

**THE GOSPEL OF BELIEF - Studies in John's Gospel - Part seventy**  
**Sunday, February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2015, 10:00 a.m.**  
**Teaching #1785 - Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church**

## **JESUS' FAMILY AND HIS DISCIPLES NEVER CAME TO HIS BURIAL**

**John 19:31-42** - "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." [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."

Jesus died a lonely death. As the gospel writers record it, John is the only disciple near the cross. Jesus' mother is the only immediate family member. And neither of these even came to His burial. Two relative strangers have to take Jesus' body away and very quickly bury it.

Scholars speculate the reason Mary was the only family member to gather at Jesus' crucifixion is none of the other relatives believed in Jesus. There is evidence for this:

**John 7:2-5** - "Now the Jews' Feast of Booths was at hand. [3] So his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. [4] For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." [5] **For not even his brothers believed in him.**"

Let that register. His **brothers** didn't "**believe in Him.**" It's not just that they didn't **believe Him** - like He said some things they doubted. They didn't believe **in** Him. They didn't trust Jesus' understanding of Himself. They didn't believe He was who He thought He was. They didn't think Jesus was reliable - not credible - not to be trusted. Maybe a bit delusional. They didn't come to watch Him die. And they didn't come for His burial.

Those are the facts. Jesus died in deep pain. Jesus died naked in the freezing cold. And except for His mother and one disciple, Jesus died totally alone and unsupported by those in His closest earthly circle.

Yet, in spite of all of this, some revelation is already starting to shine in the details of this crucifixion text:

### 1) **RELIGIOUS ZEAL IS ALWAYS DEFENSIVE, CRUEL, AND CONFUSED WHEN GOD THE SON ISN'T AT ITS CENTER**

**John 19:31** - "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."

Do you see those people killing Jesus? Most of them are zealous to please God. It was religious zeal that blazed passionately to keep the land pure and holy for the Jewish Passover week. This particular Sabbath was an especially high and holy day because, not only was it the Sabbath, but the first Sabbath of the annual Passover week celebrations. And these Jews were devoutly serious about keeping the law regarding Sabbath purity:

**Deuteronomy 21:22-23** - "And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, [23] **his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.**"

Now get this picture. John wants the irony of it to fill our hearts. Here are people trying to maintain purity regulations regarding the law. They are trying to keep the Passover holy. And they're doing it by destroying the very One to whom the Passover pointed. They love the Passover while hating the **subject** of the Passover. They're destroying the true Passover Lamb - the "**Lamb of God**" who would "**take away the sin of the world**" - in their effort to honor their religion's perception of God.

World religions will always be **aggressive** and **defensive** when they have **laws** at the center, or **prophets** at the center, or **books** at the center, rather than the **Lamb of God** at the center, dying for the sins of the whole world.

This only makes sense. When **laws** are broken the price of disobedience must be legislated and duly inflicted. There is no other way to get disobedience out of the way and achieve holiness. When **prophets** aren't honored, their reputation must be avenged. Those who don't honor the prophet must be punished. After all, what's the point of having a prophet if the prophet's teachings aren't admired and treasured. A prophet whose teachings aren't honored by anyone won't be perceived as a prophet for long.

**Religion** without a **Redeemer** will always end up **strident** and **self-defensive**. It can do no other if it is to survive and not end up ignored. Religion can't help but turn sour without a Redeemer. These Jews will have a good, pure Passover - they will preserve their **understanding** of the Passover - even if it means killing Jesus.

And yet, you're watching the hand of God at work.

## 2) WHY THE SOLDIERS DIDN'T BREAK JESUS' LEGS - AND WHY THEY DID BREAK THE OTHERS'

**John 19:31-33** - "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."

Let's start with why they **did** break the legs of the others. John wants us to note it was the **Jews** who wanted these bodies removed from their crosses. Dead bodies were a pollutant to the land - especially at the holiest of times, Passover week.

But criminals **knew** the Jews considered it desecration to have bodies on the cross on the Sabbath. And one of the ways victims would strike back against the religion of their captors was to prop themselves up on their legs as long as they had strength.

They did this because crucifixion led to death primarily by **suffocation**. The victim lost the ability to breathe as his own mass pulled down into the lungs. That's the reason most of the sayings of Jesus recorded by John are so brief - barely enough nouns and verbs to cobble a sentence. No words are wasted. Jesus can't get air as He tries to speak.

Out of sheer vengeance, criminals would prolong their life as long as possible to offend and flaunt Jewish law. They would prop themselves up as best they could for air. Hence the reason the Jews would request the breaking of the victims' legs. There would be no way to push up from the feet to sustain breath long enough to desecrate the Jewish Sabbath.

So now we know why the soldiers broke the legs of the two criminals flanking Jesus' cross. What John probes into is why they **didn't** break the legs of Jesus. And there are two levels of answer to that question. The simple one is there in the first part of the text - **John 19:33** - "But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs."

