

“Behold the Man!” (Jn. 18:39-19:5)

1. Pardon Substitution (18:39)
  - a. A clever way out. The custom of pardon. Craig Keener explained: “Although unattested in extant Palestinian sources (as are many customs), the specific custom mentioned here is the sort of custom the Romans would have allowed. Roman law permitted two kinds of amnesty, the *indulgentia* (pardoning a condemned person) and—what Pilate probably has in mind here—*abolitio* (acquitting a person before judgment). Romans and Greeks seem to have granted mass amnesty at some other regular feasts, and Romans occasionally acquitted prisoners in response to the cries of crowds; Roman provincial officials were also permitted to follow previous officials’ precedents or provincial customs.”<sup>1</sup>
  - b. “King of the Jews.” Pilate, feeling the need to release innocent Jesus, somewhat mockingly calls Him the “King of the Jews” to poke at Jesus’ accusers.
2. Person Substitution (18:40)
  - a. Pilate’s plan backfires and they call for Barabbas.
  - b. Because Jesus had a significant following, Pilate could have used their cries for His release to appease his conundrum. However, the mob always rules and the self-righteous leaders of establishment ruled the mob.
  - c. They opted for a murderer (Mk. 15:7) and insurrectionist to be released rather than Jesus. Carson sums up the Gospel’s brief description of Barabbas: “All four canonical Gospels tell us a little of Barabbas (whose full name may have been Jesus Barabbas: there is a variant reading in support of the longer name in Mt. 27:16, 17). He was a *lēstēs* (lit. ‘one who seizes plunder’). In the hands of some first-century authors, however, the word depicts not simply a brigand, but a terrorist (from the Roman point of view), a guerilla (from the nationalist perspective); hence niv’s *had taken part in a rebellion*. He had participated in bloody insurrection (Mk. 15:7).”<sup>2</sup>
3. Punishment Substitution (19:1)
  - a. Another clever solution to Pilate’s conundrum was to have Jesus scourged rather than crucified.
  - b. Lu. 23:13-16. Punish and then release was the plan.
  - c. 3 forms of severity: Carson explained:
    - i. Flogging administered by the Romans could take one of three forms: the *fustigatio*, a less severe beating meted out for relatively light offences such as hooliganism, and often accompanied by a severe warning; the *flagellatio*, a brutal flogging administered to criminals whose offences were more serious; and the *verberatio*, the most terrible scourging of all, and one that was always associated with other punishments, including crucifixion. In this last form, the victim was stripped and tied to a post, and then beaten by several torturers (in the Roman provinces they were soldiers) until they were exhausted, or their commanding officer called them off. For victims who, like Jesus, were neither Roman citizens nor soldiers, the favoured instrument was a whip whose leather thongs were fitted with pieces of bone or lead or other metal. The beatings were so savage that the victims sometimes died. Eyewitness records report that such brutal scourgings could leave victims with their bones and entrails exposed.

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<sup>1</sup> Keener, C. S. (1993). [The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament](#) (Jn 18:39). InterVarsity Press. NIV New International Version.

<sup>2</sup> Carson, D. A. (1991). [The Gospel according to John](#) (pp. 595–596). Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

What beating, then, did Pilate administer to Jesus? There appear to be two possibilities.

(1) The scourging was the most brutal, the *verberatio*, Mark’s *phragellōsas* (Mk. 15:15), commonly meted out to a victim about to be crucified to weaken and dehumanize him. But if John is referring to the same beating, then it is necessary to follow Blinzler (p. 334), who argues that the aorist participle in Mk. 15:15 refers to a scourging administered to Jesus *before* Pilate delivered the death sentence. Thus the discrepancy in time between John and Matthew/Mark is cleared up. But for three reasons, this is quite unlikely. First, when an aorist particle (like Mark’s *phragellōsas*) follows the finite verb on which it depends (*paredōken*, ‘handed him over’), it usually refers to a succeeding event; second, it is hard to imagine any Roman prefect administering the *verberatio* before sentencing; and third, it is so brutal that it ill accords with the theme of Luke and of John, that Pilate at first found Jesus innocent and merely wanted to administer enough punishment to be able to appease Jewish officialdom and then let Jesus go.

