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- [0 : 00] The reading is on page 1092, which is John chapter 19, from verse 31. Page 1092.
- John 19, verse 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.
- 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, they 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 also may believe. For these things took place that the scripture might be fulfilled.
- [1 : 14] Not one of his bones will be broken. And again, another scripture says, They will look on him whom they have pierced. 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 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. Rachel, thank you very much for reading.
- Let me pray for us as we study God's word. Father, we thank you for your word. We pray that it will speak to us into our hearts this morning.
- [2 : 44] Amen. So please keep your Bibles open at this passage on page 1092. We're in a series, a short series, looking at the importance of Easter.
- And these words will be very familiar to many of us. But let me ask you first, what do you think is the most important event in history?
- If you look this up on reliable sites such as Wikipedia, as I did, the answer will be the invention of writing or the printing press or the French Revolution.
- But John Stott, in his book, The Cross of Christ, quotes Bishop Stephen Neill, who said this, The death of Christ is the central point of history.
- Here all the roads of the past converge, and hence all the roads of the future diverge. He's saying this passage we're considering today is the key point in human history.
- [3 : 50] So that makes it a pretty important event for us to look at today, to understand why it's so important. Last week's passage finished with the last words of Jesus before his death.
- In verse 30, it is finished. And continued, and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. And today we're going to follow the important details that John picks out in his description of Jesus' death on the cross.

And his burial. For the most important event in history, the account is quite short. So we need to see why is John choosing the details that he's included in the text here.

And we're going to look at this under three headings. The death of Jesus the man, the death of Jesus the king, and thirdly, living in the light of the cross. And the headings are on the back of this sheet with some of the quotations.

Through this we need to remember why John is writing what he does. Look at verse 35 with me that Rachel read.

[5 : 04] 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.

John is telling us that this is an eyewitness account of the crucifixion. And in the second half of that verse he becomes very personal.

He moves from his account of events to address each reader directly. That you also may believe. And John expands this in verse 31 of chapter 20.

A verse we've looked at over the last few weeks. Where John sets out his overall purpose of the gospel. Look at that verse with me.

Just turn over the page. In verse 31. Oh, so we don't need to turn over the page. Do we? Yeah. We do. These are written so that you may believe.

[6 : 07] That Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. And that by believing you may have life in his name. John is saying don't doubt what you're reading. It's true. It's important.

And it concerns you. This is the key to eternal life with Jesus. And if these are familiar words to you. I hope you can come to this passage today with fresh eyes.

Fresh ears and hearts. And that your faith will be strengthened by John's words. If that's not you. Then stick with it. And I hope you'll see why this is so important.

So let's look at our first headache. Death of Jesus the man. All four gospels share an account of the death of Jesus on the cross. But John emphasizes some different points.

Just as there were some early groups in the church who denied Jesus' resurrection. There were those who explained his subsequent appearance. By saying that he didn't really die on the cross.

[7 : 07] Or he was taken down alive. He was substituted in some way. And that's the belief of many Muslims today. They regard Jesus as a prophet. But deny that he is the Son of God.

They deny that he died on the cross. But here in John's gospel there's no doubt that this was real physical human death. It comes from an eyewitness.

This isn't second hand information. The Roman soldiers here were professional executioners. They were very used to dealing with dead bodies. Usually the bodies would be left on the cross until they were dead.

And then they would be taken down and thrown on the local rubbish heap. And in verse 31 we see that because this was the time of the Passover, the Jews asked that the body should be removed, making sure they were really dead first.

Death by crucifixion was horrific. It might take up to 24 hours to die, hanging from one's arms, making breathing difficult. And it could be helped and suffocation delayed for a bit by pushing up with your legs to move the diaphragm.

[8 : 21] And that's why the Jews asked Pilate to have the soldiers break the legs to stop this last desperate fight for survival. To quicken death. It's ironic, isn't it, that the Jews who'd called for Jesus' crucifixion a few hours earlier now feel they might be offended by seeing his body hanging there on the cross.

So having broken the legs of the other two men being crucified, the soldiers find that Jesus is already dead. They see that he's no longer making any breathing efforts, so they don't bother to break his legs.

Now they must have had no doubt about his death for them to disobey Pilate's orders in this way. A Roman soldier swore a military oath, the sacramentum.

And this stated that he would obey orders on pain of punishment, including death. In fact, falling asleep on duty could be punished by death. Some of you would be glad to hear that we don't impose this in sermons at Grace Church for you this morning.

