord came to be the true sin offering, to give His soul an offering for our sins. Therefore it was divinely overruled of God that, in order to fulfill the type perfectly, He should suffer outside the city. (See also Lev. 6:12-21.) St. Paul specially refers to this when he tells the Hebrew Christians, who were familiar with the law of Moses, that "Jesus suffered without the gate" (Heb. 13:12). The minutest details of our Lord's passion have a deep meaning.

[*Into a place...skull...Golgotha.*] The precise position of this place is not known certainly and can only be conjectured. We only know (from verse twenty) that it was "nigh to the city," that it was "outside" the walls of Jerusalem at the time of our Lord's crucifixion, and that it was near some public road, as there is mention in one Gospel of them "that passed by" (Matt. 27:39). So many changes have taken place during the long period of 1800 years in the boundary walls and the soil of Jerusalem, that no wise man will speak positively as to the exact whereabouts of Golgotha at this day. Though outside the walls 1800 years ago, it is far from unlikely that it is within the walls at this time.

(a) Some maintain, as most probable, that Golgotha was a place between the then existing wall of Jerusalem and the descent into the valley of the Kidron on the east side of the city, near the road leading to Bethany. In this case the cross must have been in full view of anyone standing on the tower of Antonia, in the temple courts, on the Mount of Olives, or upon the eastern wall of the city. If this is correct, the crucifixion might have been seen by hundreds of thousands of people at once with perfect ease; and from the sufferer being lifted up, as it were, in the air, must have been an event of extraordinary publicity. According to the advocates of this theory, the traditional site now assigned to the Holy Sepulcher is the true one.

(b) Others, however, who have carefully examined the topography of Jerusalem and are extremely likely to be wise and impartial judges, are decidedly of the opinion that Golgotha was on the north side of Jerusalem near the Damascus gate, and they repudiate altogether the site commonly

assigned to the holy sepulcher at the present time. An old and valued friend, who has walked repeatedly over this "debatable land," says, "I think the crucifixion took place on the north side of the city, near the present Damascus gate, on a platform of rock just above a valley which runs on in endless tombs nearly two miles. Beneath this platform is a garden of olives still, full of excavations. In one of these, I think, was the sepulcher."

(c) Others, and among them another friend who has traveled much in Palestine and published the results of his travels, incline to think that Golgotha was on the west side of Jerusalem near the Jaffa gate. The friend I now refer to says, in a letter to me on this subject, "When I was first in Jerusalem in 1857, I visited some extraordinary fissures and cracks in the rocks west of the city, reminding me of the expression, *the rocks rent*. (Matt. 27:51.) These fissures are now all filled up." Much, he adds, depends on the question whether Pilate resided in the tower of Antonia and had his judgment hall there, or in the tower of Hippicus. This, however, we have no means of ascertaining.

In the face of such conflicting opinions, I dare not speak positively, and I must leave my readers to judge for themselves. The question is one about which no one, it is clear, has any right to be heard unless he has actually seen Jerusalem.

Why the place was called "the place of a skull" we are not told and are left entirely to conjecture.

(a) Some think, as Gualter, Bullinger, Musculus, Gerhard, Burgon, Alford, Besser, and others, that the verse points to the bones, skeletons, and skulls of executed criminals that were lying about on Golgotha as the common place of execution. This theory, however, is open to the grave objection that it is most unlikely that dead men's bones would be left lying above ground so near the city when, according to the Mosaic law, they made any Jew unclean who touched them. The Pharisees, with their excessive scrupulosity about externals, were not likely to tolerate such a source of defilement close to the holy city! Moreover, John expressly says that in the place where Jesus was crucified "there was a garden" (John 19:41). This does not look like a place where dead men's bones and the skulls of criminals would be left lying about! The very mention of this garden would suggest the idea that the place was not ordinarily used for execution, and that the Pharisees chose it only for its singular publicity. If it was on the east side, we can well believe that they felt a diabolical pleasure in tormenting our Lord to the last by making Him die with the temple, the Mount of Olives, and His favorite Gethsemane before His eyes.

(b) Some think, as Lampe, Ellicott, and others, that the name "place of a skull" arose from the shape of the small rising ground, like a skull, on which the cross was fixed. That such small elevations of limestone rock are to be found in that vicinity is asserted by some travelers. To me there seems more probability in this theory than in the other. The name "Calvary," we should remember, is never used in the Greek; and the marginal reading in Luke 23:33, "the place of a skull," ought certainly to be in the text.

One thing alone is very certain. There is not the slightest authority for the common idea that the place where our Lord was crucified was a hill or mountain. The common expression in hymns and religious poetry, "Mount Calvary," is utterly incorrect and unwarrantable; and the favorite antithesis, or comparison between Mount Sinai and Mount Calvary, is so completely destitute of any Scriptural basis that it is almost profane! Anything more unlike, as a matter of fact, than Sinai and Golgotha cannot be conceived.

