

198. The Gospel of John 19:30-42

The King is Buried

A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier
(11-6-22)

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John 19:30–31 (NKJV)

³⁰ So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit. ³¹ Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should 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.

According to Mosaic law, the corpse of anyone that had been executed by hanging them from a tree (the Jews considered a cross a 'tree'—1 Peter 2:24) was not to be left there hanging into the night but was to be buried that same day lest the land be defiled. (Deuteronomy 21:22-23)

If this was true of a normal day—then it would apply doubly if the next day (which began at sundown) was a Sabbath as John, in verse 31, tells us that it indeed was.

As John further points out—the particular Sabbath that was about to begin was especially holy because it was a high (special) Sabbath.

Jesus was crucified on Passover—the 14th of Nissan.

The next day (which started at sundown) was the beginning of a 7-day feast that took place from the 15th of Nissan thru the 21st—a feast known as the Feast of **Unleavened Bread**.

According to the commandment of God (Leviticus 23:5-8), this feast was to start (and end) with a Sabbath—a special or 'high' Sabbath. As mentioned, besides the weekly Sabbath (Saturday)—there were 7 other special or 'high' Sabbaths that were sprinkled throughout the year, and it was because of one of these high Sabbaths that the Jewish religious leaders wanted the bodies of these three crucified men buried before sundown.

One author had this to say,

"Nowhere is the ungodly hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders more evident than in their insistence that Jesus' body be taken down before the Sabbath. They had no compunction about murdering the Lord of the Sabbath, yet they were meticulous in not wanting to defile the Sabbath by having His body hanging on the cross after that day began."

Now because the Romans wouldn't allow a crucified man to be taken down from the cross before they were sure he was dead—the Jewish leaders requested that Pilate order his soldiers to **'break the legs'** of the three men who were being crucified that day to hasten their deaths so that their bodies could be buried before sundown.

This was done with a large wooden mallet shattering the tibia and the fibula bones in each leg—the major and minor bones that connect the ankle to the knee.

What would this accomplish? It would hasten death by preventing the one being crucified from being able to push himself up by his legs (using the nail in his feet) so that he could take some oxygen into his lungs. So, Pilate gave the order to have the legs of Jesus and the thieves being crucified on either side of Him broken.

However, as John records—

John 19:32–33 (NKJV)

³² Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. ³³ But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs.

Not only that, but according to Bible scholar Alfred Edersheim in his classic work *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*—he says that if Rome wanted to hasten the death of someone being crucified—or to simply verify that they were in fact dead, the Roman soldiers standing by would administer what was called the ‘death stroke’.

The death stroke consisted of jabbing a spear into the heart of the one being crucified to make sure they wouldn’t cheat death.

John tells us that when the Roman soldiers came to Jesus, they didn’t break His legs because He was already dead.

But just to be sure, one of the soldiers administered the death stroke anyway—this John said fulfilled two prophecies concerning Jesus’ death:

John 19:34-37 (NKJV)

³⁴ But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. ³⁵ And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe. ³⁶ For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, “*Not one of His bones shall be broken.*” [Psalm 34:20] ³⁷ And again another Scripture says, “*They shall look on Him whom they pierced.*” [Zechariah 12:10]

I think at this point a third prophecy was fulfilled from Psalm 69:20—a prophecy spoken by Jesus Himself through David—“*Reproach has broken my heart.*”

Some medical experts believe that, under extreme circumstances, it is possible for the human heart to literally ‘burst’ (rupture) from emotional strain, causing blood to spill into the pericardium (the sack surrounding the heart) and mix there with the lymphatic fluid—which is 96% water.

This many believe is what happened to Jesus on the Cross—He died of a ‘broken heart.’

That is why when the soldier plunged his spear into Jesus’ side—out came blood mixed with ‘water.’

Now as soon as the victims were dead their bodies were removed from the cross and sometimes given to the family for a proper burial. However, if no one stepped forward to claim the body, the Romans would toss it into a shallow, ‘common’ grave.

These were graves in which the bodies of the poor and criminals would be disposed of. Although sometimes the Romans would simply toss the body into a ditch where wild animals and birds would feed on the carcass.

John 19:38–39 (NKJV)

³⁸ After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave *him* permission. So he came and took the body of Jesus. ³⁹ And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds.

So, who was this Joseph of Arimathea?

- Matthew tells us he was a wealthy man and calls him a *disciple* of Jesus.
- Mark and Luke add that he was “*a member of the Council*,” which means that he was a member of the Sanhedrin—the Jewish High Council.
- Mark says that he was “*waiting for the kingdom of God*” (Mark 15:43) and Luke that he was “*a good and upright man, who had not consented to their decision and action.*” (Luke 23:50–51)
- So, Joseph was a follower of Jesus—although up until this point he had been a *secret* or ‘*closet*’ disciple.

Jesus had many who secretly believed in Him—another one of these was a well-known Jewish rabbi and Pharisee named **Nicodemus**.

