



G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI ♦ DEO ♦ GLORIA

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Sermon Notes

Caring for the Body of Jesus

John 19:31-42

October 8, 2006

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- I. **The Providential Setting**
 - a. **The Death of Christ**
 - Few things, if any, cause us to question God, His will, and His sovereignty more than death, especially the death of a loved one.
 - Since we as human beings are not omniscient, we are shocked and devastated at the tragedy of the death of loved ones. Further, we consider death especially tragic when it is 'senseless' or involves someone who is young and 'innocent'. In these terrible situations, we often think that death could have been avoided, 'if only...' In other

words, when death does not make sense to us [and it rarely does], we call it ‘senseless’ as if there was a degree of arbitrariness to it.

- ❑ Yet, as we examine the Cross of Christ, and look upon the revealed truth of God’s Word, we realize that there has never been a more ‘tragic’, ‘unfair’, or ‘unjust’ event than torturous death of Christ on the cross.
- ❑ Until we realize this truth, it is difficult to apply the truth of the cross to our lives.
- ❑ Too often we view our own personal tragedy as so unique that no one or nothing could ever help ease the pain.
- ❑ Yet, only Christ was truly unique, and His death marks the greatest injustice the world has ever known, yet the Bible is clear: **IT WAS THE FATHER’S PERFECT WILL** and throughout the entire ordeal **HE WAS IN COMPLETE CONTROL.**
- ❑ Even Christ Himself demonstrated His sovereignty in His death, as He ‘gave up’ His spirit and died.
- ❑ Therefore, it is absolutely essential for us to understand that, as Jesus’ body hang, lifeless, on the cross, God is still in absolute control!
- ❑ Therefore, let us take comfort when the tragedies of life come our way that God is still in absolute control, seated on His throne!

b. The Day of Preparation

- ❑ One of the fascinating truths of the crucifixion account in John’s Gospel is John’s reference to the ‘Day of Preparation.’
- ❑ This is important for several reasons:
 - First of all, the ‘day of preparation’ was when the Passover lambs were slaughtered in the Temple, and, therefore, Christ was crucified, not only on the day the Passover lambs were slaughtered, but quite possibly, at the very moment the Passover lambs were being slaughtered. This truth, therefore, demonstrates how Christ was the true Passover Lamb.
 - Also, this reveals that, as the Jews were rushing to try, convict, and crucify Jesus Christ on the day they did, they were actually perfectly in accord with the sovereign will of God, who established, long before the first century, that Christ would die at that appointed time.
 - Therefore, Jesus had to die on that very day, and not a moment early, or a moment later.

- Secondly, the ‘day of preparation’ immediately preceded the Passover Sabbath, which was, as John notes, ‘a high day.’ Because of this truth, Christ’s body had to be removed from the cross prior to the beginning of the Sabbath, in accordance with the Law. This truth will also demonstrate that every event is perfectly within the will of God.

II. The Ordained Instruments

- ❖ It is crucial that we understand that God is absolutely sovereign, and as a part of His perfect will, He uses His imperfect Creation as instruments to accomplish His sovereign, foreordained ends. As believers, we should not view this as a ‘violation’ of our personal freedom and will, but as a privilege to participate in the plan of God. Yet, God, as an expression of His absolute sovereignty, uses, not just believers in Him, but His enemies as well, to accomplish His will.
- It was God’s will that Christ be crucified exactly when He was, that His body be ‘treated’ exactly as it was, and that His body be immediately buried when it was, in perfect accordance with the Old Testament Scriptures; and He used the Jews, the Roman Gentiles, and two newly converted disciples, to accomplish this outcome/fulfillment.

a. The Jews

- In accordance with the Scriptures, Jesus was to be crucified, buried, and rise on the third day.
- It is amazing that one of the groups that God uses to fulfill this was the Jews – the enemies of Christ and the cross.
- John writes, in Verse 31, that the Jews asked Pilate that the legs of the crucified [but assumed not yet dead] men be broken to expedite their deaths.
 - The practice of breaking the legs of a crucified individual was a rather common practice in the Roman world.
 - The practice, known as *crurifragium*, involved the Roman soldiers, who would take a heavy mallet and break or crush the legs of the one hanging on the cross.
 - The reason for this practice was to expedite death. Death by crucifixion could take days as the suffering victim slowly asphyxiated; however, there were times, such as this one, where the executioners sped up the tortuous death.
 - The breaking of the legs would do several things: (1) shock the individual; (2) increase blood loss; and (3) prevent the individual from

pushing up in order to breathe. Therefore, the victim would die quickly once his legs were broken on the cross.

