

“Crowded Out”

John 19:16–27

¹⁶So he then handed Him over to them to be crucified.

¹⁷They took Jesus, therefore, and He went out, bearing His own cross, to the place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha. ¹⁸There they crucified Him, and with Him two other men, one on either side, and Jesus in between. ¹⁹Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It was written, “JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS.” ²⁰Therefore many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Latin and in Greek. ²¹So the chief priests of the Jews were saying to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews’; but that He said, ‘I am King of the Jews.’” ²²Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.”

²³Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His outer garments and made four parts, a part to every soldier and also the tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece. ²⁴So they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, to decide whose it shall be”; this was to fulfill the Scripture: “THEY DIVIDED MY OUTER GARMENTS AMONG THEM, AND FOR MY CLOTHING THEY CAST LOTS.” ²⁵Therefore the soldiers did these things. But standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶When Jesus then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” ²⁷Then He said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” From that hour the disciple took her into his own household. [NASB]

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I. Christ got crowded out

I find it interesting that in the four Gospel accounts of Christ’s crucifixion, there is not a lot of mention of His suffering and agony. We derive more knowledge from the Psalms in the OT about Christ’s agony than we do in the very gospel accounts themselves. You would not know that to be the case, from many lessons and sermons, which seem to go into much detail of Christ’s suffering.

But if you look at these accounts such as this in John, you’ll find that there is a lot more description of the suffering, agony, and conflict going on in the hearts and souls of all the people *around* Jesus. So I do not intend to say a lot about what God has not said a lot about in this passage.

You probably already know that crucifixion is the most gruesome death imaginable. Some years ago, the American Medical Association published a detailed report of the physical anguish of a human subjected to scourging and crucifixion. That report speaks the unspeakable. How can we begin to imagine the hopeless hope for another breath before suffocating, as instinct and impulse force bone and cartilage downward against iron spike driven through heel and tendon? How can we fathom the vain attempts to draw the pain to a close, after hours and sometimes days, but not even being able to force a suffocation that can only come as one’s energy all too slowly ebbs into dark weakness?

How can we relate to the thirst that parches mouth, tongue, and throat so that they all feel glued together with dust-coated epoxy that didn’t have quite enough hardener mixed in to finally seal off air intake? And what of every bone—*every bone*—feeling like it is out of joint? Or of the stomach, intestines, lungs, and heart all searing hot inside, so they feel like melted wax?

You must know all this about the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior. His suffering, His agony was not made one iota less agonizing than any other human who was ever crucified, on account of Jesus’ being God. To the contrary, He suffered every letter and every iota of crucifixion for every human He laid down His life for. And yet... this is not what John focuses upon.

Instead of the unimaginable physical agony, John focuses upon Christ getting crowded out. Pilate, the Roman governor in Jerusalem, has finally had more of this argument with the Jews than he can take. The only answer Pilate sees—in order to save his own hide from getting crowded out of his friendship with the Emperor—is to crowd Jesus out of his life. So Pilate gives Jesus—innocent of any crime at all—over to the Jews to crucify Him. Pilate even took water and washed his hands in front of the Jews as if to deny all culpability, saying, “I am innocent of this Man’s blood.” You see, Pilate was vainly trying to crowd Jesus right out of his conscience. He did not succeed. No one ever does.

Ironically, the Jews themselves also tried to crowd Jesus out of their consciences. ^{Mt27.25}“And all the people said, ‘His blood shall be on us and on our children!’” You see, they vainly tried to convince themselves that they were doing God and the world a big favor by murdering this Righteous Man. They did not succeed in their convincing. No one ever does.

They vainly tried to convince themselves that crowding Jesus out of their lives would make their lives easier. They could go on in their positions of influence and power, of control, and of manipulation of God’s Word. They could continue to add man’s convenient rules without Jesus continually embarrassing them in their hypocritical inconsistency. They did not convince themselves, however, that crowding Jesus out would make life easier. No one ever does.

They crowded Christ out of any comfort at all. At first, He even had to bear His own cross. Big wooden beams are not lightweight, even if the horizontal crossbeam was all He carried. Remember, His body was already stricken, smitten, and afflicted by the scourging.