If you remember, Nicodemus was the Pharisee who came to Jesus privately one night and said—“*Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.*” (John 3:2)

So, it seems that there was a small group of powerful, well-connected men who secretly followed Jesus but were afraid to openly declare their allegiance to Him for fear of the repercussions from the other members of the Sanhedrin who hated Jesus—and they were in the majority.

But there comes a time when you can be a secret disciple of Christ no longer and are compelled by the Holy Spirit to step from the shadows into the light—and ‘*come out of the closet*’ in your faith!

I can still remember the day when I came “*out of the closet*” in my faith, and the same was true of Joseph and Nicodemus who now openly go to Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus—

John 19:40–42 (NKJV)

⁴⁰ Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury. ⁴¹ 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. ⁴² So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews' Preparation Day, for the tomb was nearby.

If Joseph had not offered his tomb to bury Jesus’ body—the Romans, as I said, would have probably buried it a shallow grave in a potter’s field—or simply tossed it into an open ditch where wild animals would have eaten it.

This was in fulfillment of a prophecy from Isaiah 53:9—“He had done no wrong and had never deceived anyone. But he was buried like a criminal; he was put in a rich man’s grave.”

Some commentators make a point to say that Joseph took the body of Jesus and ‘*embalmed*’ it—but this is absolutely untrue because the Jews didn’t *embalm* the bodies of their dead as did the Egyptians—again we read in John’s Gospel—

John 19:39-40 (NKJV)

³⁹ And Nicodemus...also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. ⁴⁰ Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury.

Later the Apostle John tells us that these strips of cloth were wound around Jesus' torso, arms, and legs and that a separate piece of cloth was used to cover His head leaving His face exposed.

One author said,

"This proves to me conclusively the Shroud of Turin is not authentic. Think of the pictures you've seen of the shroud. They always show the imprint of the crucified victim from head to toe. Here, the Scripture record says there was a napkin—a separate piece of cloth around the head. Thus, the shroud does not meet this particular criterion."

So, the Jews didn't embalm, they wrapped the body with strips of cloth weaving into them sweet spices to stave off the stench of decomposition.

The Egyptians embalmed the bodies of their dead to *preserve* them—the Jews often put the bodies of their dead into a limestone burial box (casket) called a *sarcophagus*. The word 'sarcophagus' literally means '*flesh-eater*.'

The reason the Jews did this was because they weren't trying to *preserve* the dead body—they wanted it to *decay* as quickly as possible. So, they would place the dead into one of these '*flesh-eating boxes*', put it into the family tomb—and then leave the body alone for a few years until the body decayed down to the bones.

These bones were then removed from the sarcophagus and placed into a small stone box known as an *ossuary*—or '*bone-box*'.

The ossuary would then remain in the family tomb with the remains of other family members.

Matthew 27:59-60 (NKJV)

⁵⁹ When Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, ⁶⁰ and laid it in his new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb, and departed.

When the Garden Tomb was discovered in 1867 by a very godly British army officer named General Gordon—at first, he thought it was simply a cave they had discovered but on further examination he realized that it was a man-made burial chamber hewn out of the stone.

They knew it was a wealthy man's burial chamber because it had two compartments to it—which was consistent with how the rich had their burial chambers constructed.

One author speaks further on this—

"When the Garden Tomb was discovered in 1867, the godly General Gordon was convinced that this was the place where the body of Jesus had lain. The Garden Tomb, hidden for centuries, was covered with rubbish twenty feet high. When they first cleared the spot, with great caution they gathered all the dust and debris within the tomb and carefully shipped it to the Scientific Association of Great Britain with this question—'Are there any traces of decomposition in these samples?' After everything was carefully analyzed—they sent word back to General Gordon—'After carefully examining the samples you sent us, we have concluded that there is absolutely no traces of human decomposition or decay in them.'"

If this is the real tomb of Christ, then Jesus was the first to be laid there—and He was also the last—or as one pastor put it, *“He came into the world from a virgin’s womb; He came forth again from a virgin tomb”*.

“...and he rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb and departed”. (Matthew 27:60)

- This was the customary way to seal an expensive tomb.
- The tomb would commonly have a small entrance where you’d have to stoop to enter.
- The door to the tomb was typically made of a heavy, circular shaped stone weighing between 3 and 4 thousand pounds.
- The stone rested in a groove or channel long enough to allow it to be rolled back and forth to either open or close the tomb (the track is still there outside the tomb General Gordon discovered but the stone is gone).

Needless to say, it took several strong men to move the stone which is why we read in Mark’s gospel that very early on Sunday morning as some of the women made their way to the tomb to finish preparing Jesus’ body properly for burial that they said among themselves, *“Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?”* (Mark 16:3)

So Joseph laid the body of Jesus in his new tomb and he rolled (had some servants roll) a large stone over the opening and departed.

Matthew 27:62-66 (NKJV)

⁶² On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, ⁶³ saying, "Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise.'
⁶⁴ Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead.' So the last deception will be worse than the first." ⁶⁵ Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how." ⁶⁶ So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard.