Origen, Cyprian, Epiphanius, Augustine, Jerome, and Theophylact all mention an old tradition, that Golgotha was the place where the first Adam, our forefather, was buried, and that the second Adam was buried near the first! This of course is a ridiculous, lying fable, as Noah's flood must have swept away all certainty about Adam's grave.

18.--[*Where they crucified Him.*] This famous mode of execution is so well known to every one that little need be said of it. The common mode of inflicting it, in all probability, was to strip the criminal, lay him on the cross on his back, nail his hands to the two extremities of the cross-piece (or fork of the cross), nail his feet to the upright piece (or principal stem of the cross), raise the cross on end and drop it into a hole prepared for it, then to leave the sufferer to a lingering and painful death. It was a death that combined the maximum of pain with the least immediate destruction of life. The agony of having nails driven through parts so full of nerves and sinews as the hands and feet must have been intense. Yet wounds of the hands and feet are not mortal and do not injure any great leading blood-vessel. Hence a crucified person, even in an eastern climate exposed to the sun, might live two or three days enduring extreme pain without being relieved by death, if he was naturally a very strong man and in vigorous health. This is what we must remember our blessed Lord went through when we read "they crucified Him." To a sensitive, delicate-minded person, it is hard to imagine any capital punishment more distressing. This is what Jesus endured willingly for us sinners. Hanging, as it were, between earth and heaven, He exactly fulfilled the type of the brazen serpent, which Moses lifted up in the wilderness. (John 3:14.)

Whether the person crucified was bound to the cross with ropes (to prevent the possibility of his breaking off from the nails in convulsive struggling), was stripped completely naked or had a cloth round His loins, had a separate nail in each foot or one nail driven through both feet, are disputed points which we have no means of settling. Some think, following Irenæus, Tertullian, and Justin Martyr, that there was a kind of seat or projection in the middle of the stem of the cross, to bear up the weight of the body, and also a place for the feet to rest on. Jeremy Taylor thinks, in support of this view, that the body of a crucified person could not rest only on the four wounds of hands and feet. Bishop Pearson also quotes a passage from Seneca, which seems to favor the idea. As to the nails, Nonnus, and Gregory Nazianzen say there were only three, and that one was driven through both feet at once. Cyprian says there were four. But these are matters about which we really know nothing, and it is useless to guess and speculate about them. Of one thing, however, we may be very sure. The

feet of a crucified person were much nearer the ground than is commonly supposed, and very likely not more than a foot or two from the earth. In this, as in other points, most pictures of the crucifixion are grossly incorrect, and the cross is made out to be a piece of timber so long and so thick that no one mortal man could ever have carried it.

Concerning the precise amount of physical suffering and the precise effect on the human body in a crucifixion, the following medical account by a German physician named Richter, quoted in Smith's Dictionary of the Bible, can hardly fail to interest a Bible reader. He says, (1) "The unnatural position and violent tension of the body caused a painful sensation from the least motion. (2) The nails being driven through parts of the hands and feet that are full of nerves and tendons, and yet at a distance from the heart, created the most exquisite anguish. (3) The exposure of so many wounds and lacerations brought on inflammation, which tended to become gangrene, and every moment increased the poignancy of suffering. (4) In the distended parts of the body more blood flowed through the arteries than could be carried back into the veins, and hence too much blood found its way from aorta into the head and stomach, and the blood vessels of the heart became pressed and swollen. The general obstruction of circulation caused an internal excitement, exertion, and anxiety more intolerable than death itself. (5) There was the inexpressible misery of gradually increasing and lingering anguish. (6) To all this we may add burning and raging thirst." (Smith's Dictionary of the Bible: article, Crucifixion.) On the whole subject of the cross and the sufferings connected with crucifixion, "Lipsius de Cruce" (published in 1595) is a most exhaustive book.

When we remember, beside all this, that our Lord's head was crowned with thorns, His back torn with savage scourging, and His whole system weighed down by the mental and bodily agony of the sleepless night following the Lord's Supper, we may have some faint idea of the intensity of His sufferings.

When we read "they" crucified, we are left to conjecture who it can refer to. It cannot be the Jews, because they could only stand by and superintend at the most, as the Roman soldiers would certainly not let the punishment be inflicted by any other hands than their own. It must either be the four soldiers who were the executioners, or else it must be interpreted generally after the manner of other places, for "He was crucified." Thus, in John 16:2, "*They* shall put you out of the synagogues." In that sentence "they" cannot refer to any person in particular. The simplest plan is to refer it generally to the whole party--Jews and Gentiles together.

[*And two others with Him, etc.*] We know from the other Gospels that these other two were malefactors and thieves. The object of crucifying our Lord between them is plain. It was intended as a last indignity and injury. It was a public declaration that He was counted no better than the vilest criminals.

