

EXPOSITION OF JOHN

Message #74

John 19:31-42

One of the more dramatic holocaust stories I ever read was the story of a Jew who pretended to be dead among the carnage of dead bodies and was able to get to freedom after the soldiers had left. The person telling the story said he laid there and didn't move and didn't even breathe much, for what seemed to be hours. It was a great story of playing dead.

This part of John's narrative is clearly designed to show us that Jesus was dead. There are some great mysteries and moving of God involved in these events, but John's key point is that Jesus was dead. What any must see by analyzing these verses is that:

JESUS CHRIST WAS LITERALLY, TOTALLY AND COMPLETELY DEAD AND WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED TO HIS BODY ABSOLUTELY PROVES IT.

You cannot walk away from this text without realizing that Jesus was actually dead. The reason why John wants us to get this point is so that when He comes back to life, we are witnessing a major declaration of God and a miraculous resurrection of God.

ACTION #1 – The hypocrisy of the Jews. **19:31a**

The first action that proves Jesus was actually dead is this hypocritical action of the Jews. These Jews are a real piece of work. They will not step foot in Pilate's house for fear they might defile themselves (John 18:28) and now they are concerned about leaving a dead body hanging in public on the eve of the Sabbath day. The O.T. law required that corpses of hanged criminals be taken down before sunset (Deuteronomy 21:22-23; Joshua 8:29; 10:26). This was a special Sabbath, near the Passover, a "high day" and so the Jews wanted those bodies taken down. The hypocrisy of all of this is that they have just executed Jesus Christ, the innocent Son of God, and they were worried about violating some Sabbath day rule. They had bigger things to worry about than dead bodies hanging out in public; they should be worrying about their dead soul and heart heading to eternal condemnation.

John Calvin said that is the way it is with religious hypocrites. They direct all their attention to small insignificant things and pass over their own greatest crimes (*John*, Vol. 18, p. 238). It was Charles Spurgeon who said that he came to realize that 'religious scruples can live in a dead conscience.' Don't be deceived; there are many very religious people, who have their rules and regulations and they follow them rigidly and legalistically, who are not right with God. There are many religious people who don't do this or that, who do not know Jesus Christ. That is seen right here. These were the most religious people in the world and they just killed Jesus Christ.

ACTION #2 – The breaking of the legs. **19:31b-33**

I want you to notice that 'the Jews' (articular in Greek, meaning the specific religious leading Jews) specifically asked that the legs of those crucified be broken and Pilate dispatched his soldiers to do just that (**19:31b**).

What typically would happen is that soldiers would smash and break the lower leg bones. In fact, in 1968 the only known archeological discovery was made of a person who had been crucified. The skeletal remains revealed that the lower legs had been shattered. The breaking of the legs did three things:

First, it would speed up the process of death. It was possible that a person could hang on a cross and live for quite some time and the breaking of the legs would cause shock, loss of blood, inability to breath and bring about quick death.

Second, it meant there would be no possibility of one recovering and somehow walking away.

Third, it meant that the man being crucified could not possibly elevate himself a little in order to be able to breathe while hanging on the cross.

What is so important to see here is that the two thieves' legs were broken, but by the time the soldiers came to Jesus they realized He was already dead and, therefore, did not break His legs. Little did they realize that God was sovereignly watching over what they were doing to this dead body. He was not going to allow one of His Son's bones to be broken as a specific fulfillment of Biblical prophecy (Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12; Psalm 34:20). What was actually working here was the secret, silent, sovereignty of God in full force. This becomes more amazing when we realize that the request of the Jews and the order of Pilate were to break Jesus' legs, but they did not do it because God was overseeing this whole situation and He would not permit it.

ACTION #3 – The piercing with the sword . 19:34-37

The language used here would indicate that Christ's side was not just scratched with a spear, but a spear was actually thrust into His side. God permitted this to happen to His Son's dead body because it was a fulfillment of His prophetic word (Zechariah 12:10). The specific fulfillment of this prophecy guarantees that one day Israel will look on the One they pierced. The first part of the prophecy has already been fulfilled; they pierced Him. But the second part of the prophecy is yet to be fulfilled. **In other words, this nation, Israel, will be forced to literally and physically face Jesus Christ.** This means two things for Israel, terrible avenging judgment and gracious, delivering salvation.

When they pierced Christ's side there was a sudden flow of blood and water that came out immediately and that is specifically what caught John's eye. This is a very odd thing.

In the course of my life, I have personally harvested a dozen elk. When you harvest an elk in the mountains, you cannot drag it back to camp and just load it in your truck. You must field dress the animal, quarter it and pack it out. This requires that you take a sharp knife and handsaw and go into the body cavity. Now when you do this, the thing you notice is the blood. There are various liquids inside a body, but those liquids basically flow out in the blood. To look and see a flow of blood and a flow of water would be very odd and that is exactly what caught John's eye. What was the meaning of this flowing out of blood and water from Jesus body?

First of all we begin by saying that this proves beyond any shadow of doubt that Jesus Christ was truly dead . As Dr. Charles Ryrie said, this is "undebatable proof that He actually died" (Charles C. Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible*, p. 1720).

