

John 19:31-37

Then the Jews, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. So the soldiers came, and broke the legs of the first man and of the other who was crucified with Him; but coming to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe. For these things came to pass to fulfill the Scripture, "NOT A BONE OF HIM SHALL BE BROKEN." And again another Scripture says, "THEY SHALL LOOK ON HIM WHOM THEY PIERCED."

If you remember we finished last week with Jesus' final words, "it is finished." All had been accomplished; both the sin offering and the peace offering had been made for the redemption of mankind. After this, Jesus gave up His spirit and He died. Take note; Jesus' physical death is a critical fact upon which all of Christianity hinges. And in this passage John provides for us all of this detail so we can be assured and fully convinced that Jesus had died.

In this passage the Spirit already anticipates the ridiculous arguments that would one day be brought up to suggest that there was no literal resurrection because there was no literal death, either because Jesus was not truly flesh but more of an apparition (so He could not technically die) or that He was just

unconscious and was only mostly dead but not all the way dead. But John makes it clear that as an eye-witness he saw both the blood and the water flow.

In modern medical terms, it would be understood that the spear must have penetrated the pericardial sac which surrounds the heart. As we studied last week, the lack of oxygen due to Jesus' limited ability to exhale would have caused massive trauma to the heart as it would have been beating so rapidly trying to transport what little oxygen it did have to the rest of the body. This pressure on the heart would have lead to the rupturing of vessels and leakage of watery fluid from the capillaries into the tissue around the heart resulting in a buildup of fluids in the pericardial sac. It would also have been more than likely that the vessels of the heart also ruptured, which would account for the amount of blood that poured from His side. But then again the spear might have just penetrated both the sac and the heart at the same time; again resulting in the flow of the blood and the water. But either way, for there to be both blood and water Jesus would have to be dead.

There are some silly people who, despite the amazing accuracy in which the Bible predicts Jesus death, try and pick a fight over details that they think prove the inaccuracy of John's testimony, as if to bring indictment against his testimony. They say that if Jesus really did have His pericardial sac pierced that the water would have flowed first; thus, John saying "the blood and the water" verses "the water and the blood" reveals an inconsistency. Well, these critics are not only ridiculous but also not very studied. In the Greek the order or priority given a word is not limited to sequence in time but is often adjusted to capture intensity or amount. In other words, there would be more blood that would flow if the

heart ruptured or was pierced than there would be water, so it would be entirely natural and consistent to list first the one with the greater amount of fluid which poured from Jesus side. Hence, he said: “the blood and the water.”

John makes the point that he is an eyewitness. Remember, he wrote this gospel so we might believe that Jesus is the Christ; therefore he gives us reasons and evidence why we can believe. He saw it and his eyewitness testimony must be given credibility over some second-hand witness who wrote about these events, much less critics who attempt to rewrite history 2,000 years later thinking that they “know” what really happened. John was there and he in effect is raising his right hand and swearing that the testimony he has given is true and can be depended upon.

Therefore, because of the testimony of the blood and the water we can definitively conclude that Jesus was not just mostly dead but He was really most sincerely dead. Besides, the Roman soldier’s necks were on the line; they were responsible to ensure the death of each victim. Therefore, they must have been absolutely convinced that Jesus was dead or else they would have broken His legs. They would not have risked their own lives for the sake of some Jewish criminal. The medical and cultural facts simply do not support some bizarre notion that Jesus was either an apparition or was knocked unconscious to revive at a later time.

Jesus having been pierced is also referenced in the book of Revelation. It is a powerful passage which provides for us a prophecy regarding the events at Jesus’ second coming.

Revelation 1:7

BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.

I love the way this passage ends—“so it is to be.” In other words, there is no if, and, or buts, it is going to happen exactly as it has been predicted—just like every other prophecy the Spirit ever made through the writers of the Bible. Jesus is going to return to earth in His supernatural and yet physical body; and all will know that He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And yes, the scars will remain throughout eternity. That is why everyone will not only see Him upon His return but know who He is as they will recognize the scars.

