

## The Gospel of John

John 19:31-47

9.24.2023



THE JOURNEY  
CHURCH

### SCRIPTURE:

John 19:31-37

### SERMON NOTES:

#### Exegesis of John 19:31-37

***VS31-34 -- 31 Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away. 32 So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. 33 But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. 34 But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.***

John not only reminds us that it is a Friday, but that it's a special Friday, the Friday before the Passover celebration. This was called the Day of Preparation. Every Friday was a day of preparation for the Jews. They did all their needed prep work to get ready for the Sabbath to come. For example: when our team was in Israel in May, on Friday, they prepared the food that would be served on Saturday. They took special care to do what was necessary on Friday so that they didn't have to violate the Sabbath. But this particular Friday was even more special because it was a Day of Preparation for the annual Passover meal. John mentions these details because it played into what happens to Jesus' body on the cross. The Mosaic Law (Deuteronomy 21:23) detailed that an executed criminal had to be buried immediately after their execution. If they weren't buried right away the land would become defiled. This is Jewish Law, God's Law given through Moses...but remember, who's in charge of this crucifixion (and all crucifixions for that matter)? The Romans. The Romans often left the bodies of those crucified hanging on the crosses for days after they died as a warning to others.

So the Jews ask that the legs might be broken (to speed up death) and that the dead be taken away (on Friday) so as not to defile the land with Passover approaching. This is what the Jews desire in verse 31, so they ask Pilate if that's allowable, he agrees, and in verse 32 this is what the soldiers do.

**Application:** Consider for a moment the hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders here. They are eager to avoid the land becoming defiled, but they seem to miss altogether that by killing the innocent Lamb of God is the ultimate act of defiling themselves. How blind are they? It's sad. And the scary thing is how vulnerable WE still are to imitate their pattern. Paul warns Timothy (2 Timothy 3:5) about people **"having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power."** There are people who go through religious motions today, but have no love for Christ. There are people who claim to be Christians, but cast off biblical teachings and doctrine for worldliness and ideologies of men. Looking at this hypocrisy from the Jewish leaders ought to put us on guard about ourselves. It should lead us to a deeper repentance and greater pursuit of holiness. We should strive to close the gap between what we profess to be our beliefs and how we live our lives. We should be known as those who align our thinking and living to what we see in Scripture, not to our preferred habits, customs, or traditions. We die to ourselves so that we might live to Christ. We don't want lips that praise Him while our hearts are far from Him. This is the kind of hypocrisy that angered the Lord in Matthew 23. We need a revitalization in the church of this pursuit of holiness and killing of hypocrisy. Let the blindness of these leaders remind you of your own vulnerabilities and weaknesses.

We read in verse 32 that the soldiers come with heavy mallets to start breaking legs. They began with the two other criminals, but as they come to Jesus in the middle they find He is already dead (verse 33). Why was Jesus dead before them only after 6 hours on the cross? He was brutally flogged before hanging on the cross. When the soldiers recognize that He's dead, they don't break His legs. There was no need to. You only break the legs to expedite the death. But to ensure Jesus was dead, and not simply passed out, one of the soldiers grabs a long spear and pierces Jesus' side (verse 34). John records that "at once there came out blood and water." Why does John record this particular detail, when he leaves out other details in the crucifixion account (like Jesus' interactions with the two other people crucified with him)?

One of the reasons John records this detail is that by the time he wrote his Gospel a false teaching about Jesus was circulating called Docetism. Docetism taught that Jesus wasn't truly human, but only appeared to be human. With this came the belief that His death on the cross wasn't a true death but just an appearance of death. John deals with this issue in more detail in his letters (1, 2, 3 John), but this important detail in his account of the crucifixion proves that: Jesus was truly man, He did truly die, and His body hanging on the cross was a corpse. Jesus didn't fake His death on the cross by swooning, passing out, or going into a coma. We'll get into this more in the weeks in front of us with Jesus'

resurrection, but it is important to note here: the pierced side of Jesus is evidence that He truly died.

But John's aim goes deeper than addressing Docetism. There is spiritual significance here as well. Blood flowing out reminds us of His sacrificial death, the cleansing power of His blood which purifies us from sin's power and penalty. Water flowing out reminds us of our sins being washed white as snow, of the living water of the Spirit Jesus spoke of that wells up within us to eternal life, and of life abundant coming to us even in the midst of death. John is also likely thinking of the moment in Exodus 17 where God told Moses to strike the rock so water would flow out and refresh Israel. Isn't the parallel incredible? Jesus hanging here in death is the Rock struck by the Father, causing a redemptive fountain to flow forth in the power of the Holy Spirit to all who believe. Augustus Toplady included this scene in his hymn Rock of Ages calling it a 'double cure' saying, "Rock of Ages cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee. Let the water and blood, from Thy wounded side which flowed, be of sin the double cure, cleanse me from its guilt and power."