(2) It is better to follow Sherwin-White (pp. 27–28), who argues that the flogging threatened in Luke and reported here in John is the *fustigatio*, the least severe form, and was intended partly to appease the Jews and partly to teach Jesus a lesson (*cf.* Luke’s *paideusas*; John’s *emastigōsen*, ‘had [him] flogged’, is a more generic description) for being something of a trouble-maker. The chronology of Luke and John is correct. But this means that Jesus received a second scourging, the wretched *verberatio*, after the sentence of crucifixion was passed. This would hasten death, and the nearness of the special Sabbath of that week provided the officials with some pressure to ensure that the agony of crucifixion, which could go on for days, would not be permitted to run on too long (Jn. 19:31–33). This also explains why he was too weak to carry his own cross very far (*cf.* notes on v. 17).<sup>3</sup>

- ii. Other scholars like Keener agrees: “Because Pilate has not yet pronounced sentence, the beating Jesus receives is a lesser one. Pilate may hope that the blood it draws would satisfy Jesus’ accusers (19:5).”<sup>4</sup>
- iii. Scripture seems to clearly testify that Jesus ultimately did receive the ultimate scourging. In Isa. 52:14, we read that the Sin-Bearing/Suffering Servant would be marred beyond the appearance of any man! A supreme irony: the perfect man was beaten – not just beyond description of identification of which man but between man and beast! “And His form more than the sons of men.” Astonishing!

#### 4. Potentate Substitution (19:2-3)

- a. The Mocking Games (2) Keener: **19:2**. Soldiers played games like throwing knucklebones, coins or dice; the chance to play games with this prisoner would come as a welcome respite from their customary boredom in a foreign land. Common, coarse street mimes seem to have often included mock kings arrayed in mock splendor; the Jewish ruler Agrippa I was ridiculed in this manner in Alexandria. ¶Greek vassal princes typically wore a purple

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Blinzler J. Blinzler, *Der Prozeß Jesu* (Regensburg: Pustet, <sup>4</sup>1969). Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (IVP, 1987).

Sherwin-White A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Oxford University Press, 1963).

<sup>3</sup> Carson, D. A. (1991). *The Gospel according to John* (pp. 597–598). Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

<sup>4</sup> Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Jn 19:1). InterVarsity Press.

“Behold the Man!” (Jn. 18:39-19:5)

chlamys—purple dye being the most expensive—and a wreath of gilded leaves. The “purple robe” that the soldiers put on Jesus may have been a faded scarlet lictor’s robe or an old rug. The crown of thorns, perhaps from the branches of the thorny acanthus shrub or from the date palm (the latter would have looked more realistic), may have been meant to turn mainly outward (mimicking the wreaths of Hellenistic kings) rather than painfully inward; nevertheless, some thorns must have scraped inward, drawing blood from Jesus’ scalp. Only the highest king would wear an actual crown instead of a wreath, so they are portraying him as a vassal prince.<sup>5</sup>

- b. The Crown’s Symbolism
  - i. Rule of King/Monarch
  - ii. As noted above, the makeshift crown and robe were meant to mock, humiliate, and discredit Jesus.
  - iii. Majesty/Authority
  - iv. Yet Jesus’ Crown was that of thorns, symbolizing His substitution for the penalty of our sins – seen in Gen. 3:18. The immediate consequences for the first couple’s sins included (specifically for the man) that though he would have authority over the woman v. 16, he would have to toil laboriously for the cursed ground would produce “thorns and thistles” indicative of sin’s negative results. And yet Jesus bore those sins for us – conquering with a crown of cursed thorns.
- c. Disdain for the holy (3). Seemingly with no pity at all, they add injuries to insult – on a man deemed innocent by Pilate! Nevertheless, the Jews were more guilty of their plotting to kill Jesus (e.g. v. 11; 9:41; 18:14, 28-32; Mat. 27:1-2). “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him” (John 1:11). Why? Jn. 3:19. [Excursus: Unity is not harmony. The music of unity can be pleasant or disturbing. Likewise, unity can be misguided or even evil e.g. v. 6. A recent example was the regular season game between the Bills and Bengals when Demar Hamlin suffered cardiac arrest and laid unresponsive to CPR for almost ten minutes. It seemed as if the entire filled stadium was in prayer for him. God only knows how many millions at home etc. joined in united prayer for Hamlin. However, how many praying souls to that point were blatantly defying God with their actions, attitudes, apathy, and agendas? Do you think that because of their unity, they were heard? Do you think that because of the one’s calling in unison for Jesus’ crucifixion, God’s answer to their demand was “yes”? I suggest that God’s providential path to Jesus’ crucifixion was not because of the plotting, demanding, manipulating, and fearful tactics employed to secure Jesus’ death, but rather for those who say to Jesus’ proclamation that we are evil and must repent and fully trust God’s Person and work to make them righteous. It was for those who disdain themselves not Jesus for whom He died.]
- d. From Richard Phillips’ commentary on John: Harry Ironside illustrates this truth with a story of two sermons preached at a church one Sunday. In the morning, a visiting preacher gave a marvelous oration on the beauty of virtue. He concluded, “Oh, my friends, if virtue incarnate could only appear on earth, men would be so ravished with her beauty that they would fall down and worship her.” Many left impressed by the stirring oration and returned in the evening to hear a gospel minister preach about Christ crucified. He closed by saying, “My friends, Virtue Incarnate *has* appeared on earth, and men instead of being ravished ... cried out, ‘Away with him! Crucify him!’ ” As the preacher explained, man in his sin hates God’s

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<sup>5</sup> Keener, C. S. (1993). [\*The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament\*](#) (Jn 19:2). InterVarsity Press.

