
The Gospel Events

John 19:17-20:10

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The gospel is a story. It is history. It is a narrative of events. The gospel is also the Biblical interpretation of those events. The gospel tells the story and tells us what it means.

This is the gospel story. It is John's telling of it. It flows out of the focus he has given us in the trial narrative that is just before this text. The focus is on the King. He was betrayed, unjustly tried and condemned to death. Now, the king is taken out to be executed by crucifixion on a cross.

¹⁶ So he [Pilate] delivered him [Jesus] over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus, ¹⁷ and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha

Many years later, the Apostle Paul tells us why this story is important.

¹ Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ² and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. ¹¹ Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

It is important for the same reasons it is important in John: it is what you must believe in order to be saved.

The Title of the King (v.18-22)

¹⁸ There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. ¹⁹ Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." ²⁰ Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. ²¹ So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" ²² Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

Simple words and a familiar scene. Hidden from our view is the excruciating pain and terrible hours. Three crosses, two criminals and the King of the Jews, the King of the Universe. Pilate makes sure that the Jews know who is hanging here. He is making a political statement; getting even for the position they have put him in.

John makes sure the world knows. This is the King hanging here on the cross. And the great question then is, "Why is He here?"

The Clothing of the King (v.23-24)

²³ When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, ²⁴ so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, "They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots."

Kings are known by the garments they wear, extravagant garments and golden crowns. Robes of ermine and purple satin and silk. In olden days a king would be known as a warrior king by his armor and his great cloak thrown over one shoulder. Others would be known for the greatness of their power as they sat in majestic attitude surrounded by banners.

Jesus' is known by his underwear. He has been stripped of his cloak and outer garment. His head-covering and belt are also taken away and given to the soldiers. He is going to be stripped naked. Standing there, his last remaining article of clothing is a tunic. It is seamless and made of very fine, woven linen. Someone who loved Him had either made it for Him or bought it at some expense. The soldiers are loath to divide it up. So they pull out and roll their dice. One of them is the winner. He walks over the King of the Universe and pulls the tunic off over his head.

John points us once again to the fulfillment of Scripture. This is from Psalm 22:18. That Psalm is the lament from the cross. Listen to the stanzas this comes from:

¹⁴ I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast;

¹⁵ my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my
jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.

¹⁶ For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me;
they have pierced my hands and feet—

¹⁷ I can count all my bones— they stare and gloat over me;

¹⁸ they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they
cast lots.

In this way, John assures us that what we are witnessing here is the fulfillment of the Father's plan. Even in such a simple, crass act by Roman soldiers, Jesus is walking the will of His Father. He gives up His kingly garment, an undershirt.

The Followers of the King (v.25-27)

So the soldiers did these things, ²⁵ but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" ²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

Kings have followers. They are always surrounded by their attendants, advisors and courtiers. Their throne rooms and halls are thronged with counselors, petitioners and supporters. Jesus has His loyal followers.

Among the many women who were near, John identifies these four. It is likely they are standing together.

And John himself is among them. He is the disciple that Jesus loves. He has quietly, courageously, loyally followed His king from the garden to the court. He has trudged along the road to Golgotha. I can him standing there, his face wet with tears, concern for these dear ladies etched on his face.

And he is given an assignment. From the cross, Jesus sees them. He is the eldest son. Joseph is dead. Who will care for His mother? At this point, His brothers are unbelieving. But there is a faithful follower. There is the only disciple at the cross. And Jesus speaks. He calls her, "Woman". This is a term of respect – we might say, "Lady..." And it protects her identity. With a nod to John, there is your son. And staring deeply into John's eyes, there is your mother. John understood exactly what His beloved King wanted.

He took Mary home with Him and provided for her.

The Death of the King (v.28-37)

John focuses on two significant events in the death of Jesus. And he reminds us why he is writing what he is writing.

The Giving of His Life (v.28-30)

²⁸ After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." ²⁹ A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth.

³⁰ When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

To the last word to the last drop Jesus fulfills the Scripture. Everything is done. He has completed the work the Father gave Him. There is one last Scripture to be fulfilled, Psalm 69:16-21.

¹⁶ Answer me, O LORD, for your steadfast love is good; according to your abundant mercy, turn to me.

¹⁷ Hide not your face from your servant; for I am in distress; make haste to answer me.

¹⁸ Draw near to my soul, redeem me; ransom me because of my enemies!

¹⁹ You know my reproach,
and my shame and my dishonor;
my foes are all known to you.

²⁰ Reproaches have broken my heart, so that I am in despair.
I looked for pity, but there was none,
and for comforters, but I found none.

²¹ They gave me poison for food,
and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.

What a pitiless mercy – give him vinegar to drink for this is what sour wine is.