The early church saw the piercing of Christ's side and the flow of blood and water, as an allusion to Eve's creation (Genesis 2:21-22). By the end of the second century we find Tertullian saying, "If Adam was a figure of Christ, the sleep of Adam was the death of Christ who was to fall asleep in death; that in the injury of His side might be figured the Church, the true mother of the living."

How can the piercing of Jesus' side and the flow of blood and water have any parallels with the creation of Eve?

**1. Death as sleep.** The piercing and flow follow the death of Jesus. Genesis tells us that prior to taking Adam's side to form the woman he caused Adam to go into a deep sleep. Since Jesus rises again, His death is likewise comparable to sleep. Jesus makes the comparison between sleep and death explicit in John 11:11 before the resurrection of Lazarus.

**2. Opened side.** While "rib" is a good rendering of what God took from Adam in Genesis 2 it is unnecessarily restrictive. The Hebrew may refer to a rib but it more broadly means side. The substance God uses to form the woman is found in the man's side. It is the side of Christ where John locates the piercing. Just as God takes from Adam's side, so the soldier pierced Christ's.

**3. The Substance.** In Genesis, God takes a part of Adam to fashion a helper just like him. In a similar fashion, what flows from Jesus' side is a representation of his two natures. The blood stands for his flesh or humanity while the water His spirit and divinity. Blood refers to Jesus' real humanity while the water represents the Spirit.

These parallels led early church Fathers to connect these events to each other. But in what way is it communicating something? In the same way Adam's side was opened for his bride to be brought forth, so was Jesus' side opened up (in death) to purchase His bride. Adam's side was opened to bring forth a new creation, so was Jesus' side opened up to bring forth new creation in sinners. Adam's side was opened up to bring oneness to him and his woman (this at last is bone of bones and flesh of my flesh), so was Jesus' side opened up to bring us into the union and oneness of the Father and the Son.

Some draw allusions of the blood and water as symbols of the sacraments: Lord's Supper and Baptism. While these are certainly images that resonate with us: Jesus blood shed for our sins (the cup of the new covenant) and identifying with Jesus in His death (water baptism), John is not likely adding these details to point to those images.

Last thing on this issue, tradition has it that the soldier who pierced Jesus' side was named Longinus. Three of the Gospels record an event that John does not record, just as the other three Gospels don't record the piercing of the side. We read:

*Matthew 27:45, 50-51, 54: "From noon onward, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon...But Jesus cried out again in a loud voice, and gave up his spirit. And behold, the veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth quaked, rocks were split...The centurion and the men with him who were keeping watch over Jesus feared greatly when they saw the earthquake and all that was happening, and they said, 'Truly, this was the Son of God'"*

This soldier saw the events surrounding Jesus' death and said, "Truly, this was the Son of God." But tradition holds that this individual, who had poor eyesight, is the same individual who pierced the side of Jesus and had the blood and water spray onto his face, healing his eyesight. This event is said to also point to his conversion and faith in Jesus. Whether John is tipping the cap to the conversion of the soldier here or not is unknown, but tradition says it is the same soldier. And I think that is a pretty amazing thought.

***VS35 -- 35 He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe.***

John takes a pause in the action to let us the reader know that we can trust him about these events. His account is based in reality and history. What does he say he wants from us? For us to believe. He's bearing witness to these events, and assuring us of their accuracy, so we will believe. He wants to see faith birthed in our hearts. Faith in Jesus' death for our sins is not an exercise in blind trust. It's not a leap in the dark. It's based on evidence. It is according to eyewitness accounts. These things are the truth about God and the world. By believing in them we have life, both now and eternal. John's heart is for the reader to walk in the truth and know Christ.

I can't help but take a minute to highlight that this is the same reason why we do everything here at TJC. Our service is built on the truths of God's Word so that you may believe. We sing songs grounded in the truth, recite creeds and catechism rooted in the truth, and preach doctrinal/theological sermons about the truth, so that you may believe. We don't sugar coat things. We're not looking to be liked, gain approval, or build a following. This is why sometimes what we preach is hard to hear, because it goes against things we perhaps were never taught. But if you've been around TJC for a while you know this, we may not be right about everything, but there is nothing we will say or teach that we are not convinced isn't taught in Scripture. It is possible we could be wrong, but it's not because we've turned away from what the Bible says. It would only be because we misinterpreted something in an earnest effort to teach EVERYTHING the Bible says.