- Yet, it wasn't mercy that the Jews were seeking by requesting that the death of Christ be expedited; rather, they were up against a clock – the Sabbath was coming, and just any Sabbath, but a high day – that is a Sabbath that fell on one of the appointed Feasts...and not just any Feast, but Passover!
- Furthermore, Deuteronomy 21:22-23 states that not only is a man cursed who hangs on a tree; but, if left there overnight, he would 'desecrate the land.' Such an effect, in the eyes of the Jews, would have devastating consequences, especially as Passover was only hours away [and they, and their land, was to be ceremonially clean].
- Once again, the irony here is obvious – as the Jews have just demonstrated that they are unclean throughout by having the true Passover crucified; yet, they remained determined to keep the letter of the Law, while breaking its spirit and attempting to destroy its perfect fulfillment.

b. The [Roman] Gentiles

- Clearly Pilate granted the request of the Jewish leaders to quicken the deaths of the crucified men, and remove their bodies, as John writes that the soldiers went to break the legs of the men.
- John says that soldiers broke the legs of the men on either side of Jesus; however, when they got to Jesus, he had already died, so there was no need to break His legs.
- Yet, in an apparent attempt to see if Jesus was truly dead, John records that one of the soldiers 'pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.'
 - In these two Verses, John reveals how the Lord used Roman soldiers as His instruments to accomplish His ordained ends.
 - Yet, one of the most powerful truths revealed here is that, even though it appears to the casual onlooker at the cross that the Romans are in control – it is truly God who is!

c. The Disciples

- Not only did God use the Jews and the Gentiles, He also used those who were His own to accomplish His work.
- John says that Joseph of Arimathea, 'being a disciple of Jesus' went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

- In the Synoptic Gospels, the writers state that Joseph was a member of the Sanhedrin (Mark 15:43); he was rich (Matthew 27:57); and he was looking for the kingdom of God (Mark 15:43).
 - According to Roman Law, the bodies of criminals who were executed were handed over to their families for proper burials. However, an exception was made when the charge was sedition. In these cases, the Romans let the bodies remain on the cross, rotting. They were eventually eaten by wild animals and vultures.
 - However, it was a Jewish custom to always bury their dead, even the criminals. However, they would be placed in a grave outside the city, as opposed to a family grave inside, for they did not want the sins of the dead to desecrate those with whom they would be buried.
 - Therefore, it is no surprise to Pilate, most likely, that Joseph of Arimathea, a Sanhedrin member, asks for the body of Jesus.
 - Yet, it is powerful to think that it was, most likely, Joseph's prominence as a member of the Sanhedrin that allowed him the personal access to Pilate. This, once again, demonstrates the sovereign power of Almighty God in using human instruments to accomplished His desired ends.
- John also mentions, along with Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus. John is the only Gospel writer to mention him, here.
 - Nicodemus is seen bringing 65.45 pounds of spices to prepare Jesus' body for burial.
 - Nicodemus and Joseph then prepared Jesus' body for burial in accordance with Jewish burial customs.
 - They, then, laid Jesus in 'a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid.'
 - What is also fascinating is that John mentions the reason why Joseph and Nicodemus acted when they did: 'because of the day of Preparation.'
 - The tomb was nearby, and they could accomplish the work before the beginning of the Sabbath.
 - But, John, interestingly, notes that the reason for Joseph and Nicodemus acting when they did was the same reason the Jews acted when they did: the Sabbath was coming.
 - God, therefore, used the Sabbath as the means by which he would cause both the Godless Jews and the new converted followers of Christ, to act in accordance with His will.

III. The Ordained Outcome

a. The Fulfillment of Scripture

- Perhaps no biblical evidence demonstrates the sovereign hand of God more than when the New Testament writers clearly demonstrate that an event is the fulfillment of Old Testament Scripture.
 - This most certainly reveals that God's hand is most assuredly in the situation, regardless of how tragic it may appear.
 - It also shows how God was at work *before* the event, insuring that all things leading up to the event were perfectly in accordance with His will.
- In this passage (John 19:31-42), John's account of what occurred *after* the death of Christ reveals that, even though Christ is physically dead, God is in control.
- First, in Verse 36, John quotes from Scripture, which prophesied that 'NOT A BONE OF HIM SHALL BE BROKEN.'
 - This could be a reference to both Exodus 12:46 [It (the Passover lamb) is to be eaten in a single house; you are not to bring forth any of the flesh outside of the house, nor are you to break any bone of it.] or Numbers 9:12 ['...nor break a bone of it; according to all the statute of the Passover they shall observe it'].
 - Both of these references refer to the Passover Lamb, and it may very well be that this is the inference John is making – that Christ, as the true Passover Lamb, did not have any of His bones broken.
 - However, Verse 36 could also be a reference to Psalms 34:20: 'He keeps all his bones, Not one of them is broken.'
 - It may be, though, that all three references are typical, which is not unusual in the Gospel of John.
- Secondly, in Verse 37, John quotes from Zechariah 12:10: 'I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that **they will look on Me whom they have pierced**; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.'
 - The truth that Jesus' side was pierced and from it flowed blood and water was a confirmation to John, as he personally witnessed it, that Jesus Christ was indeed the Messiah, in accordance with Zechariah 12:10.