Little as our Lord's enemies meant it, this very crucifixion between two thieves did two great things. One was that it precisely fulfilled Isaiah's

prophecy about Messiah: "He was numbered with the transgressors" (Isa. 53:12). The other was that it gave our Lord the opportunity of working one more mighty miracle, even in His last hours--the miracle of converting the penitent thief, forgiving his sins, and opening paradise to him. If His enemies had been content to crucify Him alone, this last trophy could not have been won and our Lord's power over sin and the devil would not have been exhibited. So easy is it for God to bring good out of evil and to make the malice of His enemies work round to His praise.

Augustine remarks that three very different persons hung together on the three crosses on Golgotha. One was the Savior of sinners. One was a sinner about to be saved. One was a sinner about to be damned. (On Psa. 34.)

Cyril sees in the two malefactors a type of the Jewish and Gentile Churches: the one rejected, impenitent, and lost; the other believing at the eleventh hour, and saved.

Many pious commentators remark that even on the cross our Lord gave an emblem of His kingly power. On His right hand was a saved soul whom He admits into His kingdom; on His left hand, a lost soul whom He leaves to reap the fruit of his own ways. There was right and left on the cross, even as there will be right and left, saved and unsaved, when He sits on the judgment-seat wearing the crown at the last day.

It only remains to add that the cruel punishment of crucifixion was formally abolished by the Emperor Constantine towards the end of his reign. It is an awful historical fact that when Jerusalem was taken by Titus, he crucified so many Jews around the city that Josephus says that space and room failed for crosses, and crosses could not be found in sufficient number for bodies! Reland well remarks, "They who had nothing but 'crucify' in their mouths were therewith paid home in their bodies."

19.--[*And Pilate wrote a title...cross.*] To fix a board with an inscription over the head of the person crucified, appears to have been a well-known custom, and is mentioned as such by classical writers. Some say it was a board covered with white gypsum with letters of black, and others say that the letters were red. Pilate therefore did nothing unusual. In our Lord's case it served two ends, whether Pilate meant them or not. For one thing, it proclaimed to all passers-by and all who saw the crucifixion, that Jesus did really suffer, that He was not at the last moment released and another punished in His stead, and that He was not taken away by miraculous interference from His enemies' hands. For another thing, it drew attention of all witnesses and passers-by to our Lord, and made it quite certain on which of the three crosses He hung. Without this, a person looking at three naked figures hanging on their crosses, from a little distance off, might well have doubted which of the three was Jesus. The title made it plain. That our Lord was regarded as no common everyday criminal, and that it was thought right to call special attention to Him, is evident from this title being put on His cross.

[*Jesus...Nazareth...King...Jews.*] Pilate's reasons for choosing to place this description of our Lord over His cross, we are left to conjecture. My

own decided opinion is that he worded the title as he did in anger and vexation, and with an intention to annoy and insult the Jews. He publicly held up to scorn their King, as a poor criminal from a mean village in Galilee, a fitting *king* for such a people! Whatever his motive may have been, it was curiously overruled by God, that even on the cross our Lord should be styled a "king." He came to be a King, and as a King He lived and suffered and died, though not acknowledged and honored by His subjects. "Nazarene" identified our Lord as the well-known Teacher from Galilee, who for three years had stirred the Jewish mind. "King" identified Him as the Person accused by the chief priests for claiming a kingdom, and formally rejected by them on the plea that they had no king but Cæsar. It was a very full and significant title.

A careful reader of the Gospels will not fail to observe that each Gospel writer gives this title in a slightly different form, and that there are in fact four versions of it. The question naturally arises, Which is correct? The versions do not at all contradict one another, but that of Mark, "the King of the Jews," is much shorter than that of John. No two, in a word, are exactly alike. In reply, it is fair to remind the reader that the inscription was written in three languages, and that it is far from unlikely that it was in one form in one language and in another form in a different language. The one common point in all the four versions is "the King of the Jews," and this was probably the only point that Mark, in his brief and condensed history, was taught to record. John gives the whole inscription, because he alone narrates the dispute between the priests and Pilate about it. If I may venture a conjecture, I should guess that Mark gives the Latin inscription, Luke the Greek, and Matthew and John the Hebrew one. But why it seemed good to the Holy Ghost that Matthew should omit the expression "of Nazareth," which John mentions, I do not pretend to say. It is precisely one of those things in which it is wisest to confess our ignorance and to be willing to wait for more light.

St. John alone records that Pilate "wrote" and "put" on the cross this title. We are not obliged to suppose that he did both with his own hands. The writing was almost certainly his own act. Putting the title on the cross he probably left to the soldiers.

The common pictures of the crucifixion, showing a kind of scroll or parchment over our Lord's head on the cross, are most probably in this, as in other details, most incorrect representations of the real facts. Moreover, most painters seem to forget that it was written three times over, being in three languages!

