

Fulfilled

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[0 : 00] Today's reading is John chapter 19 and we're reading from verse 31 down to verse 42.!

Since it was the day of preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath, for the Sabbath was a high day. The Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away.

So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness. His testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth, that you may also believe.

For these things took place, that the scripture might be fulfilled. Not one of his bones will be broken. And again, another scripture says, they will look on him whom they have pierced.

[1 : 13] 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. Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about 75 pounds in weight.

So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. 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.

So because of the Jewish day of preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there. Shall we all just pray? Let's say a short prayer.

Father in heaven, we do thank you for your word, and we do pray that you would speak to us through it now. If anything is said by the speaker, which is amiss, we pray that it would be done away with quickly, and that it would not in any way hinder the word that you want us to hear.

[2 : 36] And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, good morning, and a welcome, very warm welcome, if you are visiting us for the first time.

We share something in common. It's not that it's my first time here, but it's my first time literally here, speaking from the front. Our two pastors, our lead pastor Phil and assistant pastor Andy, are both away.

And so I've been asked to step in and share the word with you this morning, which I'm very pleased to do. So my name is Barry, and I'm a member of the church family here at Grace Church Dulwich. Today is Palm Sunday, the start of what is known as Holy Week, the week leading up to Jesus' death. Well, we're a little bit further on in the story, if you will.

On Sunday mornings, it started last week and it finishes next week, we're considering three aspects of the final week of our Saviour.

[3 : 47] Last week, Andy preached on the first part of John's Gospel 19 up to verse 28.

And I'm preaching on the verses 31 to 42. And then next week, Phil will be preaching on the resurrection.

Resurrection. John, in his account here of the death of Jesus, wants us to focus our minds on three aspects of that.

Firstly, that Jesus really did die. That he died as the Passover lamb, the true Passover lamb. And knowing that, we should believe and go on believing.

You may have seen the film *Gladiator*. I'm not talking about the recent one. I'm talking about the one starring Russell Crowe as Maximus Meridius, commander of the armies of the North, general of the Felix Legions.

[4 : 57] That was his great title. It's an epic movie. And in true action film style, the opening scene is dramatic and action-packed.

This is also true of the closing scenes. But there are scenes in between where nothing very much seems to be happening. And if you've got a remote control, you're very tempted to hit the fast-forward button and get to the next big scene in the movie.

But of course, if we do that, we miss the unfolding story of Maximus as a gladiator. And of course, the filming doesn't really make then any sense or it has no meaning.

Well, similarly, it would be very easy for us to skip through these few verses, verses 31 to 42 of John 19.

Why? Because our passage is towered, it's overshadowed by two huge events. In the first 30 verses of this chapter, we have the account of the trial, the torture, the crucifixion, and the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[6 : 13] And of course, in chapter 20, we have the resurrection and the appearances to the disciples. And so we're very tempted to want to go from the death on the cross straight to chapter 20 and concentrate or think about those wonderful verses there.

Even when we refer to the passion, we might speak of the death and the resurrection of Jesus, but actually not mention or pay any attention to the fact that he was buried also.

The apostles understood the importance of Jesus being buried. It was part of their gospel message. Paul, when addressing the church at Corinth, and we can read this in 1 Corinthians 15, reminds them of the gospel in which they stood, saying this, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day of the week according to the scriptures.

Note twice according to the scriptures. The death, the burial, and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Indeed, the account of the burial of Jesus is recorded in all four of the gospels, underlining once again the importance of it.

Well, nothing perhaps surprising in that. After all, the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the foundations of the Christian faith.

[8 : 00] Putting it plainly, no death, no atonement for sin. No burial, no resurrection. No resurrection, no eternal life.

Death is the end. The accounts in Matthew, Mark, and Luke focus primarily on the actions surrounding Joseph of Arimathea.

He came before Pilate, asking for the body of Jesus, and taking it down from the cross, wrapped it in a linen shroud, laying Jesus in his own tomb, and rolled a large stone against the entrance.