- Finally, John concludes this chapter by describing the care of Jesus' body by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus.
 - This, most likely, fulfills the great Suffering Servant passage of Isaiah 53:9: '...Yet He was with a rich man in His death...'

b. The Vindication and Revelation of Jesus Christ as the Son of God

- Although to the casual observer the events surrounding Jesus' death may have appeared tragic and 'out of control' John account makes it clear – it was not in spite of, but because of [and through] these events that Jesus Christ was vindicated and revealed as the eternal Son of God – the promised Messiah of Old
 - First of all, the **vindication of Jesus Christ** occurs in Verse 36 when John is quite certainly referring to Psalm 34:20.
 - In the original context of that Messianic Psalm, it declares that the LORD providentially cares for His righteous Servant, delivering Him out of afflictions, and ensuring that none of His bones are broken.
 - Certainly the application to Christ is somewhat symbolic in the sense that Jesus was already dead and would not have felt the pain of the *crurifragium*; however, it symbolizes God's sovereign care, control, and vindication of Jesus Christ as His righteous suffering servant.
 - Secondly, the **revelation of Jesus Christ as the Son of God** is powerfully declared in this passage.
 - First, at the end of the passage, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, bury Jesus 'in a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid.'
 - This is significant because it first of all demonstrates that Jesus was **unique**. He was fully God and fully man and perfectly righteous in accordance with the Law of God.
 - However, it also demonstrates that, although He experienced the same death as all men do, He was buried in a **new** tomb, as He was to be the new, Second Adam; the first-born from the dead (Colossians 1:18); and the first-fruits of them that rise (1 Corinthians 15:20).
 - In these truths, it is declared: Jesus is the Son of God.

- Secondly, John records that when they pierced the side of Jesus Christ [Verse 34], ‘immediately blood and water came out.’
 - Medical experts have often tried to explain the significance of these event *scientifically*; however, this misses the point [even though we must affirm that the event actually occurred].
 - The first point of significance of this event is clear: Jesus was fully human. He did not merely *appear* to be of flesh [as many, such as the Gnostics and followers of Doceticism, claimed] – He was flesh.
 - Indeed, He had to be fully flesh, just as we are, in order to save us in our flesh.
 - Secondly, the fact that blood and water flowed from the pierced side of Jesus Christ may further underscore the first point, as well as emphasizing that Jesus had two natures: (1) fully God [represented by the water]; and (2) fully man [represented by the blood].
 - Thirdly, there is a powerful parallel between this passage and 1 John 5:6-8 [“This is the One who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.”]
 - It is fascinating to see that Jesus gave up His spirit in 19:30, leaving behind the water and the blood.
 - Fourthly, many see a reference to Exodus 17, when the LORD tells Moses ‘Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink.’
 - This, too, would be fully consistent with Scripture, which reveals Jesus Christ as the Rock of our Salvation [and fully Man, hence the blood]; and reveals the Holy Spirit as water.
 - This was, no doubt, on the great hymn writer’s mind [Augustus M. Toplady] when he wrote ‘Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee; Let the water and the blood, from Thy riven side which flowed, Be of sin the double cure, Cleanse me from its guilt and power.’
 - Finally a great paradox is revealed here: from the dead body of Jesus Christ flows live-giving properties – water and blood.

- Of course, this is fully consistent with Scripture, which emphasizes that it is through the death of Christ that we have life!

D.A. Carson writes, “The blood of Jesus Christ, i.e. his sacrificial and redemptive death, is the basis of eternal life in the believer (6:53-54), and purifies us from every sin (1 John 1:17), while water is symbolic of cleansing (John 3:5), life (4:14) and the Spirit (7:38, 39). All of these incomparable blessings are conditioned by the death of the Lamb of God; they ‘flow’ from the ‘lifting up’ of the Son.”

John Calvin also writes, “Christ came with water and blood, (1 John 5:6.) By these words he means that Christ brought the true atonement and the true washing; for, on the one hand, forgiveness of sins and justification, and, on the other hand, the sanctification of the soul, were prefigured in the Law by those two symbols, sacrifices and washings. In sacrifices, blood atoned for sins, and was the ransom for appeasing the wrath of God. Washings were the tokens of true holiness, and the remedies for taking away uncleanness and removing the pollutions of the flesh.”

c. The Testimony of a Witness

- Finally, after observing all of this, John writes, ‘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.’
- What John is stating is clear: through his testimony of the truth of the cross-work of Jesus Christ – we shall believe.
- In other words, we have come full-circle: God chose John, and chooses us today, as the ordained means by which He will save His people.
- May this become our utmost privilege – that we are His instruments,.
- We are called to be living testimonies, just as John was, that God will use us as ‘the feet who bring good news’ sharing the Gospel with the world that God and God alone will bring them to saving faith through the imperishable seed of His Word and the power of the Holy Spirit!