20.--[*Then many of the Jews read, etc.*] This seems to be one of John's parenthetical comments. It also reads like the report of an eye-witness, and this we know John was. He stood by and saw all that happened. It is as though he said, "I can testify that many of the Jews saw and read this title; some as they passed along the road which ran by, and some from the walls of the city, for the place was near the walls. It was an inscription, moreover, so contrived that hardly anyone in Jerusalem could fail to understand it, for it was written in the three languages most likely to be known--in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin."

It is almost needless to say that the title was in Hebrew, because every Jew would know it, Hebrew being the oldest language in the world and the language of the Old Testament; in Greek, because this was the language most known in all eastern countries and the language of all literary and educated people; in Latin, because this was the language of the Romans, the ruling nation in the world. The Roman soldiers would all understand the Latin, the Greek proselytes and Hellenistic Jews would all understand the Greek, and the pure Jews from Galilee and Judea, and every part of the earth, assembled for the passover, would all understand the Hebrew. All would go away to spread the tidings that one Jesus, the King of the Jews, had been put to death by crucifixion at the passover feast.

Henry remarks: "In the Hebrew the oracles of God were recorded, in Greek the learning of the philosophers, and in Latin the laws of the Empire. In each of these languages Christ is proclaimed King, in whom are hid all the treasures of revelation, wisdom, and power."

To this very day it is certain that no three languages can be more useful for a Christian minister to know, if he would be familiar with his Bible, than Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.

The last day alone, perhaps, will disclose the effect this title had on those who read it. When the priests and their companions saw it, they mocked and scoffed. "King indeed! Let Christ the King of Israel descend from the cross, and we will believe." (Mark 15:32.) But there was one man who saw the title probably with very different eyes. The penitent thief perhaps grasped at the word "King," and believed. Who can tell that this was not the root of his cry, "Lord remember me, when You come into *Your kingdom*" (Luke 23:42). Perhaps Pilate's title helped to save a soul!

Brentius remarks that when we think of the cross of Christ and the title on it, which so many read, we should remember there was another handwriting nailed to that cross spiritually, which no mortal could read. Jesus Christ, by His vicarious death for us, "Blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross" (Col. 2:14).

21.--[*Then the chief priests said, etc.*] This verse brings out the feeling which the sight of Pilate's title excited in the minds of the chief priests. They were annoyed and angry. They did not like the idea of this crucified criminal being publicly declared "the King of the Jews." They probably detected the latent scorn and irony which guided Pilate's hands and lay at the bottom of his mind. They did not like so public an announcement that they had crucified their own King, and wanted "no King but Cæsar." They were vexed at the implied reflection on themselves. Besides this, they were probably uncomfortable in conscience. Hardened and wicked as they were, they had, many of them we may be sure, a secret conviction they vainly tried to keep down--that they were doing a wrong thing, and a thing which by-and-by they would find it hard to defend either to themselves or others. Hence they tried to get Pilate to alter the title and to make it appear that our Lord was only a pretended King--an impostor who "said that He was King." This, they doubtless thought, would shift some of the guilt off their shoulders and make it appear that our Lord was

crucified for usurping a title to which He was legally proved to have no claim.

When and where the chief priests said this to Pilate does not appear. It must either have been when the whole party was leaving the judgment-seat for Golgotha, or after our Lord was nailed to the tree, or while the soldiers were nailing Him. Looking at St. John's account, one might fancy that the centurion sent word to Pilate that the prisoner was being nailed to the cross, and asked for a title to put over His head before the cross was reared. If we do not suppose this, we must believe that Pilate actually accompanied the party outside the walls and was only at a little distance off during the last horrible preparations. In that case he might easily write a title, and the priests might easily be standing by. The difficulty is to understand where the parties could be when the priests said "Do not write;" and it is one which must be left unsettled. It seems, however, certain that once put over our Lord's head, the title was not expected to be taken down; and the request was not to alter it, after being put up, but to write a different title before it was put up.

Bengel observes that this is the only place in St. John's Gospel where the chief priests are called "the chief priests *of the Jews*." He thinks it is intended to mark emphatically the bitter hatred with which the *priests* of the Jews regarded the *King* of the Jews.

We may well believe that even the wickedest men at their worst are often more sore and uncomfortable inwardly than they appear outwardly. It was this that probably lay at the bottom of the chief priests' remonstrance about the title. Herod's cry, "It is John the Baptist," after John was dead, is another case in point.