And this was witnessed by a group of faithful women, followers of Jesus. But John, in his eyewitness account before us, of death and the burial of Jesus, he mentions the actions of Joseph and Nicodemus for us to learn from.

But he wants to bring Jesus into view in two ways. And he also gives us his purpose in doing so. Firstly, Jesus really died and was buried according to the scriptures.

[9 : 15] We can see that in verse 33 and verse 37. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.

In verse 37, again, another scripture says, they will look on him whom they have pierced. And then John wants us to consider Jesus as the Passover lamb.

And we'll come to that in verses 31, 33, 36, and 42. And the whole purpose of John giving us this detailed account is so that in verse 35 we might believe.

In verse 28 of John 19, we have the last words of our Savior on the cross when he said, it is finished.

We can see that in verse 28 and verse 30. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said it is finished. And he bowed his head and he gave up the spirit.

[10 : 24] And he last week told us that the Greek word for it is finished was tetelestai. And tetelestai can mean it is finished.

It can also mean it has been paid in full. So for example, if there was a commercial invoice that had been generated and it had been paid, it would have the word tetelestai on the bottom of it.

Paid in full. Only twice in the New Testament does that word appear. And both times it's in John chapter 19 to do with the finished work of Jesus on the cross.

Now, I don't know if anyone here still goes to the supermarket and uses a trolley. You know, often the wheels are not working or they're working in different angles and not the easiest thing.

And of course, with online shopping now, there's no great need to go to a supermarket. But if you do, you will know that as you go around with your empty trolley at the beginning and as you start moving through the store and the different sections of the store, you start filling it up.

[11 : 35] And even if you've only gone in for some bread and milk, by the time you get to the end of the aisles, there's normally a lot more shopping in there than what you were thinking of.

And of course, there's the impulse buys, the chocolate and the doughnuts that you had no intention of buying but couldn't resist. Or even better, chocolate doughnuts. Well, even better.

And of course, when we get to the checkout, well, then the pain starts, doesn't it? The easy bit is putting it in. The painful bit is when we realise it's got to be paid for.

We did have an experience once in Sainsbury's where we got to the checkout with our trolley full of shopping and one of the Sainsbury's workers came up and said, we're paying for your shopping today.

We're doing it because you're a loyal customer and the shopping is on us. And we thought, wow.

And I said, well, there's a few items we haven't picked up yet. Are they paid for as well?

[12 : 34] And they said, yes, everything is paid for, it's paid in form. Well, in a way, why do I give that quick illustration? Because in some ways, that very much illustrates our lives before God.

As we journey through life, our rebellion against God shows itself in our sinful thoughts, our words and our actions. And the longer we live, the more sin we amass.

The trolley's getting more and more full. And of course, when we come to the checkout, the checkout of life, we will be held accountable by God for them all.

And they will have to be paid for in form. And the Bible, God's word, makes it clear that the payment for sin is eternal death.

And we can read that in Romans and way back in Genesis 2. In the day that you sin, you will surely die. That's how death entered the world because of sin. And John is assuring us and reassuring us in this passage that because Jesus has died on the cross, the sin debt has been paid in full.

[13 : 51] Tetelestai. And that through personal repentance and faith in Christ, our sins will be forgiven and eternal life awaits us once we check out.

This is what Jesus did on the cross in dying for you and me as the sinless one. We can perhaps begin to grasp why then John is taking time to give detailed evidence that Jesus had really died. Jesus' physical body was dead. Just like any other body when the last breath has been breathed. During the 33 years that Jesus lived on this earth, he experienced in his body many of the things that you and I experience.

He suffered hunger, thirst, fatigue, sorrow, tears, pain, and now even death. And so in verse 35, we have this great witness statement from John.

He who saw it has borne witness. His testimony is true and he knows that he is telling the truth.

He's really laboring the point here.

[15 : 18] You can believe what I'm saying. You can believe what I'm writing. I bore testimony to these things. I saw it. If we were asked to make a witness statement about something we had seen, we would be asked for answers to the questions of who, when, how, and where.

