

Sermon Discussion Questions & Follow-up Notes
March 17, 2024
Rev. Dr. Andrew Keuer

Sermon Text for Lent 5: John 19:17-22

Title: “His Own Cross” / Series: “Things He Carried”

Core Observations of the Texts

1. Things He Carried: Our sermon series this Lent 2024 has focused on the items Christ carried during his last hours. John’s Gospel gives focus to these physical items, and what has emerged in previous weeks is that a particular aspect of human culture is behind each item Jesus carries. In our first week, He held a whip of cords so He could engage the temptations and entanglements from the economic sphere of life. We then looked at the purpose robe, which Pilate used to mock and express cynicism, two temptations that still mark the political sphere in our world today. The crown of thorns, in John’s account is woven together by the soldiers (see John 19:2), and in wearing it, Jesus engages the unjust use of pain to which military personnel can be tempted in their line of duty. The shackles and chains were brought forward by religion – first by the Jewish religious leaders who wanted to “chain-up” or “put God in a box”, but then by the disciples of Jesus in 19:6 and 19:40. As we turned this week to 19:17 where Jesus carries the cross, we notice that no group or individual foists it upon Christ – the carrying of the cross is unique in that it was entirely Jesus’ idea.

2. The carrying of the cross: John’s Gospel emphasizes that Jesus picked up the cross himself (probably around 25-50 pounds of cypress wood), and that he walked a good distance (probably a little over ½ mile). Given the exhaustion from being up all night under intensive examination without food or drink and from the physical beatings he received all morning, Jesus must have shuffled slowly through the city. His march gave Pilate time to create a tri-lingual message board above where he would hang (19:20), and it gave the Jewish leaders time to unsuccessfully dispute the message (19:21).

3. The meaning of carrying the cross: Jesus picked up the cross, because only if He did so would he be allowed back outside to be among the crowds whom He loved. In other words, Jesus carried the cross to be present in love to those in the city. Similarly, when Jesus commands us as His followers to take up a cross by our own decision (see Mark 8:34), He is calling us to be willing to bear any burden involved in being present to those whom you are called to love in Jesus’ name.

Questions to Ponder

1. A cross carried for you: Share with a friend or small group a time when someone carried a cross so they could remain lovingly present in your life.

2. Types of crosses: In the sermon we pondered three types of crosses: for prodigals, for those in a time of weakness, and for those going through ‘growing pains’. Of these three, which stood out to you? Which of the three is the most relevant to your life right now?

Notes: Historical details about the size and wood used for Roman crosses in the first century was drawn from Borg & Crossan’s *The Last Week* and from Jim Bishop’s *The Day Christ Died*. The story from Tom Long was heard at a pastor’s gathering in Abilene, Texas about a year ago.