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Lent: Behold, the Man!

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Lent: Behold, the Man!

Abstract

"Jesus is ridiculed and mocked and handed over for execution as if less than human."

Posting about the importance of the prologue to the Gospel of John from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/lent-behold-the-man/>

Keywords

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Disciplines

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

Lent: Behold, the Man!

 [all in allthings.org/lent-behold-the-man/](https://allthings.org/lent-behold-the-man/)

Benjamin Lappenga

This is post #5 of 8 in the series “*Lenten Reflections*”

So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And [Pilate] said to them, “Behold, the man!” John 19:5

The prologue to the Gospel of John (1:1-18) is one of the most famous passages in the New Testament. Though it was once in vogue to read the prologue as a “hymn” that sits uneasily with the rest of John, few scholars today would disagree with C. K. Barrett’s assessment that John’s prologue is intended to serve as a guide for how his Gospel is to be read.¹ Therefore, when we encounter Pilate’s reluctant presentation of Jesus to the crowd in John 19:5 (in Greek, simply “Behold, the man!” [*idou ho anthrōpos*]), the words from the prologue should start ringing in our ears: “in him was life, and the life was the light of people [*anthrōpōn*] (1:4); “the true light, which enlightens all people [*panta anthrōpōn*], was coming into the world” (1:9); and especially, “the Word became flesh and lived among us” (1:14). What are we to make of this? How does the prologue unlock our understanding of Pilate’s words in John 19:5?

John’s prologue deliberately echoes the opening chapter of Genesis (both books open with, “In the beginning...”), especially in the way it presents Jesus as the full embodiment of the “image of God” (Gen 1:26-27). On Friday, the sixth day of creation, God created humankind to serve as his unique image-bearers in the world. Just as ancient kings set up statues of themselves throughout their kingdom, so too God designated human beings as visible pointer to the true Lord of all creation and as those through whom God would carry out his rule (Gen 1:28). Humans quickly and tragically rejected this vocation (Genesis 3), but God refused to abandon his plan. God designated a special people (Israel) to bring blessing to the whole world (Genesis 12-17). When this plan, too, was imperiled by the people, God sent his own Son to fulfill the vocation of Israel and to reveal once and for all what it is to be human (*anthrōpos*).

Pilate’s words, then, could not express a more tragic irony: on a Friday, Jesus, the true “image of God,” the perfect embodiment of God the King (“Here is your king”; 19:14), is presented by Pilate as “the human” (*ho anthrōpos*). Rather than celebrating the unimaginable, wonderful accuracy of Pilate’s choice of words, Jesus is ridiculed and mocked and handed over for execution as if less than human.

In this Lenten season, what do we hear in Pilate’s words, “Behold, the man”? In what ways do we participate in the crowd’s mockery of Jesus, living as though comfort, money, political security, or getting our way are our true masters (19:17)? In what ways do we conveniently forget our confession of Jesus as “completely human,”² and thereby escape Jesus’ hard words to do as he does (John 14:12), to be unified as he is (John 17:22-23), and to participate in his suffering and ridicule (John 15:20; cf. Phil 1:27-30)?

Footnotes

1. C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (2d ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 149-69. ↩
2. <http://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/creeds/athanasian-creed> ↩