Well, from this 19th chapter of John, we learn where Jesus died, Golgotha or Calvary, how he died, crucifixion, when he died, on the eve of the Sabbath during Passover, who buried him, Joseph and Nicodemus, how he was buried, the detailed preparation with the body, with the spices and the linen shroud, and where he was buried, in a tomb, in a garden that belonged to Joseph.

And we also know the names of some of those who witnessed it, not least of which were two of the most respected and influential Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, Joseph and Nicodemus, members of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish council.

Well, more about Joseph and Nicodemus shortly. So what is the evidence that John is giving us here in our passage? Well, in verses 31 to 34, we read that the Jews concerned that the start of the Sabbath, being just hours away, the bodies of those crucified would still be on the cross.

And that this would be against the Mosaic law that we can read of in Deuteronomy chapter 21, where the instruction was given that anyone put to death and hung on a tree must be taken down and buried the same day, for they are cursed by God and they defile the land.

[17:17] So some of the Jewish leaders in wanting to keep this part of Mosaic law go to Pilate, not out of compassion, but out of religious observance, requesting that their legs might be broken to quicken death.

And the bodies disposed of, the custom then being that the bodies of the crucified were not returned to their families, but were tossed away and buried like garbage in common nameless graves.

Oh, the fallenness of man. The gravity of sin. Before their eyes, Old Testament promises and prophecies were being fulfilled.

So many times in our passage, this was done according to the scriptures. Evidence that Jesus is the Christ, the appointed one, the anointed one, the one from whom substitutional sacrifice and atonement would redeem and restore that which was lost through the curse of sin.

And what are these people focusing on? Religious observance. Blind to Jesus as the Passover Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world.

[18:53] Why did they ask for the legs to be broken? Well, it was to quicken death. How did the breaking of legs do that? Well, those crucified were held on the cross by nails being driven through their hands and their feet.

And once the cross was placed in an upright position, almost immediately the shoulders of those crucified would become dislocated because of the weight bearing of the body sinking down.

And as the body sank on the cross, it made it increasingly difficult for them to breathe. And to stop the body from suffocating, the crucified in agony would push up from their feet to try and get a breath into their lungs.

And then they would slump back down and suffocate once again. The legs being broken meant that they could no longer push up from their feet and therefore no longer could take a breath.

And so they would die through suffocation. In verse 32, we read that the legs of those crucified, either side of Jesus, are broken.

[20:21] But when the soldier comes to Christ, he sees that he is dead already. I think it's safe to assume that being a soldier in the Roman army, you probably have seen a lot of dead men.

A lot of men die. This soldier recognized that Christ had already died. And therefore, by his actions, he did not break Jesus' legs.

This, then, is part of the evidence that John is putting before us to show that Jesus was truly dead. But why didn't the Roman soldier, given an order at the command of Caesar, no less, break the legs of Jesus anyway?

After all, a mistake could cost him his own life. Why? Because God was in complete control of the situation.

In verse 36, we read that these things took place that the scripture might be fulfilled. In Psalm 34, verses 19 and 20, we have the great prophecy that not one of his bones will be broken.

[21:54] The first evidence, he was dead already, which is why his legs were not broken.

Secondly, the second evidence, and to be doubly sure that Jesus is truly dead, in verse 34, a soldier takes a spear and pierces the side of Jesus.

And we read that out flows blood and water. Again, a fulfillment of scripture in Zechariah, chapter 12, we read this, they will look upon him whom they have pierced.

Now, I'm conscious that there might be some medical professionals here, so, if I get this slightly wrong, you can tell me afterwards.

But I believe that it is a medical fact that when the heart suffers a major trauma, the pericardium, which we all have, it's a sack that surrounds the heart to protect it.

It fills with blood and water, and its piercing here is further evidence that Jesus had already died, and the blood and the water flowing from the Saviour's side was further evidence of this.

[23:30] Once again, I have to mention the fallenness of man, the sinful heart. The soldiers knew that Jesus was dead, but not content with that.