***VS36-37 -- 36 For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken." 37 And again another Scripture says, "They will look on him whom they have pierced."***

John says that Jesus' unbroken bones and the piercing of His side fulfilled messianic prophecy. Jesus' unbroken bones fulfill Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12; and Psalm 34:20, which speak of the unbroken Passover lamb and God's care for Israel's righteous king. Jesus is the final Passover Lamb who died so that God's wrath would pass over His people, not falling on us, and God finally preserved Jesus' life, raising Him from the dead (1 Cor. 5:7; 15:20). The piercing fulfills Zechariah 12:10–14, where the world mourns over God's pierced Servant. All people will look upon Him they have pierced. They will look upon Jesus and mourn: some in repentance for their sins and some at the judgment they receive for remaining in rebellion.

John repeatedly reminds us in the sequence of Jesus' arrest, trial, flogging, crucifixion, death, and piercing that all these things are done in fulfillment of the Scriptures. Not that these individuals are looking at the list and saying, "okay, we have to do this next." No, they are acting in accordance with their inclinations and desires, yet all of it is predicted as a testimony to us. John indicates that God so ordered these events with His governing providential hand that they were both the free actions of these soldiers and the fulfillment of Scripture. The soldiers meant these actions for their own purposes, while God meant them for His purposes.

Why does John recount the piercing of Jesus' side after He died. So that we might believe.

John's desire and goal is our assurance of faith. Jesus really died on the cross for sins. His blood truly poured out. This was all in fulfillment of the Scriptures, which gives evidence that it is the Father's plan. Believe!

Those who believe find:

- forgiveness of sins
- adoption into God's family
- power from the Holy Spirit who comes to dwell in us
- hope for this life and the life to come
- comfort in our sorrows and pains (because He is with us)
- help in our troubles
- purpose and meaning in life
- strength to fight sin and overcome the flesh
- eternal life in Heaven
- confidence in facing death and assurance of resurrection from the grave

Believe! To believe simply means to trust that not only did Jesus do these things, but that His doing them was for a sinner like you. When you believe, you are saved.

*Romans 10:10-13 -- 10 For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. 11 For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. 13 For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

**REVIEW:**

- ❖ Read John 19:31-37
- ❖ What is significant about it being Friday and why Jesus died on that day? (Exodus 12:29, John 1:29)
- ❖ What is the significance of blood and water coming out of Jesus' side? (John 6:53-56, Numbers 20:10-12, John 4:10-14, John 7:37-39)
- ❖ Discuss the analogy between Adam and Jesus.
- ❖ Why does John take a break in the action in verse 35 to state it was an eyewitness account?
- ❖ What Old Testament prophecies is John alluding to in verses 36 & 37? (Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12; and Psalm 34:20, 1 Corinthians 5:7; 15:20, Zechariah 12:10–14)

#### **REFLECT:**

- ❖ How did the Jewish leaders reveal their ignorance and hypocrisy by asking Pilate to break their legs?
- ❖ What is John's ultimate desire for recording these events? (John 20:31)

#### **RESPOND:**

- ❖ In what ways do you have the appearance of godliness but deny its power?

#### **MEDITATE:**

- ❖ John 19:36-37: *36 For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken." 37 And again another Scripture says, "They will look on him whom they have pierced."*

#### **MEMORIZE:**

- ❖ John 20:31 - *but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

#### **PRAYER FOCUS:**

- ❖ Director of Mobilization - **Christian Townson**
- ❖ Ministry - **For the Nations**
- ❖ **Pray for our long-term families:**
  - The Wilsons
  - The Grays
  - The Starks (departing in October)
- ❖ **Pray for our mid-term sent ones:**
  - Kaesi
- ❖ **Pray for our short-term teams:**
  - Central Asia Team departs in September 29
- ❖ **Pray for the lost - Unreached People Group (UPG): Hakka Chinese in Cambodia**
  - **Population in country:** 600
  - **Global population:** 44,228,000
  - **Christian Adherent:** 1.20%

- **Evangelical:** 0.55%
- **Primary Religion:** Ethnic Religions
- **Primary Language:** Chinese, Hakka
- **Summary:** Characteristically, the Hakkas have been dentists, shoemakers or Chinese medicine merchants. Today, many Hakka families have started the popular noodle shops that line city streets in Cambodia. Hakka noodles, or hakka mee, are yellow noodles topped with minced chicken or pork and condiments. Hakka food is so delicious that there are now Hakka Chinese restaurants spread throughout the West as well as East Asian countries.
- **Prayer Focus:** Pray for the Lord to prosper the Hakka spiritually and economically, so they will know he is their true provider. Pray for the Lord to enable and thrust out loving workers to the Hakka Chinese in Cambodia. Pray for the Hakka to have receptive hearts to Christ. Pray for Hakka church planters to train others to plant more churches and make disciples.
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