



John 19:28-37
So That You May Believe: John
“Jesus’ Cancel Culture”

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Palm Sunday

The last few years, as you’re probably aware, there has been a lot of talk about “cancel culture.” I don’t think it’s always understood what it is, so I looked up a few definitions this week. They were all about the same, but this one was easiest to follow. **Dictionary.com defines “cancel culture” as: “the phenomenon or practice of publicly rejecting, boycotting, or ending support for particular people or groups because of their [those people’s/groups’] socially or morally unacceptable views or actions.”** Now, the phrase might be new, but the idea of rejecting support for people or groups because of their unacceptable views or actions is not new.

For instance, when Jesus came into Jerusalem on the colt, that we celebrate and remember on this Palm Sunday, Luke tells us (19:39) that some Pharisees were disturbed at the noise of the crowd and the energy and adoration they had for Jesus, and so they asked Jesus to rebuke the crowd. To get them to hush up. They wanted Jesus to cancel the crowd – and really, also for them to cancel Jesus.

So, this isn’t a new phenomenon. And that isn’t the only time Jesus encounters it. There’s one instance of cancel culture that is connected to today’s passage, and again Jesus is at the center of it. So, as we continue our series in the Gospel of John, let’s read today’s passage and get into what that is. We are in **John 19:28-37**. This is God’s Word to you and me today...

I want to start with the last 2/3 or so of what we just read, because some things happen that might raise some questions for us. For instance, we might wonder what the day of Preparation is. **The day of Preparation was the day before the Sabbath day.** The Jewish Sabbath was and is Saturday, so that makes this Friday. That fits with the timeline of events as we’ve been reading the last several weeks, with the Passover meal being on Thursday, though the whole week is known as the Passover and there were several meals and gatherings that would happen all week long. But this day was a day to prepare for the Sabbath – probably a lot of which was taking care of things on this day, so that the Sabbath could really be a Sabbath.

We might wonder about breaking the legs of those on the crosses. **The breaking of legs was done to speed up death on the cross.** At this point, if any of the three were still alive, there was no way they were going to stay alive through the Sabbath day, and the Jewish leaders didn't want the bodies up there through the Sabbath. So, to make sure they died on Friday, the soldiers broke their legs, because that made it impossible to lift oneself up by the legs in order to breathe. But when they came to Jesus – who they probably saved for last because of who he was and also because some had told them he had in fact already died – when they come to him they see that yes, he is dead.

Then we get another somewhat cryptic insertion of an unnamed person in verse 35 as we've seen other times in John, **“The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe” (John 19:35).** We see this same message about “believing” in 20:31 when John says that he has written his account of the life of Jesus so “that you may believe.” It's not surprising that we find this similar message in today's passage, and that it is once again John identifying himself in the recording of the life of Jesus, but doing so in a way that doesn't draw attention to himself.

And then **John points to the fact that Jesus' legs were not broken and his side was pierced as a fulfillment of Old Testament Scripture.** The legs not being broken is a commandment regarding the Passover lamb that is given in Exodus 12 and repeated in Numbers 9; the Psalm reference is a different context and seems to be more of a prophetic word in the sense of a future event being predicted. And then the verse that connects to his side being pierced comes from Zechariah 12:10. And so John is pointing to these events as fulfillments of these verses from hundreds of years earlier, even nearly 1500 years earlier in the case of the Exodus and Numbers verses.

But those things really are all postlude to the main event, which is Jesus' death on the cross. In the week of the Passover, when God's people celebrated the freeing work that was done in delivering them from Egypt some 1,500 years earlier...it is in this week that Jesus is the final Passover

lamb who is sacrificed giving freedom from sin and its effects. **Jesus' cancel culture is about canceling sin and the effects of sin, that leads us away from God our creator.**

So, Jesus' cancel culture is really about our present and our future. He's not saying that the sin never happened. He acknowledges we have sinned. But rather than turning a blind eye, he does something about it. And so, the sins of our past need not dictate our future. They need not be the story of our lives that continues to be written.

This last week I watched a short tribute video that was also a promotional piece for a company that makes noodles – as in spaghetti noodles and bowtie pasta noodles, and so forth. Barilla has sponsored Mikaela Shiffrin for the last 11 years or so, since she first became a professional skier. For those of you who don't know, three weeks ago or so, Mikaela Shiffrin became the all-time winningest World Cup skier ever – male or female. She eclipsed the great Ingemar Stenmark with her 87th World Cup victory – and she's only 28 years old. She is the greatest ski racer in history. And in this 87 second video, which is a tribute to her 87 world cup victories, as video clips and photos of her skiing are shown, she says in a voice-over, “So what does history actually mean? Is it the past? Or the future? History is also just somewhere in the middle.” In other words, history isn't just in the past – it's here and now and still to come. We make history each day. Who knew skiing could get so philosophical, right?¹

And Jesus knows our past; he knows our “history” as we might normally think of it. He knows each and every one of us and the past that has been our lives: The struggles, the sins, the heartaches, the brokenness, the addictions, the failed relationships...all of it. And that history of our lives can't be changed. You can't erase it and make it go away. But the future history, the history we're making now, the lives we live each day, the days yet to come, the history we have still to make: Jesus sets us on a new course for that, and it carries into eternity. **Jesus' cancel culture is that his death redeems us, and sets us free from that past, so it doesn't determine our future.** He invites us to live by faith, trusting in him for the future history of our lives.