22.--[*Pilate answered...I have written.*] The hard, haughty, imperious character of the wicked Roman Governor comes out forcibly in these words. They show his contempt for the Jews: "Trouble me not about the title: I have written it, and I shall not alter it to please you." They suggest the idea that he was willing enough to be revenged on them for their obstinate refusal to meet his wishes and consent to our Lord's release. He was glad to hold them up to scorn and contempt as a people who crucified their own king. It is likely enough that between his wife and his own conscience and the chief priests, the Roman Governor was vexed, worried, and irritated, and savagely resolved not to gratify the Jews any further in any matter. He had gone as far as he chose in allowing them to murder an innocent and just person. He would not go an inch further. He now made a stand and showed that he could be firm and unyielding and unbending when he liked. It is no uncommon thing to see a wicked man, when he has given way to the devil and trampled on his conscience in one direction, trying to make up for it by being firm in another.

Calvin observes that Pilate, by publishing in three languages Christ's title, was "by a secret guidance made a herald of the Gospel." He contrasts his conduct with that of the Papists who prohibit the reading of the Gospel and the Scriptures by the common people. Gualter says much the same.

Bullinger remarks that Pilate acted like Caiaphas when he said, "It is expedient that one die for the people, not knowing what he said." Just so, Pilate little knew what testimony he was bearing to Christ's kingly office.

Leigh quotes a saying of Augustine: "If a man like Pilate can say, 'What I have written I have written, and will not alter,' can we think that God writes any in His book and blots him out again?"

23.--[*Then the soldiers, etc.*] The soldiers having now finished their bloody work--having nailed our Lord to the cross, put the title over His head, and reared the cross on end--proceeded to do what they probably always did, to divide the clothes of the crucified criminal among themselves. In most countries the clothes of a person put to death by the law are the perquisite of the executioner. So it was with our Lord's clothes. They had most likely first stripped our Lord naked before nailing His hands and feet to the cross, and had laid His clothes on one side till they had finished their work. They now turned to the clothes and, as they had probably done many a time on such occasions, proceeded to divide them. All four Evangelists particularly mention this, and evidently call our special attention to it.

The division into four portions shows clearly that there were four soldiers employed, beside the centurion, in the work of crucifixion. Many commentators see in them emblems of the four quarters of the Gentile world. This, however, seems to me fanciful. A quaternion, a small party of four, was a common division of soldiers in those days, just as "a file" of men is among ourselves. (See Acts 12:4.)

What the four portions of garments were we are left to conjecture. Hengstenberg thinks that they consisted of the covering of the head, the girdle, the shoes, and the undergarment fitting to the body. Matthew's report of the Sermon on the Mount contains a clear distinction between a coat and a cloak (Matt. 5:40). For these four portions the soldiers probably cast lots in order that each one might have his part decided, and to prevent wrangling about the unequal value of the portions.

Others think that the language of St. John about the coat which was "not torn," is strong evidence that all the rest of our Lord's clothes were torn into four pieces, and that Hengstenberg's division of them will not stand. It must be admitted that there is much probability in this. It seems very unlikely that so much should be said about this seamless garment being not torn if the other garments had not been torn in dividing them.

Concerning the "coat" here mentioned, it is not easy to say positively what part of our Lord's dress it was.

(a) Most commentators say that it was the long inner tunic, girt about the waist and reaching almost to the feet, which was the principal garment of an inhabitant of the East; a kind of loose smock-frock with sleeves, such as any one may see a pattern of in Leonardo da Vinci's famous picture of the Lord's Supper. The objection to this view, to my mind, is the grave difficulty of explaining how such a garment could be seamless and woven throughout, though I doubt not our Lord wore it and it was the hem of such

a garment the woman touched.

(b) Some few commentators think it was the outer garment; a loose mantle or cape thrown over the shoulders, which many wore above the tunic. Such a garment, having no sleeves, might easily be made in one piece without any seam, and perhaps was only drawn together or clasped about the shoulders. It is fair, nevertheless, to say that the Greek word here rendered "coat" ordinarily means the inward garment or tunic. (See Suicer and Parkhurst.) Becker's Charicles, however, on this Greek word, shows some reason for thinking it *sometimes* means the outward coat.

The reader must judge for himself. The question is one which cannot be settled positively either way, and happily is not of any moment. To my own mind, the objection to the first and common view is very serious indeed, if not insuperable; but it may not appear so to others. The only thing we know for certain is that one portion of our Lord's dress was not torn but made the subject of casting lots as to who should have it. As to the ancient fable that our Lord's coat was woven by His mother Mary when He was a child, grew with His growth, and never waxed old or wore out--it is a foolish apocryphal legend.

Bengel observes that we never read of our Lord "tearing" His own garments in desperate sorrow, like Job, Jacob, Joshua, Caleb, Jephthah, Hezekiah, Mordecai, Ezra, Paul, and Barnabas. (See Gen. 37:29; Numb. 14:6; Judges 11:35; 2 Kings 19:1; Esther 4:1; Ezra 9:3; Job 1:20; Acts 14:14.)

On the incident recorded in this verse, Luther remarks: "This distribution of garments served for a sign that everything was done with Christ, just as with one who was abandoned, lost, and to be forgotten forever." Even among ourselves the division, sale, or giving away of a man's clothes is a plain indication of his being dead or given up for lost, just as among soldiers and sailors, when dead or missing, the effects are sold or distributed.