“Behold the Man!” (Jn. 18:39-19:5)

holiness and will do anything to rid himself of the light of Christ.<sup>2</sup> This is why Jesus the Lamb of God appeared before God’s ancient covenant people only to be rejected and despised.<sup>6</sup>

5. Presentation Substitution (4-5)

- a. Punished w/o blame (4). No less than three times does Pilate exclaim Jesus’ innocence e.g. 18:38; 19:4, 6 cf. v. 12.
- b. Proclamations:
  - i. Foreshadowed in Exod. 12:5 typified in the spotless sacrificial Passover (substitutionary) lamb cf. Jn. 1:29. →
  - ii. The Father’s own testimony: Mat. 3:15-17; 17:5; Jn. 12:28.
  - iii. Also see Judas’s own regret/admission Mat. 27:4.
  - iv. Jesus’ challenge Jn. 18:23 cf. 8:46.
  - v. Peter and author of *Hebrews* testimony, respectively: 1 Pet. 1:19; Heb. 9:14.

6. Punitive Substitution (6)

- a. Multifaceted Man. Staying within our context and thus only considering immediate referents, I need not turn a page to produce this following list of roles this Man fulfilled(s).
- b. In order to procure our redemption, Jesus necessarily wore all these hats in order to be our rightful Substitute:
  - i. Savior = Jesus’ name.
  - ii. Servant = Isaiah’s Servant Songs, particularly Isa. 52:13-53:12.
  - iii. King = His title and claim, also linked with “the Man” →
  - iv. Son of David = King who will build His Temple (2 Sam. 7:13 also see “Branch” below)
  - v. Lamb = as discussed previously
  - vi. Branch = Zech. 6:12-13 which segues with the →
  - vii. Priest = Zech. 6:11, 13 cf. our true and only High Priest (Heb. 2:17; 4:14-15). Not only is He the High Priest but the unblemished offering (Lamb). And not only is He the Lamb of God, He is the Temple in which He offers Himself – He is Priest, Sacrifice, and Temple hence He came “to build the Temple of the LORD.” Many Christians need to grasp what the Reformers acknowledged and what Paul and Peter explicitly taught viz. that we are the Temple e.g. 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21; 1 Pet. 2:4-5 cf. Zech. 6:12-13. Those adhering to the fictional “Left Behind” series need a new NT Temple paradigm. The only literal block building referred to in the NT is the Temple proper (rebuilt by Herod) left desolate by Jesus and destroyed in AD 70 as He most astonishingly prophesied (Mat. 24:1-35). ¶This is not some academic theological side trail – it is very practical to get the concept or else why continue conveying the reality? We must learn the NT paradigm of Temple, conquering, sacrifice, etc. W/o the correct understanding, we will be misled or confused at best and working against Christ at worst. Re: the Temple: it’s not about ushering two thirds of the Jewish population into Palestine to be slaughtered. Conversely, it’s about offering our bodies, minds, agendas to the LORD as priests seeking to reconcile our fellow man (2 Cor. 5:17-21). Re: victory: it’s not about numbers, buildings, approval, and passivism but about remaining faithful in

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 5:1468.

<sup>6</sup> Phillips, R. D. (2014). *John* (R. D. Phillips, P. G. Ryken, & D. M. Doriani, Eds.; 1st ed., Vol. 2, p. 522). P&R Publishing.

opposition, staying true to biblical convictions rather than conveniently distorting clear and difficult commands/standards/virtues.

- viii. The Man = as prophesied in Zechariah, this Man is the only man who could walk through the singular door hinged on the accumulative prophesies of all those in the OT! “Behold the Man!” Pilate could not understand the significance of his own presentation of Jesus. Even the grandiose prophetic pronouncement of this King/Priest in *Zechariah* only gives a fraction of the picture. Though not directly referred to in this chapter, we can still complete the portrayal of the triad office of Messiah by considering Jesus’ prophetic words in this passage e.g. 18:20-23, 36-37; 19:11). Furthermore, and this has to do directly with our text and Jesus’ divine prophetic revelation; He is the perfect icon of God (Heb. 1:3). As a man, not unlike Adam yet from above, He represented all men (expound on the federal headship of both Adams). The Roman emperors had statues of themselves displayed throughout their governed territory so as to represent and remind the citizens who was in authority. It was an image (lit. “icon”) with sober significance. Regarding this concept, N. T. Wright wrote the following:

The Romans weren’t the first or the last to do it. They set up likenesses, images of themselves, so that the local people could look at them and say to themselves: that’s the man who rules over us. That’s the man we owe allegiance to. That’s the man who has brought peace and justice to the world.