The clock is ticking. In a few short hours the Sabbath would begin. According to the Jewish calendar the next day would begin at 6:00 that evening. So for example, our Friday evening would be considered their Saturday. And this was no ordinary Sabbath but the Passover (hence the reference that this Sabbath was a high day). This day of Jesus' death was the day they would have prepared the sacrificial lambs and all else that was necessary for this great celebration. This means that if Jesus died around 3 p.m. they had less than 3 hours to finish all the arrangements before the celebration began.

The Religious Leaders are so twisted. Now that they had accomplished their evil plan and killed Jesus (and, as we studied, violated the law over and over again in how they handled both the trial and their treatment of Him), they all of a sudden are once again focused on observing the requirements of the law.

Deuteronomy 21:22-23 states that a person who is executed by hanging on a tree must be taken down and buried that same day (“for he who is hanged is accursed of God”) or else it will bring defilement upon the land. This is why the religious leaders went back to Pilate and asked for the victims’ legs to be broken so they could get them off the cross and into the ground. Again, it was important to these Religious Leaders that the ordinary Jew believed that everything was copacetic and in order and the leaders were doing all things according to the requirements of the law. They had to maintain their image (which is why all the atrocities against Jesus were done at night in private quarters).

Just so you know the Romans would ordinarily just let the bodies rot on the cross; as a matter of fact, it was almost proverbial that the crucified were the prey of dogs and a feast for birds. But in this instance Pilate is still forced to accommodate the Jews due to both the sacredness of this festival and the tumult that would arise if he did not comply. The Jews still held over him the threat of going to Caesar if he did not meet their needs.

If you remember from our study last week, it is obvious why the breaking of the legs would have made a quick end to these victims’ lives. The strength in their legs is what allowed them to pull their bodies up to exhale. But with their bones crushed they would not have the strength in their arms to pull their bodies up and sustain breathing; thus, they would quickly die of asphyxia. So the Roman soldiers would take a large wooden mallet and literally shatter the leg bones to ensure that the victim’s legs were useless. So they first broke the legs of the guys on either side of Jesus but when they came to Jesus they saw that He was already dead, so they did not break His legs.

Now there is a lot of speculation about why the soldier pierced Jesus' side. Some experts believe that this was normal Roman procedure and was done as kind of an exclamation mark of their triumph over evil. Others say that it was just precautionary since they did not break Jesus' legs. But either way, the soldiers had to be sure because, as we discussed, the guards were held personally responsible to ensure that their victims died. But, whatever, the reason is really inconsequential; for us the issue is that the flow of blood and water was a testimony to the fact that the heart had ruptured and the pericardial sac was now filled with both watery fluid and blood. Thus, as John says, there is no question that Jesus was dead.

Now John also quotes that these events were the fulfillment of two more Old Testament scriptures: "NOT A BONE OF HIM SHALL BE BROKEN" and "THEY SHALL LOOK ON HIM WHOM THEY PIERCED." The first quotation comes directly from **Psalm 34:20** (which was written 1,000 years before Jesus died) but at the same time prophetically draws from **Exodus 12:46** and **Numbers 9:12** which state that in making the Passover sacrifice no bone of the Passover lamb shall be broken. And true to form, absolutely consistent with scripture, not a single bone on the true Passover Lamb was broken.

John also quotes from **Zechariah 12:10** when he says that "*they shall look on Him whom they pierced.*" Although this was penned over 550 years before Jesus died, once again we see a perfect parallel. But even more than a parallel; I would venture to say a perfect prophetic fulfillment. It is no coincidence that Hebrew word for "pierced" used in **Zechariah** is a word that means to thrust through with spear, javelin, sword, or any such weapon. This is perfectly fitting considering it

looked ahead to how Jesus' side would be pierced by the spear of this Roman soldier. But take note, the Hebrew word for "pierce" that we read last week in **Psalm 22:16** ("They pierced my hands and my feet") is altogether a different word. We translate it the same in English but the actual meaning paints a powerful picture. The word in Hebrew refers to the way a lion bites a person and the fangs pierce or bore a hole through its victim. This is a picture of the nail which pierced Jesus' hands and feet when they fastened Him to the cross. So one prophecy perfectly predicts the nails and the other perfectly predicts the spear and both are perfectly fulfilled. These are sweet little touches that just show you how precise the Holy Spirit was in making sure we know that the Bible is not a product of human origin but is divine in every regard.