But just to be sure, they plunge a spear into his side, probably into his heart. There have been a number of different medical explanations for the blood and the water that flowed out, suggesting blood from the heart chambers themselves, perhaps fluid built up in the pericardium or the pleural cavity around the lungs.

[9 : 48] But whatever the physical explanation, even if there had been any doubt about Jesus' death before, now it's certain with a spear thrust into his side and into his heart.

The body is taken away by two men who have no doubt either. They take Jesus' dead body to a tomb. They wrap the body in linen cloth with 33 kilograms of spices, and they lay it in the tomb wrapped up.

Well, the whole process must mean that they spent some time with this lifeless body. So John takes care to remove any doubts that Jesus dies a human physical death on the cross.

This man born to Mary in Bethlehem 33 years before, now dies on a cross just five or six miles away in Jerusalem. It all looks like a miserable failure.

For him, for the people he gathered, people who hoped perhaps that he might change their lives, that he might look, that they'd looked on him to rescue them from their subservience to Rome.

[10 : 58] But that, of course, is not why he came. So having seen that Jesus dies as a man, let's look at our second point and see what John has to say about the death of Jesus the King and why this death on the cross was really the purpose of his mission.

And we need to look at the underlying meaning and the Old Testament references for some of the details that John gives us. He's showing us that this death of Jesus is not a miserable failure at all.

It's not the end of a brief local ministry, but it's the fulfillment of God's plan for his world, the key point in history documented over the previous thousand years.

Now, often at this point, preachers often offer an account of human courage to parallel the selfless sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

And I've heard amazing stories, stories of concentration camps, of natural disasters, but it never quite works for me because there's really nothing that can compare with this example we have before us, that God, the creator of the universe, subjected himself freely to a horrific death, taking our sins, past, present, and future, and in place of our death, he offers us entry into eternal life with him.

[12 : 32] So let's look at the details that John does record. As we said, the soldiers come to break the legs of all three of those being crucified, but they don't do this to Jesus.

And I'll put some references on the back of the handout for this. One of a number of references we could go to here is in Numbers 9, verse 11.

Then he shall keep the Passover to the Lord. In the second month, on the 14th day at twilight, they shall keep it. They shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

They shall leave none of it until the morning, nor break any of its bones. So the detail that Jesus' legs are not broken, as Pilate commanded, is important.

Here we are at Passover, when the Jews look back to their salvation from slavery in Egypt, and the way they were saved was by providing a perfect Passover lamb with no broken bones.

[13 : 35] The sacrificial lamb of the Passover is the model for the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus. The annual sacrifice of the lamb to remember the Exodus rescue is not needed any longer.

Because now the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus rescues us. Not from some physical slavery by a physically perfect lamb, but from our spiritual slavery to sin by a sinless savior.

So John's first Old Testament reference takes us to Jesus' substitution in taking our place on the cross, the intact bones showing the perfect sacrifice.

When the soldiers pierce his side with a spear in verse 34, John is taking us back to our second Old Testament reference, the Zechariah chapter 12, verse 10, which says, 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 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.

And Isaiah 53 also looks forward to this moment on the cross. The words are there on the notes. Jesus takes the punishment that we deserve and by his wounds, by his death on the cross, we are healed.

[15 : 15] He brings us peace, peace with God so that we can enter into a relationship with God. God regards us as righteous, free from sin, acceptable to him because of his own action on the cross.

We can't achieve this relationship with God for ourselves, but it's freely available through God's grace poured out on us. God is a just God who cannot tolerate sin.

None of us is able to meet God's standards. None of us can come into that relationship. But here on the cross, Jesus takes that sin for himself. He takes the punishment that we should suffer and he can do it because he is sinless and perfect because he himself is God, taking our place, making us acceptable.

And what we have to do, our part, is to acknowledge him as our king and repent of our sin. Now when the spear pierced Jesus' side, John tells us that blood and water flowed out at once.

And if we look on in Zechariah, a few verses after the reference to the body being pierced, we have Zechariah chapter 13, verse 1.

[16 : 35] On that day, there should be a fountain opened for the house of David to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness. As Jesus dies, forgiveness pours out like a fountain from his death as blood of sacrifice and as water of cleansing pour from him.

And this cleansing fountain leads to eternal life. Back in chapter 4, John has said, talking to the woman at the well, whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again.

The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. After being taken down from the cross, Jesus' body is not thrown on the rubbish heap with the others.

But look at verse 41. He's taken to a new tomb by a rich man, by Joseph Arimathea. So our next reference continues in Isaiah 53.

They made his grave with a wicked man and with a rich man in his death. John is making it clear that this is the promised Messiah, God's promised king and our rescuer who died on the cross in our place.