This matter has been interpreted in various ways and frankly most of them don't make any sense:

- 1) Some say it is evidence of the fact that Jesus died with a broken heart. This is absurd because Jesus died triumphantly, crying 'it is finished.' Hebrews says He went to the cross with 'joy,' not with a broken heart (Heb. 12:2).
- 2) Some say that it represents two ordinances - blood is communion and water is baptism. Again, there is no hint that this has anything to do with ordinances and furthermore, since Paul only addressed the Lord's Supper and not water Baptism for the church, we seriously doubt this is a true interpretation.
- 3) Some say it has sacred significance in that it is the only stream that can heal people from sin. This is the only blood that can wash away sins and the only water that can cleanse from filth. In view of what John says in **verse 35**, we suspect there is truth to this view.

John is very clear to point out that he literally saw this himself with his own eyes and that he wanted people to know this truth so they could believe this truth. What truth? He wanted people to realize that Jesus Christ did literally die for our sins and that by believing on Him we may be saved and have all of our sins washed away. This is the only death that can save you from all your filthy sin. We are washed clean the moment we believe.

Both of these events were a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy pertaining to the Son of God who could save us- no bones broken and side pierced.

ACTION #4 – The taking of the dead body. 19:38

We don't know much about either of the next two men who are mentioned by John, but, as Dr. Boice observed, what we do know about them is 'significant' (*The Gospel of John*, Vol. 5, p. 1558). They came to the forefront of things at a very unique moment. Both of these men were financially rich, but more importantly, even though to this point they had been quiet about their faith, both were spiritually rich. They both risked their lives and their religious status to do what they did. I want you to remember that the actual disciples of Jesus Christ had fled. They were no where to be seen, but what these two did was something very special and sacred.

The first man we learn about is Joseph who was from Arimathea. The Apostle John gives Joseph the title of being a "disciple" of Jesus Christ. Arimathea was a city located about 20 miles northwest of Jerusalem. Joseph was a very rich man who had become a secret disciple of Jesus Christ (Matthew 27:57). He did apparently believe that Jesus Christ was the One who would eventually establish the Jewish Kingdom (Mark 15:43). Joseph was a member of the Sanhedrin and he had not consented to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ (Luke 23:50-51).

There is something important to observe here and that is, sometimes when things of God seem to be at their lowest moments, God will raise up certain people who have the means to minister to God's servants and do the work of God at a very unusual level.

After a body was dead, the Romans typically liked to leave it hang until in putrefied or until the birds of the air ate the flesh. This made a powerful statement that you do not want to mess with Rome.

Family and friends of dead criminals could make a request and oftentimes pay some money to get the dead body. We do not know whether or not Joseph paid any fee, but what we do know is that he went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus and got it.

ACTION #5 – The treatment of the dead body. **19:39-40**

Another key Jewish leader was Nicodemus. He also was a rich man. This is the one who had come to Jesus Christ early in His days of ministry, to whom Jesus said he must be “born again” (John 3:1 ff; 7:50-51). Nicodemus was another one of the secret believers in Jesus Christ and he, at his own expense, brought several pounds of treatment for the dead body and used it to take care of Jesus’ dead body.

We may only surmise that it probably had clicked with Nicodemus what Jesus had meant when He said He would be lifted up and whoever would believe in Him would not perish but have everlasting life.

Nicodemus took the dead body and wrapped it tight in linen strips mixed with about 100 pounds of spices. John’s real point here is designed to show that these things were being done in regard to Jesus’ dead body. Furthermore, this linen wrapping would become critical to John’s faith in Jesus’ resurrection (John 20:4-5, 7-8). John knew Jesus was literally dead and He also knew when He saw that linen laying there in the tomb that Jesus was literally alive.

ACTION #6 – The burial of the dead body. **19:41-42**

They took the body into a garden area and Joseph placed it in his own new tomb that had been dug out of the hill and rocks (Matthew 27:60). This tomb had been cut out of the rock and no one had ever been buried in it yet. This too was in total fulfillment of prophecy for it was Isaiah who predicted that Jesus would be buried with the rich and this tomb was a fulfillment of that very prophecy (Isaiah 53:9). Apparently the Sabbath day was fast approaching, which would explain why they rolled the stone in front of the tomb and the women went back to prepare more spices for the dead body (Luke 23:54-56).

The eyewitnesses to this event were Joseph, it was his tomb; Nicodemus, it was his spices; four Galilean women (Luke 23:55) and the Apostle John. All of these people would testify that Jesus was really and truly dead. He wasn’t playing dead, He wasn’t faking that He was dead, He wasn’t just in some death state; He was literally, totally and completely dead.

But when that spear had been thrust into the side of Jesus Christ, something very unique had occurred; blood and water had come out of His side which said this is the death that could take away sin and give life and what would happen next would prove this very point.

In your lifetime you will probably attend many funerals and you will stare at many dead bodies. But know this, there is only one dead body that can actually take away all your sin and wash you clean and it is the One right here. The body of Jesus Christ. If Christ would have just stayed in the grave, His dead body wouldn’t be able to save you any more than your own dead body could save you. But He arose and by that act, He proves that He is the One who paid the price for your sins and can wash them away and give you life.

John was an eyewitness of this and he recorded this so you could believe and be saved. Will you believe in Jesus Christ tonight? Do you believe in Him as your only Savior?