John 19:38

After these things Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate granted permission. So he came and took away His body.

I am going to camp out for a moment on verse 38 because we need to get to know a little bit about this Joseph of Arimathea. We are told that this man was a follower of Jesus' teachings and according to John was even a believer, but it was all in secret because of the Jews. We have covered this before but when John uses the phrase "the Jews" he is not talking about the run of the mill dude walking around Israel, but it is a specific reference to the Religious Leaders.

Do you remember how these leaders had previously threatened to expel anyone from participating in Temple activities if they uttered even a word of support for Jesus? These guys were playing rough. Well guess what? The reason this man had to hide the fact that he was a disciple was because we find out from **Mark 15:43** that he was a prominent member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of the Jews which tried and sentenced Jesus to death. We also find out from **Matthew 27:57** that he was rich (as were most members of the Sanhedrin). And **Luke 23:51** tells us that Joseph was a man who was waiting for the kingdom of God.

So Joseph of Arimathea was in a pickle. Clearly he did not come out earlier as a believer for that would have threatened everything he had built: his reputation as a godly man and spiritual leader of the nation, his position of power and authority, his ability to generate and sustain wealth, and his standing in the community. There was a lot to lose, so he kept his beliefs hidden. However, we do know from **Luke 23:50-51** that he did not consent to the conspiracy of the Sanhedrin against Jesus; but we also know that he did not declare his allegiance to Jesus either. Who knows for sure what happened. Maybe he just abstained from participating in the trial or perhaps he ardently opposed their tactics as being inconsistent with the law.

But now it did not matter. After Jesus died he was finally willing to expose himself as a disciple and take action which demonstrated his support of Jesus. Finally he would risk everything that he had built and trust himself only to God. It's amazing how Jesus' death instantly begins to produce life. Besides, you have to understand and believe that in going to Pilate Joseph had instantly made

himself an enemy of the Jews. His friends and companions would now most assuredly abandon him and in short order he would lose his position and stature in the community. He made this choice to stand for Jesus knowing that he would lose it all.

This story kind of reminds me of the rich young ruler who finally got it right. In **Luke 18:18-17** we have a story of a man, a ruler of the Jews, who loved God and had kept the commandments his entire life. He came to Jesus and asked, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" This sounds a little like Joseph who we are told was waiting for the kingdom of God. Jesus told him that only God is good (thereby declaring that He is God) and then instructed him to sell everything he had and distribute it to the poor and come and follow. When hearing this reply, the man became very sad and walked away for he was very rich.

Luke 18:24-27

And Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!" For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." They who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" But He said, "The things that are impossible with people are possible with God."

Now I am not saying that definitively this Joseph of Arimathea was the rich young ruler, but the story line rings familiar and what was impossible for him to do on his own (to come out, risk it all, and declare that he was a believer) was

now possible as he had seen the power and glory of Yahweh made manifest on mount Moriah. The things that are impossible for man are always entirely possible with God!

Now Joseph was given an audience with Pilate probably because he was a known member of the Sanhedrin. As we know from the story, Pilate clearly gave his consent and allowed him to take Jesus' body; but let's think about that interaction. Why would Pilate consent to give the body to this man who first of all was not family, was not a known disciple, and was a member of this hateful group that had just coerced and manipulated him? I think it is because Pilate was actually relieved that there was at least one person in this malfeasant group that cared and was convinced, as was Pilate, that Jesus was an innocent man.

So Joseph, this rich ruler, took away Jesus' body. And guess what? In so doing he fulfilled still another Old Testament prophecy. I will get to that in a minute, but let's read the next part of our text.

John 19:39-42

Nicodemus, who had first come to Him by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. Therefore because of the Jewish day of preparation, since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

By taking Jesus off the cross and carrying Him to the tomb, Joseph fulfilled an Old Testament prophecy found in **Isaiah 53:9** which, by the way, was made about 700+ years before Jesus died.