Henry thinks that "the soldiers hoped to make something more than ordinary out of our Lord's clothes, having heard of cures wrought by the touch of the hem of His garment, or expecting that His admirers would give any money for them." But this seems unlikely and fanciful.

Our Lord was treated, we should observe, just like all common criminals--stripped naked and His clothes sold under His eyes, as one dead already and cast off by man.

It is noteworthy that in this, as in many other things, our Lord was in a striking manner our substitute. He was stripped naked, reckoned, and dealt with as a guilty sinner in order that we might be clothed with the garment of His perfect righteousness and reckoned innocent.

24.--[*Therefore they said among themselves, etc.*] In this verse we are told that the conduct of the soldiers was a precise fulfillment of a prophecy delivered a thousand years before (Psalm 22:18). That prophecy foretold not only that Messiah's garments should be parted and distributed, but that men should "cast lots for His vesture." Little did the four rough Roman soldiers think that they were actually supplying evidence of the

truth of the Scriptures! They only saw that our Lord's coat was a good and serviceable garment that it was a pity to tear, and therefore they agreed to cast lots as to who should have it. And yet, in so doing, they added to the great cloud of witnesses who prove the divine authority of the Bible. Men little consider that they are all instruments in God's hand for accomplishing His purposes.

The importance of interpreting prophecy literally and not figuratively is strongly shown in this verse. The system of interpretation which unhappily prevails among many Christians--I mean the system of spiritualizing away all the plain statements of the prophets and accommodating them to the Church of Christ--can never be reconciled with such a verse as this. The plain, literal meaning of words should evidently be the meaning placed on all the statements of Old Testament prophecy. This remark, of course, does not apply to symbolical prophecies such as those of the seals, trumpets, and vials in Revelation.

The typical meaning of this seamless and untorn coat of our Lord is a point on which fanciful theological writers have loved to dwell in every age of the Church of Christ. It represented, we are told by Augustine and many others, the unity of the Church, and it was an allusion to the priesthood of the Divine wearer! I frankly confess that I am unable to believe such notions, and I doubt extremely whether they were intended by the Holy Ghost. But it is a fact mentioned by Henry that "those who opposed Luther's separation from the Church of Rome urged much this seamless coat as an argument, and laid so much stress on it that they were called Inconsutilistæ--the seamless ones!"

As to the lying legend that this seamless coat was preserved and handed down to the Church as a precious relic, it is scarcely worthwhile to mention it, except as a melancholy illustration of the corruption of man and the apostasy of the Church of Rome. The holy coat of Trèves and its exhibition are a scandal and disgrace to Christianity. Nor is Trèves the only place where the Romish Church professes to have the Lord's coat. Which of them all is the original and true one no Pope has ever yet attempted to decide! Suffice it to say that anyone who can seriously believe that our Lord's seamless coat, after falling into the hands of a heathen Roman soldier, was finally treasured up as a relic, or that the cross itself was kept safe and escaped destruction, must be so credulous a person that argument is thrown away on him.

It is worth remembering that when the first Adam fell by sin and was cast out of Eden, God mercifully clothed him and covered his nakedness. When the second Adam died as our substitute and was counted "a curse" for us on the cross, He was stripped naked and His clothes sold.

The reason why John concludes the verse with the words "These things therefore the soldiers did," is not very apparent. Burgon suggests it may mean, "Such was the part which the soldiers played in this terrible tragedy. Uninfluenced by the Jews, without any direction from Pilate, these things the soldiers did." This, however, seems hardly satisfactory, because this was not all that the soldiers did. I prefer thinking that St. John means to say that he was actually an eye-witness of the soldiers

unconsciously fulfilling an ancient prophecy: "I myself saw, with mine own eyes, the four soldiers casting lots on my Lord's coat; and I can testify that I saw the words of the Psalmist literally fulfilled."

Lampe thinks that St. John makes this remark in order to show how literally Scripture was fulfilled by men who were totally ignorant of Scripture. The Roman soldiers, of course, knew nothing of the Psalms yet did the very things predicted in the Psalms.

25.--[*Now there stood by the cross, etc.*] A wonderfully striking incident is recorded in this and the two following verses, which is not found in the other three Gospels. St. John tells us that at this awful moment Mary the mother of Jesus and other women (two if not three) stood by the cross on which our Lord hung. "Love is strong as death;" and even amid the crowd of taunting Jews and rough Roman soldiers these holy women were determined to stand by our Lord to the last and to show their unceasing affection to Him. When we remember that our Lord was a condemned criminal, peculiarly hated by the chief priests and executed by Roman soldiers, the faithfulness and courage of these holy women can never be sufficiently admired. As long as the world stands, they supply a glorious proof of what grace can do for the weak, and of the strength that love to Christ can supply. When all men but one forsook our Lord, more than one woman boldly confessed Him. Women, in short, were the last at the cross and the first at the tomb.