(And perhaps they might add, under their breath: That’s the man we are paying such high taxes to! That’s the man whose army killed all our fighting men! That’s the man we’d like to get rid of!)

The idea of someone putting an image of themselves in the country they rule is an important clue to understanding the very first chapter of the Bible. In Genesis, chapter 1, God creates the **heavens** and the earth. He makes the sea, the dry land, the plants, the fish, the birds and the animals. This is his world. This is the world over which he now rules. This is the world he wants to respond to him in love and gratitude.

So God places, within this new world, an image, a statue of himself. Except, of course, because of who God is, it isn’t a statue made of stone or wood. It is itself a living being, like the animals but also unlike. This image is there for a purpose: so that, through this image, God can rule over his new world wisely and lovingly.

And also that, in coming under the rule of this image, the creation can properly honour him, its creator.<sup>7</sup>

- ix. Therefore, like the first Adam, Jesus was the federal head of all His posterity and He emanated the image of God. But unlike Adam, Jesus is God the creator endowed with flesh. Therefore, as He stood before Pilate, His accusers, the Jews, and all the world at the center of history – He stood as the divine man, the King of truth (Jn. 18:37), the King of all the earth (read Ps. 24) who conquered evil, sin, death, hell, and the grave and ascended the mount of God. The Man decked in a bloody attire, scourged, mocked, maligned, and to be beaten to exhaustion and shamefully crucified is the King of Glory!

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<sup>7</sup> Wright, T. (2004). *John for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 11-21* (pp. 117–118). Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

“Behold the Man!” (Jn. 18:39-19:5)

- x. This “Man” is the only way to the Father (Jn. 14:6). The only name given among men by which we are saved (Acts 4:12). The Man who is the only Mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5). Christians are not arrogant, claiming they have the only way of salvation – rather, they are the only ones acquiescing to God’s prescribed Priest who reconciles all who will come to Him in repentance and faith (cf. Lu. 13:3; Heb. 7:25; Mat. 11:28-30; Jn. 5:39-40; 8:24 (see context vv. 21-26)).
7. Personal Substitution (18:40)
- a. Looking back to ch. 18’s last verse, we can consider what some commentators have read between the lines so to speak. Though what they offer is not recorded in the accounts (although all accounts record the Barabbas substitution) the following is culturally and contextually informed and thus possible or even plausible. Furthermore, it offers an obvious application.
  - b. Richard Phillips wrote:

We should consult one last person. While Jesus stood before the crowd at the Praetorium, Barabbas sat imprisoned in the Tower of Antonia some fifteen hundred feet away. Barabbas would have been too distant to hear anything that Pilate said, but the loud answers of the crowd would have resounded in his cell. Pilate asked which prisoner the crowd desired to release, and Barabbas heard the loud cry of his name. Pilate responded, as Matthew records, “Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” Barabbas heard nothing of that, but the crowd’s answer arrived loud and clear: “Let him be crucified!” (Matt. 27:22). Pilate responded, “Why, what evil has he done?” but Barabbas heard only the loudly shouted response, “Let him be crucified!” (27:23). “Barabbas ... Let him be crucified! ... Let him be crucified!” Imagine then, with those dreadful cries ringing in his ears, the sinking heart and trembling hands of the insurrectionist as the fall of heavy feet sound in the corridor, the soldiers approaching his room to inflict the punishment that Barabbas knows he deserves. He hears the sound of the keys, his terror mounting as the door swings open. Yet instead of receiving death, Barabbas is set free. ¶What does Barabbas find as he emerges into the dreary daylight of Jerusalem on that Passover day? A crowd follows a bloodied man carrying a cross. It is a man acquitted of all guilt, yet trudging in solitary condemnation. As he inquires further, the truth unfolds for Barabbas: Jesus is dying in his place. Hearing the hammer blows nailing Jesus to the cross, did Barabbas cry out in wonder, “Those blows were meant for me, but Jesus has taken my cross”?<sup>8</sup>
  - c. The application is apparent viz. Jesus took my place. The righteous/divine Son of God, Son of Man, and royal Son of David (Ps. 110) the King of glory died for me. Rather than wielding the scepter to proclaim judgment, he was beaten with a rod (Mk. 15:19). Rather than sitting on the throne with a royal robe, he was covered with a Roman’s robe being sentenced from Pilate’s bema seat. And rather than wearing a brilliant radiant crown of gold signifying unquestioned power, authority, and majesty; He conquered wearing the tormenting/primitive crown which bore the sign of man’s curse of sin.

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<sup>8</sup> Phillips, R. D. (2014). *John* (R. D. Phillips, P. G. Ryken, & D. M. Doriani, Eds.; 1st ed., Vol. 2, p. 529). P&R Publishing.