Simple enough. Jesus was already dead. No need to break the legs of a corpse. But John can't let this go. There's deeper reason for the actions of the soldiers. And it has everything to do with why you and I are redeemed today rather than perishing, chained to our sins:

**John 19:34-37** - "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."

We need John's explanation to make sense of these events. Why bother to puncture the body of Jesus when these very soldiers are already convinced He is dead? It's not as though they **doubted** Jesus' body was lifeless. John has already made that clear in **verse 33**.

These are important events. On the surface the soldiers **didn't** break the legs of Jesus. But, as John unwraps the **meaning** of these events we find there's a sense in which the soldiers **couldn't** break the legs of Jesus. There's another script behind these events - **John 19:36** - "For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: 'Not one of his bones will be broken.'"

John digs those words out of **Psalms 34:20**. But why are they so important to John? What's he driving at? And here's the money question. What is there about Jesus' unbroken legs that can in any way contribute to our trust and confidence in our Lord today at Cedarview? Because clearly John is connecting those dots in this text - **John 19:35** - "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."

There only one reason those unbroken legs of Jesus matter to John. When he pulls that quote from **Psalms 34** he's actually reaching way back to **Numbers 9:11-12** - "In the second month on the fourteenth day at twilight they shall keep it. They shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. [12] They shall leave none of it until the morning, nor break any of its bones; according to all the statute for the Passover they shall keep it."

These are instructions for eating the Passover meal. But wouldn't it be easier to eat this meal with the bones broken? Can you imagine having all the relatives over for Christmas dinner with the stipulation that you couldn't break one single bone in that bird?

"**Not one bone broken,**" Moses tells the people. Because this is the **Passover lamb**. And it's a picture - just a shadow - of the **genuine** Passover Lamb yet to come. "Pay attention to the details," says John. "They point to the predicted, certain foundation of your confidence in God the Son today!"

The same is true of the soldier who "**pierced his side with a spear**" (34). This isn't a random act of violence. This **had** to happen just this way. The prophet **Zechariah** was led by the Spirit to declare with certainty this is how the death of Jesus would unfold - **Zechariah 12:10** - "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."

More and more pieces of the picture keep coming together. They're all there so you and I would **believe - rest down our confidence** - in Jesus Christ and the Lamb of God dying for our sins.

In fact, the Bible says *everyone - you and I* - will somehow look at this *punctured proof* of God's love for us - **Revelation 1:7** - "Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen."

John wants all of his readers to know Father God is already cementing the details of history - right up to the end of time - in the death of God the Son. Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of it all. Especially in His *redeeming death*.

### 3) **JOSEPH, NICODEMUS, AND THE OVERCOMING OF FEAR**

**John 19:38-42** - "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.

Mark's account shines additional light on Joseph of Arimathea - **Mark 15:43** - "Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus."

He wasn't *always* courageous. For a long time he followed Jesus covertly - "*secretly*," John says - because he was "*afraid of the Jews*." We've seen this disease before. It's the fear that turned Pilate into a traitor and pronounce judgment on Jesus when the Jewish leaders told him Caesar would frown upon their Jewish revolt if Pilate didn't do their bidding. Likewise, Joseph wouldn't follow Jesus openly because the Jewish leaders would make life ugly for him if his loyalty were ever visible.

But there's always hope. Joseph "*took courage*," says Mark. Followers of Christ can come out of the closet. And better late than never. However proud you have been to follow Christ up till now, it's not too late. The very last thing Joseph can do to prove his loyalty to Jesus is give Him his own grave. Again, better late than never. Stick your chin out. Get risky. Always bet on Jesus. Make a difference. Don't *wait* for courage. *Take* courage.

Nicodemus, I believe, is easier to figure out. I can't prove it, but here's what I think happened. I think Nicodemus had some words from Jesus come back to haunt him - haunt him in a blessed, life-generating way. I think Nicodemus couldn't have helped remember something Jesus said as the life of His secret Lord was ebbing away on the cross:

**John 3:14-15** - "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, [15] that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

Those are the words Jesus spoke to Nicodemus. We all know what it is to hear something and then, at some later point, have what you heard explode in full color in your mind. I think Nicodemus saw Jesus crucified and suddenly saw - almost like another layered image - that serpent Moses commanded the Israelites to put up on that pole - and then *look upon that serpent* and find their wholeness.

And Nicodemus' whole being said, "*Aha! That's it! That's what the death of Jesus is all about!*"

And so our text rather quietly pulls down the curtain on the death of these three victims. The Jews want the bodies gone. John simply says the Jews went to Pilate and requested these gnarled bodies "*might be taken away*" (31).

And they were. And with one of those bodies they also took away the sins of the whole world and buried them in a grave. And the greatest surprise in the entire universe is right around the corner.