It is interesting to consider who and what they were that stood by our Lord's cross as He hung upon it. We know that John, the beloved disciple, was there, though with characteristic modesty he does not directly name himself. Yet the twenty-sixth verse shows clearly that he was one of the party. He might well be the one that "Jesus loved." No Apostle seems to have had such deep feeling toward our Lord as John. Mary, the mother of our Lord (*never called the Virgin Mary in Scripture*), was there. We must suppose that she had come up from Galilee to the feast of the passover in company with the other women who ministered to our Lord. She must now have been comparatively old, at least forty-eight years old! Our Lord was born thirty-three years before his crucifixion. To represent her in pictures as a beautiful young woman at the time of the crucifixion is absurd. Who can doubt that when she saw her son hanging on the cross, she must have realized the truth of old Simeon's prophecy: "A sword shall pierce through your own soul also" (Luke 2:35). Very striking and instructive is it to observe how very rarely she is named in the Gospel history. Mary, the wife of Clopas, or Alpheus, was there. The Greek leaves it uncertain whether it means daughter or wife, but nearly all think it must be wife. She seems to have been the mother of James and Jude the Apostles and to have been related in some way to the Virgin Mary, either as sister or sister-in-law. Hence James is called the "Lord's brother." She too must have been nearly as old as the Virgin Mary, if we may judge by her having two sons who were Apostles. Mary of Magdala, in Galilee, commonly called Mary Magdalene, was also there. Of her we only know that Jesus had cast out of her seven devils, and that none of all the women who ministered to our Lord seem to have felt such deep gratitude to our Savior and to have demonstrated such deep affection. The common doctrine that she had once been a notorious breaker of the seventh commandment has no foundation in Scripture. She probably was the youngest of all the party, and as such had to risk more

and sacrifice her own feelings more than any in pressing through a crowd of enemies to the foot of the cross.

But were there only three women at the cross? This is a disputed question and one which will probably never be settled, since the Greek wording of the verse before us leaves the point open either way.

(1) Most commentators think that the words "His mother's sister" belong to "Mary the wife of Clopas," and are meant to define the relationship between that Mary and Mary the mother of our Lord.

(2) Others, as Pearce, Bengel, and Alford, think that "His mother's sister" means a fourth woman, and that this woman was Salome the mother of James and John. The strongest argument in favor of this view is the distinct statement in Matthew's account of the crucifixion that many women beheld the sight, "among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children"--that is, Salome (Matt. 27:56.) If she stood with Mary Magdalene looking on, why should we doubt that she stood with her at the cross? The suppression of her name is quite characteristic of John. She was his own mother, and he modestly keeps back her name as he keeps back his own. In what way she was the "sister" to the mother of our Lord we do not know. But there is no reason against it that I know of. According to this view the women at the foot of the cross were four: (1) Mary, the mother of Jesus; (2) the sister of our Lord's mother, *i.e.*, Salome, the mother of John who wrote this Gospel; (3) Mary, the wife of Alpheus and mother of two Apostles; and (4) Mary Magdalene.

The reader must decide for himself. The question happily is not one affecting our salvation. For myself, I must frankly declare my belief that the second view is the right one, and that there were four women, and not three only, at the foot of the cross. The objection that the word "and" is omitted before "Mary the wife of Clopas" is worthless. In almost every catalog of the Apostles the same omission may be noticed. (See Acts 1:13; Matt. 10:2; Luke 6:14.)

Whether all Christian women should always come forward and put themselves in such public and prominent positions as these holy women took up, is a grave question about which each Christian woman must judge for herself. Considerations of *physical* strength and nervous self-command must not be overlooked. The four women who stood by the cross neither fainted nor went into hysterics, but were self-controlled and calm. Let everyone be persuaded in their own minds. Some women can do what others cannot.

Why the fierce enemies of our Lord among the Jews and the rough Roman soldiers permitted these holy women to stand undisturbed by the cross, is a question we have no means of deciding. Possibly the Romans may have thought it only fair and reasonable to let a criminal's relatives and friends stand by him, when he could do the State no more harm, and they could not rescue him from death. Possibly the centurion who superintended the execution may have felt some pity for the little weeping company of weak women. Who can tell but his kindness was a cup of cold water which was repaid him a hundred-fold? He said before the day ended, "Truly this was the Son of God" (Matt. 27:54). Possibly John's acquaintance with the

high priest, already mentioned, may have procured him and his companions some favor. All these, however, are only conjectures, and we cannot settle the point.

The Greek word rendered "stood" is literally "had stood." Does not this mean from the beginning of the crucifixion?