[17 : 56] And his body is treated in a way fit for a king. 33 kilograms of myrrh and aloes. That's an enormous amount.

It's very expensive. I priced these on Amazon. Both myrrh and aloes or sandalwood. They cost around a thousand pounds per kilogram.

Now you might get a discount for a bulk order but this is still over thirty thousand pounds. A treatment fit for a king. I'm pretty sure I didn't push the submit button but when we get home there may be a large pile of myrrh on our doorstep.

So Jesus dies on the cross as a man and he dies as a king as God himself. As we sang in our first hymn because the sinless saviour died my sinful soul is counted free.

Far from being a failure this is the purpose of his mission. Our sinless saviour takes our judgement to make our peace with God. Here is God and man together in Jesus.

[19 : 04] The only one able to take this through to kick the cross in our place. So what should be our response? To acknowledge Jesus as our king and this brings us to our third heading how should we be living in the light of the cross?

Jesus on the cross has done what we can't do our sin substituting ourselves for God going our own way and at the cross God provides the solution as Jesus substitutes himself.

We haven't earned this. Jesus is alone on the cross deserted by most of his followers. He does everything for us out of love out of grace.

In Paul's letter to the Galatians he says and those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. That's not our response.

If we continue in those passions and desires in our sin we continue to crucify God on the cross. Now so far we haven't looked at the other two characters in the story so let's look at Joseph and Nicodemus and see the beginnings of what this powerful effect of Jesus' death should be on lives.

[20 : 26] First Joseph of Arimathea he features in all the four gospels he says he's a disciple of Jesus but we are told he has acted secretly for fear of the Jews but he now declares himself he makes an open commitment by coming and asking Pilate for Jesus' body nothing secret about going to the emperor's representative to get this person who's been crucified on the cross.

And Nicodemus is our second character he appears only in John's gospel he's appeared twice already in chapter 3 he visits Jesus to discuss Jesus' teachings but he visits at night under cover of darkness he's interested but he's not committed.

And in chapter 7 Nicodemus has reservations as he reminds colleagues in the Sanhedrin that the law says a person must be heard before being judged.

But having come in the night in the past now he comes to help at the burial and this time he doesn't sneak in quietly you can't sneak in quietly carrying 33 kilograms of strongly smelling spices.

So these two Joseph and Nicodemus who've acted in secret at night in the past are now emboldened to declare themselves openly to come into the light through confidence in Jesus the light of the world.

[22 : 00] So their response to Jesus' death to Jesus' sacrifice is to find the courage to act to declare their faith to be prepared to stand up and face the consequences that may result.

Their lives have changed changed by the death of Jesus on the cross and the changes shown in their actions. So let's now lastly think about the effect this passage should have on us.

First we should have no doubt about the evidence of what's happened. Jesus the man has been put to death in the most horrific brutal way on the cross. We need to have that confidence in that to understand the next stage of Jesus' resurrection.

resurrection. And second Jesus the king has gone to his death on the cross the creator of the world on the cross taking our place. His glory to build the church.

If that's not you if you're here exploring the idea or just listening in then read again this first hand evidence from John around Jesus' death and his uniqueness as God's promised saviour.

- [23 : 14] Speak to somebody about it or come back next week and hear what happens next as we see that death is not the end of the story. And we're going to see the evidence and the significance of his resurrection from death next week but already we begin to see in the actions of Joseph and Nicodemus what this should mean to us.

Sometimes I think our faith can be a little like Joseph and Nicodemus before this a bit in the dark a bit of a secret in the night. Perhaps it's obvious on Sundays when we come to church or when we speak to fellow Christians but what what would our neighbours what would our relatives what would our work colleagues say about us?

Would they recognise us as distinctive in this way prepared to commit? Joseph goes to the authorities and states what he wants. If there are difficulties at work or amongst your friends that challenge our Christian views are we prepared to stand up and be counted or do we worry what others might say what effect it might have on our position on our reputation?

Nicodemus gave great quantities of expensive spices. Do we use our time and our money for the gospel out of love for Jesus as Nicodemus did or are there other calls on our time and our money that take priority?

So having looked again at this perfect sacrifice of Jesus on the cross dying for us perhaps it's time for us to make some changes to come into the light just as Joseph and Nicodemus did.

- [25 : 01] Lastly back to verse 35 John tells us the truth about what he has seen and understood so that we also may believe. I hope you find this as great an encouragement as I do to look again at these verses when we reflect on Jesus' sacrifice his grace in taking our sin will we like Joseph and Nicodemus bring our faith out into the light.

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