They crowded Christ out of all glory. Nails driven through His wrists and feet. Cross lifted up and dropped into hole in the ground. Where? Right between two other men, one on each side. Where? In the central position. Here, Jesus was the criminal of criminals. Chief among the sinners. Bearing more condemnation than all. Cursed more than all. Jesus the Christ was crowded out of “common criminality”—crucifixion bound as they were—by criminals considered better than Himself.

As it turned out, Pilate was not quite done with Christ yet. Pilate mocked Christ as King of a crowded-out people. Pilate would have been happy to crowd out the Jews altogether and replace them with real people... you know, Romans. Well, Pilate the governor made sure that *everybody* could read the mockery. The Jews could read it in their own language. The citizens of local provinces could read it in the prevailing but fading language, Greek. And the worthies—those who knew Latin, the language of the Romans—could read it. “Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews.”

It didn’t say much for a king to be hung on a cross. It didn’t say much for the people whom the king ruled; they too might as well be hung on a cross, as represented by this king. And that brought yet one more instance of Christ being crowded out. His very own people would crowd Christ out of their own reality. They insisted Pilate clarify his sign to say, “*He said*, ‘I am King of the Jews.’” They refused to acknowledge his claims to be their Deliverer from sin and misery, and insisted that He had been making up stories about Himself.

And finally in this passage, the crucifying soldiers crowded Christ out of all covered, unexposed humanity. They took away His last vestiges of outward dignity, taking His garments and drawing straws to see which of them got the seamless shirt He had been wearing. They had stripped Him, leaving Him uncovered on the cross, so that all the curse of God upon all the sins of man might be made evident upon this Christ crucified at the center of the criminals.

Yet it was for no sin of His, but only for our sins laid upon Him. They set an ambush for His life; fierce men launched an attack against Him, Not for His transgression nor for His sin, for there was no sin in Him; for no guilt of His, they ran and set themselves against Him.^{ps59.3f}

Yes, Christ was crowded out. Crowded out of time. Crowded out of space. Crowded out of respect. Crowded out of honor. Crowded out of life. Crowded out of His own Father’s love who forsook His Son. Crowded out of all human existence... so it would seem.

II. Christ never crowded others out

And yet at the same time, we never find Christ crowding others out. To the contrary, the Lord Jesus Christ makes room for all. Whoever would desire to be enveloped in His arms, He makes room for them. It is reasonable to conclude that Joseph has died, leaving Mary the mother of Jesus a widow.

The witness here tends to confirm this conclusion. Jesus is no longer able to provide for or care for His mother. In that culture, widows were pretty much crowded out. Crowded out of protection, crowded out of influence, crowded out of nurture, crowded out of care. Jesus protects His mother from such crowding out. He provides a home, He provides protection, He provides comfort, He provides food and nurture. Jesus releases the care of His mother into the hands of His beloved disciple John.

This tells us that Jesus is not merely concerned about providing for physical needs. Jesus had brothers, if you'll recall from ch7. They could have cared for Mom as well as John. They had a closer natural relation, being her own sons. But they did *not*, in ch7, have any spiritual sympathy with Jesus or with their mother. They did *not*, in ch7, indicate any of the faith in their brother that connected Mary to her Son spiritually. They rather mocked Him at that point. And we don't know that any of them have yet come to faith in Him though soon at least one will.

But at this point Jesus is more concerned with the spiritual nurture of His mother Mary. Thus He assigns her to the care of His beloved disciple John. Jesus will not allow His mother to be crowded out of the spiritual care she needs for her soul... that her faith in Him might flourish. That her soul might for all eternity continue to exalt the Lord and her spirit rejoice in God her Savior.

Just so, Jesus *never* crowded out *any* who came to Him for help for their soul. Jesus never crowded anyone out of life. To the contrary, Jesus, who gave His life to be crowded out of Him, gives His very life to fill those who would be crowded out by the empty and vain fulfillments of this world.

III. What remains when Christ is crowded out

It is worth observing now, when Christ gets crowded out, what remains of Him? This passage gives us some clues. It helps first to note that this crowding out is not new. Christ has been crowded out before He even came in the form of a man. He spoke in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. At the temptation of the serpent, Adam and Eve crowded Christ out of His position as Ruler in their hearts. But when they crowded Him out, His Word remained. That Word would have judged them to eternal death, had not the Lord come and given them the Word of promise of life through faith in Him.