26,27.--[*When Jesus therefore saw His mother, etc.*] The incident recorded in these two verses is wonderfully touching and affecting. Even in this trying season of bodily and mental agony, our blessed Lord did not forget others. He had not forgotten His brutal murderers, but had prayed for them--"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." He had not forgotten his fellow-sufferers by His side. When one of the crucified malefactors cried to Him, "Lord, remember me," He had at once answered him and promised him a speedy entrance into Paradise. And now He did not forget His mother. He saw her standing by the cross and knew well her distress, and felt tenderly for her desolate condition--left alone in a wicked world, after having lost such a Son. He therefore commended her to the care of John, His most loving and tenderhearted and faithful disciple. He told John to look on her as his own mother, and told His mother to look on John as her own son. No better and wiser arrangement could have been made in every way. None would care so much for the mother of Jesus as the disciple whom Jesus loved, and who lay in His bosom at the last supper. No home could be so suitable to Mary as the home of one who was, according to the view maintained above, son to her own sister Salome.

The lessons of the whole transaction are deeply instructive.

(a) We should mark the depth and width of our Lord's sympathies and affections. The Savior on whom we are bid to repose the weight of our sinful souls is one whose love passes knowledge. The shallow, skin-deep feelings of others, we all know, continually chill and disappoint us on every side in this world. But there is one whose mighty heart-affection knows no bottom. That one is Christ.

(b) We should mark the high honor our Lord puts on the fifth commandment. Even in His last hour He magnifies it and makes it honorable by providing for His mother according to the flesh. The Christian who does not lay himself out to honor father and mother is a very ignorant religionist.

(c) We should mark that when Jesus died Joseph was probably dead, and that Mary had no other children beside our Lord. It is absurd to suppose that our Lord would have commended Mary to John if she had had a husband or son to support her. The theory of some few writers, that Mary had other children by Joseph after Jesus was born, is very untenable and grossly improbable.

(d) We should mark what a strong condemnation the passage supplies to the whole system of Mary-worship, as held by the Roman Catholic Church. There is not here a trace of the doctrine that Mary is patroness of the saints, protectress of the Church, and one who can help others. On the contrary, we see her requiring protection herself and commended to the care and protection of a disciple! Hengstenberg remarks: "Our Lord's design was not

to provide for John but to provide for His mother." Alford observes: "The Romanist idea that the Lord commended all His disciples, as represented by the beloved one, to the patronage of His mother is simply absurd."

(e) Finally, we should mark how Jesus honors those who honor and boldly confess Him. To John, who alone of all the eleven stood by the cross, He gives the high privilege of taking charge of His mother. As Henry pleasantly remarks, it is a sign of great confidence and a mark of great honor to be made a trustee and a guardian by a great person, for those he leaves behind at his death. To the women Jesus gives the honor of being specially named and recorded for their faithfulness and love in a Gospel which is read all over the world in 200 languages.

The Greek words rendered "his own home" mean literally "his own things." It is a thoroughly indefinite expression. We can only suppose it means that in the future--from that day--wherever John abode the mother of our Lord abode also. His home, in a word, became her home. There is no evidence whatever that John had any home in Jerusalem. If he had any home at all, it must have been in Galilee near the lake of Gennesaret.

Bengel, Besser, Ellicott, and Alford, from the phrase "hour," suggest that John took Mary home *immediately*, so that she did not see our Lord die, and then returned to the cross." This, however, seems to me very improbable. The mother of our Lord would surely stay by the cross to the last, if any woman did. John would not leave the cross, in my opinion, for a minute. His narrative of the crucifixion reads like that of an eye-witness from first to last.

Hengstenberg takes the same view that I do.

The word "woman" in the twenty-sixth verse is noteworthy. It must not be pressed too far as implying the slightest disrespect or lack of affection. The whole transaction here narrated overthrows such an idea. But I think it is remarkable that our Lord does not say "Mother." And I cannot help thinking that, even at this awful moment, He would remind her that she must never suffer herself or others to presume on the relationship between herself and Him, or claim any supernatural honor on the ground of being His mother. Henceforth she must daily remember that her first aim must be to live the life of faith as a believing woman, like all other Christian women. Her blessedness did not consist in being related to Christ according to the flesh, but in believing and keeping Christ's Word. I firmly believe that, even on the cross, Jesus foresaw the future heresy of "Mary-worship." Therefore He said "Woman" and did not say "Mother."

Besser remarks: "Some old writers, as Bonaventura, say that Christ perhaps avoided the sweet name of *mother* so that He might not lacerate Mary's heart with such a tender word of farewell. Others see in Christ's manner of speaking a reference to the seed of the *woman* who was to bruise the serpent's head. The most obvious view is that the Lord, through this name *woman*, would direct His mother into that love which knows Christ no more after the flesh (2 Cor. 5:16), and would also declare to us that in the midst of His work of atonement He felt Himself equally bound close to all sinners, and that He was not nearer to His mother than He was to you and

me."