Now even though the chief priests and Pharisees didn’t believe in Jesus they did remember something He had told them when they demanded He give them a sign proving once and for all that He was the Messiah, He told them—

Matthew 12:39–40 (NKJV)

³⁹ ...“An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰ For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Look, these men didn’t believe that Jesus was really going to rise from the dead—what they were afraid of was that Jesus’ disciples would come and steal His body and claim He had risen from the dead which would have been, in their minds—the greatest deception of all.

- Can you imagine the sorrow Jesus’ disciples, including the women who were by the tomb that day must have been feeling?

Their hopes were crushed—their hearts were broken.

This is often how we feel when life seems to throw us a 'curve ball'
and all we feel in that moment is that
our hopes are crushed, and our hearts are broken.

At that moment Jesus' followers knew only sorrow—but in three days that sorrow would be turned into great joy!

They would soon realize that **"It is finished"** didn't mean Jesus' life and ministry had come to an end along with their hopes and dreams—but rather, it was a declaration of a new beginning.

What the disciples at that moment thought was the greatest tragedy the world had ever seen—would shortly turn out to be the greatest victory in the history of mankind!

It's as one old preacher said,

"It's Friday—Jesus is arrested in the garden where He was praying—but Sunday's coming.

It's Friday—the disciples are hiding and Peter's denying that he knows the Lord—but Sunday's coming.

It's Friday—Jesus is standing before the high priest of Israel, silent as a lamb before the slaughter—but Sunday's coming.

It's Friday—Jesus is beaten, mocked, and spit upon—but Sunday's coming.

It's Friday—those Roman soldiers are flogging our Lord with a leather scourge that has bits of bones and glass and metal, tearing at his flesh—but Sunday's coming.

It's Friday—the Son of man stands firm as they press the crown of thorns down into his brow—but Sunday's coming.

It's Friday—see Him walking to Calvary, the blood dripping from His body. See the cross crushing down on His back as He stumbles beneath the load—it's Friday; but Sunday's a coming.

It's Friday—see those Roman soldiers driving the nails into the feet and hands of my Lord. Hear my Jesus cry, "Father, forgive them."—it's Friday; but Sunday's coming.

It's Friday—Jesus is hanging on the cross, bloody and dying—but Sunday's coming.

It's Friday—the sky grows dark, the earth begins to tremble, and He who knew no sin became sin for us. The Holy God, Who will not abide with sin, pours out His wrath on that perfect sacrificial Lamb who cries out, "My God, My God. Why hast thou forsaken me?" What a horrible cry—but Sunday's coming.

It's Friday—and at the moment of Jesus' death, the veil of the Temple that separates sinful man from Holy God was torn from the top to the bottom because—Sunday's coming.

It's Friday—Jesus is hanging on the cross, heaven is weeping, and hell is partying, but that's because it's Friday, and they don't know it—but Sunday's a coming.

And on that horrible day 2,000 years ago, Jesus the Christ, the Lord of glory, the only begotten Son of God, the only perfect Man, died on the cross of Calvary. Satan thought that he had won the victory. Surely, he had destroyed the Son of God. Finally, he had disproved the prophecy God had uttered in the Garden and the one who was to crush his head had been destroyed. It was Friday—but praise the Lord—Sunday was a coming!”

Folks, I don’t know what each of you is going through right now—today, in your life.

I know it may seem like it’s ‘Friday’—like everything in your life is crashing down—your hopes seem dashed—your heart smashed—but I can assure you that Sunday’s coming—and when it does your joy will be full!

And the ‘Sunday’ I have in mind is the Rapture of the Church!

If you are a child of God this morning—live for Him and make your life count so that someday, when you stand before Him, you’ll hear Him say, *“Well done good and faithful servant...enter into the joy of your Lord!”*

While you’re on this earth realize that time is short and the only thing that really matters are the people God has placed in your life—cherish them and be thankful each and every day for them.

The way you do that is by living a good life that loves the people you’re closest to—a life that honors God!

Let me end with a poem I came across that tries to capture this profound truth—it’s called *“The Dash.”*

“I read of a man who stood to speak at the funeral of a friend. He referred to the dates on the tombstone—the beginning and the end.

He noted with joy the date of his birth—and then spoke of the following date with tears. But he said what mattered most of all was the dash between those years.

For that dash represents all the time that a person spent on earth—and now only those who loved them know what that little line is worth.

For it matters not, how much we own, the cars...the house...the cash. What matters is how we live and love and how we spend our dash.

So, think about this long and hard—are there things you’d like to change? For you never know how much time is left that can still be rearranged.

If we could just slow down enough to consider what’s true and real—and always try to understand the way other people feel.

And be less quick to anger and show appreciation more—and love the people in our lives like we’ve never loved before.

If we treat each other with respect and more often wear a smile—remembering this special dash might only last a little while.

So, when your eulogy is being read with your life’s actions to rehash...Would you be proud of the things they say about how you spent [and lived] YOUR dash?”

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

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