Abraham's natural son Ishmael tried to crowd Christ out, by threatening the life of Isaac. Isaac had arisen out of the dead womb of Sarah; Isaac was the son by promise. Though Ishmael tried to crowd him out, the Word of God's promise remained. The Israelites in the wilderness tried to crowd Christ out; instead of following the Pillar of fire and of cloud they protested their preference to return to slavery in Egypt. Even Moses, at the waters of Meribah, crowded Christ out by striking again the Rock that had already been struck once for the salvation of the people, pouring out water for their thirst. The Word of promise remained, but Moses would not enter the land of promise.

The list goes on. Absalom crowded his father, King David, out of his dominion, usurping the throne. But God's Word of promise remained with David, ^{Ps89.3}“I have made a covenant with My chosen; I have sworn to David My servant, ⁴I will establish your seed forever and build up your throne to all generations.”

Uncountable prophets were crowded out, but their Word of judgment and their word of redeeming mercy always remained. Priestly service to God was crowded out by oppressive rules and regulations made by men. But the word remained; only one sacrificial Lamb, provided by God Himself, could take away the sins of mankind. And He did, on the cross. Only one pure Sacrifice, come from God Himself, could offer His purity to those whose sins He took. And He did, rising up from the dead to bestow upon us His sinlessness.

When Christ is crowded out, His Word of promise remains. Though Christ was crowded out upon the cross, the Word remained, as the text says, that Scripture might be fulfilled. In fact, the very crowding out of Christ was the promise of every Prophet, Priest, and King. This One who spoke the Truth, who offered Himself in sacrifice, who governs the hearts of men and women and children, is Himself the Word of promise. He arose from the dead according to Promise,

ascended into Heaven, poured out His Holy Spirit, and will return again when He has made rooms ready for every soul who will *not* crowd Christ out.

IV. Is Christ now crowded out?

Well, then, there was a lot of crowding Christ out before He ever went to the cross, yes before He even was born with flesh and bone. What about now? What about today? Is Christ now crowded out? You who believe in Christ know full well that He is crowded out. Crowded out of life on Sunday. Crowded out of life in your office place, your school place. Crowded out of life in much of the church place. What about your home place?

The answer is yes. For every one of us the answer is yes. We continue to crowd Him out of our life place. We crowd Him out by thinking we can justify ourselves before God by being good. Only a little naughty but a lot of nice, should for our loving God surely suffice. But God will not have His beloved Son crowded out from doing *all* that is needed to suffice for us.^{Gal2}

Or we crowd Him out by thinking we need not pay heed to His holy will revealed in the Ten Commandments. But God will not have His beloved Son crowded out by those who go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, for there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins for those who trample under foot the Son of God and insult the Spirit of grace.^{Heb10.26ff}

Or we crowd Him out of our sorrow, by not seeking His loving embrace when we are sad or depressed or lonely. He died to give us that embrace... and He really wants us to receive it. Or we crowd Him out of our joy, when either we neglect to thank Him or we neglect to count it joy when He is purifying us through trials. Or we crowd Him out of our friendships, when we don't bother to make sure we are keeping our friendships holy.

Or we crowd Him out of our hope, when in the midst of paralyzing perplexities we don't trust Him to make all things right. Or we crowd Him out of our peace, when we neglect so great a salvation by not believing Him when He says, “I forgive you” through the words of Scripture, or through the words of a beloved friend.

Or we crowd Him out of life when we don't believe what He means when He says “I love you” through the words of Scripture, or through the words of a beloved friend. Our dear Lord Jesus Christ allowed Himself to be crucified, crowded out of Life itself, so that we might never be crowded out from the love of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, or from the love of His beloved people.

And yet, even when we crowd Christ out, His Word of promise always remains. And that word of promise is this: ^{Jer32.38}“They shall be My people, and I will be their God; ³⁹and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me always, for their own good and for the good of their children after them. ⁴⁰I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; and I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me.”

Yes, the Word of promise is that even though we may crowd Christ out, even day after day, yet He will never turn away and crowd us out of Him. And He will convert our hearts, so that one bright day we shall no longer, ever again, be distressed with the turmoil of trying to crowd Him out of our life. That will be a very good day.