Isaiah 53:9

And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

In this passage the word “wicked” is clearly plural and “rich man” is clearly singular. Many think that the wicked is a reference to the two criminals and the “rich man” is an obvious reference to Joseph of Arimathea. But the Hebrew is very clear; it does not say that He was with the wicked in His death but that they made His grave with the wicked. So I would not necessarily assume that this is a reference to the two criminals. Besides we have no evidence that the 2 criminals were buried anywhere near Jesus.

I want us to look at a little passage in **Leviticus 4:11-12** and **6:11** which says that the remains of the sin offering must be taken outside of the camp and disposed of in a clean place. Since this garden was just a short distance from Calvary, it is likely that the rock in which the tomb was cut (this “clean” tomb that had not been used) was part of this same hill or ridge upon which the criminals were routinely executed. So at the same time that he was with a rich man in His death (Joseph was the one who took Him off the cross and carried Him to the tomb), His grave was also made with the wicked—located in the mountain upon which the wicked were punished. Once again, this is another example of exacting fulfillment

of Biblical prophecy. Remember, John gave us all these details so that we might believe. As we have looked at so many Old Testament prophecies that have been fulfilled in exacting detail, I would hope that your mind, your heart and emotions would be fully convinced that you can rely on the Word of God for every aspect of your life.

I bet you were surprised to see old Nicodemus suddenly reappear out of nowhere. If you remember, we encountered him in **John 3** and **John 7**. Like Joseph, He was also part of the Sanhedrin, as he was referred to in **John 3:1** as a ruler of the Jews. He is also *always* referred to as the one who came by night which indicates that he was afraid to be caught talking to Jesus for fear that he would be accused of being a believer. But he now reappears in this story, during the day mind you, and boldly assists Joseph with Jesus' body.

It is interesting that John makes the point of letting us know that Joseph was a disciple but he does not say the same about Nicodemus. Perhaps he was a believer but then again maybe not. He might have just felt very guilty about what they did to this man of God; after all, we know that he was more than impressed with Jesus in their first encounter when Jesus taught Him about the new birth. We also know that he did stand up and voice opposition to the attempts of the Religious Leaders to arrest Jesus in an unlawful manner, but when questioned about whether he was a follower the record shows no response (**John 7:50-52**). Nicodemus might have also just been freaked out over the darkness that enveloped the skies, the earthquakes, the tearing of the veil blocking the entry to the Holy Place, and decided that he would hedge his bets; but then again he might have truly believed.

Now there is some history in various apocryphal works that state that Nicodemus actually gave evidence in favor of Jesus at His trial before Pilate and as such he was removed from his office and banished from Jerusalem. I would think however that if this was true that John would have made a point of telling us that he came out in support of Jesus. That is a pretty important fact and something that John would have probably included. These apocryphal works also state that Nicodemus was eventually baptized by Peter and John and that his remains were placed in a common grave with those of Stephen and other faithful martyrs. Again, with the late date that the gospel of John was written, such detail is, at least to me, strangely omitted.

Regardless, Nicodemus brought with him a mixture of myrrh and aloes which weighed about 100 pounds. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices packed all around His body, as was the burial custom of the Jews. A lot has been made about Jesus' burial since it was carried out by 2 rich men. Some have said that with all these spices they gave Jesus a royal burial befitting a king. But that is just not the case; John makes it clear that what they did was just customary and common. Besides they had to do it all very quickly as the Sabbath was soon to begin.

Remember the big deal the Religious Leaders had made about not wanting to be defiled before the Passover, which is why they refused to enter the Praetorium? Well it is interesting that when Joseph and Nicodemus touched Jesus' dead body they purposely chose to be defiled and become unclean, at least according to the law. Thus, even though they were part of the Jewish leadership

they were not going to be able to participate in the Passover. I guess they figured it did not matter since they had found the true Passover Lamb of God.

Matthew 27:60 tells us that the tomb in which Jesus was laid belonged to Joseph, which is why John tells us that this was a new tomb where no one had previously been laid and they were able to just use it without incident. I guess Joseph did not mind, he probably told Nicodemus, “Oi Veh! It’s just for the weekend.” Although it is a little strange that this rich man would choose for himself a tomb that was so near where the public executions were held. You think he would have chosen a more private place. I don’t know, maybe he had purchased the garden before the Romans started to use Golgatha as their chosen place of execution.