They take a spear, and they mutilate the body of Jesus as a final symbol of rejection. We don't see you as our king, and we don't see you as our Saviour.

Well, time doesn't allow for deeper consideration of the rest of the evidence of Jesus' death, but we can at least mention them and encourage further reading of them, and that would largely be around the actions of Joseph and Nicodemus, who boldly go before Pilate.

We read in the other accounts in the Gospels that Joseph was filled with fear, the fear of man, the fear of being exposed as a disciple of Jesus, the fear of rejection by the fellow Jewish leaders and his community.

But he summons up the courage to plead for the body of Jesus before Pilate. The King James translation says that he craved the body of Jesus so precious was the Savior to him that he was prepared to lose everything as was Nicodemus.

[24 : 58] You remember about him, he came in John 3, he was the one who came by night because he didn't want to be seen to coming up to Jesus and asking him about eternal life. And these men were prepared to risk everything and lose everything that they might be associated with Jesus in his death.

And then they prepare his body in an amazing way and put him in a tomb. Would they have done that if Jesus wasn't dead?

Now the question is why did John feel it so necessary to ensure that this evidence of the death and burial of Jesus is recorded? Yes, it's to assure us and reassure us that the redemptive work of Jesus on the cross was finished.

It was complete and paid in full. But also because the death and burial of Jesus has always been doubted and contested. This was true in the early church through the Gnostics and Docetism. What was that? Well they claimed that Jesus didn't have a real body. But was absent or illusory and therefore he didn't really die.

[26 : 16] The conspiracists and the doubters who claimed that Jesus put himself into some kind of coma and then when he was placed in the tomb he managed to wake himself up out of it and escape from the tomb.

The Quran teaches that Jesus didn't die on a cross. And of course unbelieving hearts. And maybe there are some here who doubt the gospel message that Jesus died and was buried and he rose again.

Secondly, the second point is not only did Jesus die but he died as the true Passover lamb. You'll notice that our passage is top and tailed with mention that Jesus' death took place on the day of preparation.

Verse 31, since it was the day of preparation and then at the very end in verse 42, so because of the Jewish day of preparation.

Preparation for the Sabbath. And that Sabbath being a high day meaning it was a Passover Sabbath.

[27 : 37] Jesus died during Passover. Well, we can see that anyway in verse 14 if you just go back a few verses. In chapter 19, it clearly says, now it was the day of preparation of the Passover.

Passover. So clearly John wants us now to view Jesus not just as a dead Jesus but see that he is the Passover lamb.

If you will, he's repeating what he proclaimed in John 1 29. We could flick there quickly now when he made that great statement, behold the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

John is doing exactly that here in this passage by getting us to consider Jesus' death during Passover. Behold the lamb of God.

When we view Jesus on the cross, we should not see a weak, powerless, hopeless man, but a victorious Christ in power and glory, offering himself to God and dying as the true sacrificial Passover lamb and taking on himself the sin of the world according to the will of God and fulfilling the scriptures.

[29 : 00] Some years ago at our previous church we ran a Christianity explored course and after one of the evenings as I walked home one of the elderly ladies who attended, she turned to me and said, until tonight I always thought that Jesus was taken against his will to the cross and that he was powerless to stop it.

But now I see that he willingly and deliberately went to the cross and his death was all part of God's plan of salvation.

God was in control. God is worth reminding ourselves a little bit about the Passover.

In Exodus 12, the Passover commemorates the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage.

God commanded each household to sacrifice a lamb without blemish and apply its blood to the doorposts and the lintels of their homes.

[30 : 11] This act of faith would cause the Lord to pass over. Pass over their homes during the final plague, sparing the firstborn of Israel from death.

The lamb's blood served as a sign of protection and deliverance. And this identification of Jesus as the lamb of God is crucial for understanding the connection between Passover and the crucifixion. Just as the Passover lamb's blood was a means of deliverance for the Israelites, Jesus' sacrificial death provides deliverance from sin and death for all humanity.