But then all is done. After the work of creation, God rested on the seventh day. When man sinned and fell, God went back to work. Down through the long ages, He was working to bring about the salvation of His people. It culminated with Jesus, who came to do the works of His Father and do and say all that He had seen the Father doing and saying. Now, the work is finished. It is done. Time to die. He majestically bows His head, and dismisses His spirit.

The Proof of His Death (v.31-37)

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. 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. 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.”

One of the questions that arose in the first generation of the church and has come up over and over again is, “Did Jesus actually die? Is there any proof that He was dead, not just in some deep coma?” Where is his death certificate?

John offers three significant proofs certifying that Jesus has actually died.

The testimony of the blood and the water (v.31-34)

The Jews did not want the spectacle of these crosses on their holy day, the Passover. They wanted them taken down. So they asked for the Romans to end it. This was done by taking a heavy metal pike or hammer and crushing the lower legs between the ankles and knees. Being no longer able to push themselves up to breathe, the two on either side of Jesus would have suffocated and died fairly quickly. When they came to Jesus, they could see that He was already dead. To ensure it, one of the soldiers drove his spear into Jesus' side. When he did, he apparently pierced the heart and out of the wound flowed blood and water, thus signifying that Jesus was already dead.

Water and blood are not only the proof of Jesus' death, but are symbolic of the purpose of His death. The water speaks of our being purified by His death. The blood speaks of our being purchased by His death. We are cleansed by His death. Our penalty for sin is paid, the debt released and we are bought for God.

The testimony of the eye witness (v. 35)

John also testifies that he saw it all with his own eyes. He is a personal, eye witness testimony to Jesus' death and to the outflowing of the blood and water from Jesus' spear-pierced side.

John, in his first letter, writes these words referring to the testimony to the water and blood. (1 John 5:6-12)

⁶ This is he who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. ⁷ For there are three that testify: ⁸ the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree. ⁹ If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son

John is telling the truth. His testimony is sure. For he is giving us this testimony so that you will believe. And in believing, you will have life.

The testimony of the Scripture (v. 36-37)

Finally, there is the testimony of Scripture. What happened here was what the Scripture said would happen. In the Old Testament,

sacrifices were not to have their legs broken. So the final Passover lamb will not have his broken either as predicted by Psalm 34:20.

The Scriptures had also predicted that the Messiah, the King, would be seen by His people as one who had been pierced. Zechariah 12:10, looking forward to a future day at the return of the King, says:

¹⁰ “And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.

Those on whom saving grace is poured will plead for mercy when they see the King who died and was pierced as a testimony that His death is real and that it meant all that the Scriptures say it meant.

The Burial of the King (v.38-42)

Paul says that part of the gospel events is that Jesus is buried.

³⁸ After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was 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 away his body. ³⁹ Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. ⁴⁰ So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. 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 because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.

Now, Paul said that Jesus “died according to the Scriptures, was buried and rose again according to the Scriptures.” The burial is part of the gospel events; it is not part of the gospel meaning.

Two prominent men who have become secret disciples step forward to ask for Jesus’ body. Joseph of Arimathea requests the body and has his request granted. Nicodemus, whose visit with Jesus John had recorded earlier in this book, joined Joseph. He brought 75 pounds worth of spices normally used in a Jewish burial. They secure a grave that was in

a nearby garden to use. There they lay the beaten, broken, nail and spear pierced body of the King.

As the night falls.

The Resurrection of the King (20:1-10)

The gospel events do not end in death, but end in life.

¹ Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. ² So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” ³ So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. ⁴ Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, ⁷ and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to their homes.

Three key characters show us the story. It is Sunday morning, the day after the Sabbath. Mary of Magdala heads out for a dawn visit to the tomb. And... the tomb is open! She is shocked. What has happened? She runs to the home where two of the disciples, Simon Peter and John, were staying. Her report of a stolen body sends both of them racing for the tomb. John arrived first but didn’t enter. Peter brushes past and enters the tomb.

They see the grave cloths neatly folded up on the burial bed. And belief surges up in their hearts. He is not stolen. He is risen. It is just as He said. He has overcome death and come to life. The valley of the shadow of death has a sunrise at its end. The new creation has begun. The powers of the age to come have broken into the this old creation and the life of heaven has started. He is risen. He is risen. Let all the world know and all the world believe, the King has risen from the dead.

Reflect and Respond

This is the gospel. Jesus died according to the Scriptures. He was buried. Jesus rose from the dead on the third day according to the Scriptures.

And so, these final words from the Apostle Paul,

¹ Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ² and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. [1 Corinthians 15:1-2]

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. [Romans 1:16]

⁸ But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹ because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 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.”
[Romans 10:8-13]