But let’s talk a bit about the tomb. Last week I showed you pictures of the hill that looks like a skull. I mentioned that this is not the traditional site of Jesus’ death but a secondary site. The traditional site, where the church of the holy sepulcher is located, was chosen by the mother of Constantine about 275+ years after Jesus died. Just so you know she is accredited with choosing many of the “holy” sites in Palestine. It is entirely possible that she might have gotten some of them right; but a lot had changed in years following Jesus death, including the total destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D by the Romans. So there is also a good chance that she might have made a lot of mistakes in choosing the so called “holy” sites.

The place that looks like a skull is known as Gordon’s Calvary. It was discovered by an old British General who also discovered a tomb right near the place of the

skull. The tomb is a very short walk from Gordon's Calvary and seems to fit a number of detailed specifications from the Gospels:

1. It was outside the ancient city walls (**Hebrews 13:12**)
2. It is proximate to Gordon's Golgotha (**John 19:41**)—only 100 yards away.
3. It was a new tomb hewn in the rock (**Matthew 27:60; Luke 23:53; John 19:41**). Mind you, the Greek word John used for "new" is *kainos*, meaning not new in time but new in the fact that the tomb was unused. If John wanted to specify new in time he would have used the Greek word *neos*. Archeological research has shown that the configuration of Gordon's tomb actually dates back to the late Old Testament period which is why John did not use *neos*.
4. It was a garden area (**John 20:41, 42**) adjacent to a wine press.
5. It had an enclosed cistern of 250,000 gallons implying a very wealthy owner.
6. It had a rolling stone door (**Matthew 27:60; 28:2; Mark 16:3; Luke 24:2**).
7. And, most importantly, it is empty (**Luke 24:6, 12; John 20**)!

I do have to say that this site, like many sites in Palestine, remain extremely controversial as we really cannot know for sure.

There are a couple other points I would like to make about the burial. It is pretty clear that Joseph and Nicodemus must have planned this out. It is not every day that you have 100 pounds of burial spices just hanging around the

house. It is likely that during the time that Jesus was suffering on the cross they were making arrangements. You see normally criminals were just tossed into large common graves; and they clearly did not want anyone just tossing Jesus away. So they mustered up their courage and while Nicodemus was gathering the spices Joseph went back to the city to plead with Pilate.

But also take note of the fact that they packed Jesus away with 100 pounds of burial spices. I think John gives us this fact because he is again emphasizing how unrealistic it is to think, even for a moment, that Jesus was not dead and was somehow able to wake up and walk out of the tomb. A person who had been brutally scourged, beaten, crucified, speared, and then packed in 100 pounds of spices and wrapped, or bound, in linen cloths is not going to be able to wake up, move around with all that weight on him, find a way to unwrap Himself and then roll away a big stone from the tomb entrance and just walk out. Besides, Jesus had not eaten or drank any water since the beginning of the entire ordeal. Such inferences are absolutely absurd and stretch ridiculously far in an attempt to dispute or discredit Jesus' death and resurrection.

Jesus was wrapped in linen and covered with myrrh and aloes, which was the Jewish way of embalming. But this reminds me of a passage in Psalms which I believe speaks entirely of Jesus:

Psalm 45:6-8

Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness;

therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of joy above Your fellows. All Your garments are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia;

I think this passage is a beautiful description of Jesus' total authority, His victory on the cross, and His relationship with His Father. While at the same time it perfectly points to the way that Jesus' body was prepared for burial. And as long as we are thinking about Old Testament texts, don't miss out the fact that John told us this tomb was in a garden. This reminds me of **Genesis 3**. It was in the garden where sin and death first reared their ugly heads and enslaved mankind; thus, it is entirely appropriate that it is in a garden where life will be returned to mankind and sin and death forever are conquered.

A final comment before we head into next week and we begin our study on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Each of the other gospels lets us know that Mary Magdalene and the women who had come with Jesus from Galilee had followed Joseph and Nicodemus to the grave. So they absolutely knew the location of where He was buried and they were eyewitnesses to the deeds of Joseph and Nicodemus.

Let's Pray