Not one of his bones will be broken. the Passover lamb in verse 36.

For these things took place that the scripture might be fulfilled, not one of his bones will be broken. In verse 46 of that passage that I mentioned in Exodus 12, we read that when they were to prepare the lamb for sacrifice, it says, don't break any of its bones.

[31 : 44] The apostle Paul too explicitly connects Jesus to the Passover, but he said this, for Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

Jesus is the true Passover lamb whose blood brings about a new covenant and a greater deliverance from sin and death for all of mankind.

Our friend, have you ever stood at a grave of a loved one and watched as the coffin is lowered into the ground and the overwhelming feelings of despair and hopelessness that fills our hearts, the inconsolable grief and sorrow that we feel.

It's been said that death is the king of terrors and the terror of kings, but the grave holds no fear for the Christian. To those who have faith in Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, just as the grave could not hold Christ, it will not hold those who die in him.

it's why we can sing with joyful hearts, where, O grave, is your victory, where, O death, is your sting.

[33 : 04] Jesus died, Jesus died as the Passover lamb to take away our sins. And then finally, sometimes when you're looking at a passage or studying it, you're trying to work out what the author's purpose is.

Well, John saves us a lot of trouble in that. He makes it crystal clear, doesn't he? In verse 35, he says that all these things are there, and I'm testifying of them.

Why? That you may believe. I don't know about you, but verse 35, it's almost like someone is in court swearing an oath.

I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. So help me, God. what does John say? He's saying, I saw it.

I bore witness. This is a true testimony. I know it's true, and therefore believe it. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus believed.

[34 : 09] That's why their actions are recorded here, so that we might actually see what belief is in action. as prominent members of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish council, they knew the Old Testament scriptures well.

Indeed, when we read of Nicodemus in chapter 3 of John's gospel, Jesus says to him that you are a master of the law. You teach Israel the law. The Old Testament.

And as they observe Jesus' teaching, his life, and scripture after scripture being fulfilled in him, prophecy after prophecy, they knew that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

Until the crucifixion, they were secret disciples, living in fear of the Jews. None or few knew of their faith in Christ. As they saw clearly the crucifixion and death of Jesus as the sacrificial Lamb of God, the true Passover, they became stronger in their faith and emboldened by it.

And they made the most public of declarations by identifying themselves with Jesus in his death.

What else did they do?

[35 : 30] They gave Jesus a kingly burial. You'll read there in verse 39 that Nicodemus, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about 75 pounds in weight.

75 pounds in weight of those expensive spices. I looked it up, it's about 150,000 pounds in today's money.

This was half the weight of a man's body in expensive spices, which they wanted to anoint the body of Jesus in.

Why are those spices mentioned in particular? Well, in Psalm 45, we read that these are the very spices that fragrance the robes of the king.

king. Isn't that a lovely thought? They saw Jesus as king, and in Jesus' great shame on the cross, the time of his greatest humility, they wanted to give him the burial that a king deserved.

[36 : 51] Well, believer, those who've received faith in Christ, may this encourage us to be stronger in our faith, to be more identifiable as followers of Jesus.

May we go on believing in him with a life that is pleasing to God. May we share the good news concerning him, and may we honour him as our king, for he is worthy of all honour and praise. God's love. And if you're here this morning and have not yet received faith in Jesus to be your saviour and rescue you from the curse of sin and death and an eternity without God, we would ask you at this Easter time to consider the claims of Jesus, that he is the sacrificial lamb of God through whom sin can be forgiven and through him alone.

And we would say as John proclaims, behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Shall we just pray? Father in heaven, we do thank you for your word. We thank you for this passage that we have in John, the evidence that Jesus truly did die, and because of that we can have full assurance and be reassured that through his sacrificial death, our sins can be forgiven.

[38 : 21] We thank you as well that he fulfilled all those promises and prophecies about the Passover lamb and how he willingly sacrificed himself in that way.

Lord, increase our belief we pay. In Jesus' name. Amen.