And while some of us here this morning have maybe really felt the impact of our sins and we've had a lot of brokenness because of it, and we've been held back and hampered by it: others here maybe haven't experienced that. Maybe some of us here this morning are thinking, "Well, I wouldn't say I've been a particularly sinful person, and I haven't struggled with addiction, and while I've had some challenges in life I don't feel like my life is defined by them or that they hold me back from anything."

The Bible says over and over, however, that each person struggles with sin. And: **While we may call some sins big and others small (big sins being the ones we haven't committed, and small sins being the ones we have), they all equally separate us from God.** All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. All are like sheep who have been led astray. In the Old Covenant that God made with his people, the remedy for sin was an animal sacrifice. That was the price that was paid to cover over the sin. In the New Covenant, there's still a sacrifice to be made – and Jesus has done it on our behalf. He is the spotless lamb that was sacrificed for the sins of the world, and whoever believes in him shall not perish...shall not have their future history determined by their past history...but instead shall have forgiveness and freedom and redemption and eternal life in the presence of God. Jesus' death on the cross is the center of all of this.

So, when Jesus says "It is finished" he's not referring to the wine vinegar he was given. He's not really even referring to his earthly life. **"It is finished" is referring to the work that his life was all about, and the work that he did on the cross, to redeem us.** ...To be that sacrifice that cancels the future effects of our sins of the past.

There's a great example of this from Scripture. Well, there are lots. But one really stood out to me this week. At one point in his ministry, Jesus was in the town of Jericho. And as he went through the town there were crowds of people. And this guy named Zacchaeus really wanted to see Jesus. But he was a shorter guy and couldn't see very well, so he climbed up a tree where he had a good view of Jesus as he went by. I have always resonated with this, because I'm a bit vertically challenged, right? I'm *approximately* 5'5 23/32 of an inch tall. ☺ Of course, being up in a tree also meant Jesus could see

him well. And all of a sudden Jesus stops, looks at Zacchaeus and says to him, **“Hey, come on down out of that tree, and I’d like to come over to your place for dinner”** (Jesus, Luke 19:5, BNP) And the crowd is stunned that Jesus wants to be with Zacchaeus because Zacchaeus is a tax collector, working for the Roman government in kind of a freelance capacity. And tax collectors made their money by charging more than the tax that needed to be collected, and keeping that extra. And they were known for charging exorbitant amounts and living well.

So, here’s this Jewish guy working for the occupying government and getting rich off of it. Essentially, he’s seen as a traitor – like someone growing up in Seattle their whole life and becoming a New York Yankees fan in their adult years...it’s like almost the unforgiveable sin, right? And Jesus wants to hang with him. But at this dinner, Jesus must have asked him some questions and gotten to know him and hear his story, and got Zacchaeus thinking about his life and how he had lived and treated people, and treated God...and at the end of the dinner here’s what Luke says happened, **“Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, ‘Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount’”** (Luke 19:8). And Jesus responds by saying that today salvation has come to Zacchaeus’ house.

So, in Zacchaeus we see his past is cancelled from influencing his future. He’s going to live differently and even go back and repay those whom he had wronged. His past need not dictate his future. This is exactly why Jesus went to the cross. Paul puts it well in Colossians 1, **“For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him [Jesus], and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation”** (Colossians 1:19-22).

Through faith in Jesus – trusting him, following him, being his disciple, ...that is what activates Jesus’ work in our life and makes you blemish free in

God's sight; it's the door that when opened lets the work of the cross into our lives. Through faith in Jesus because of his finished work on the cross, God forgives us of our past that has separated us from him, and we have a new future. It's one that is built on Jesus as the foundation, with the cross at the center of it.

I hope you have acknowledged Jesus' life, his death, and his resurrection, which we'll get to next week. I hope you've acknowledged that and turned to him in faith, trusting him for the history yet to be written in your life, and for your eternal salvation. If you have, then praise God and keep following hard after Jesus, continually looking to him, seeking to live like him each day of your life so others would see Jesus in you: a life lived with joy, peace, forgiveness, and more. If you haven't taken that step of faith, then I invite you to trust his work on the cross to cancel your history that separates you from God and let him set you free in a new future, like Zacchaeus and countless others in Scripture and throughout history. That's the work he did on the cross – and that work is finished. Let's pray...Amen.

¹ The video can be watched here, if you want: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-Gn9HZaRW8>. Also, in the sermon I said she turned pro at 17. Not sure where I got that from...but it wasn't quite right. Age 15. And first World Cup victory at 17, as I said in the message.