

ROAD TO EASTER
PROOF OF DEATH

Friday, March 29

Reading: John 19:31-42

***John 19:33** But when they came to Jesus and found that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. **34** Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. **35** The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe.*

Some victims of crucifixion survived for days on the cross. With the Sabbath quickly approaching (beginning at 6pm) the religious leaders asked Pilate to break the legs of the condemned. This would hasten death as the victims would no longer be able to push up and draw breath into their lungs and would die of suffocation in a matter of minutes. When the soldiers came to Jesus He was already dead so they did not break His bones. Instead, they pierced His side and “blood and water” flowed out. This was a sure proof of death. It also fulfilled prophecy that states not a bone would be broken (Psalm 34:20) and that Messiah would be pierced (Zechariah 12:10).

“The man who saw it” (19:35) is usually identified as John himself. But this is a rather odd way for John to refer to himself. As already mentioned, I believe John had taken Mary away from Golgotha before this so he would not be around to witness these events. So who is this witness? Maybe it is the centurion who proclaimed Jesus as the Son of God after His death (Matthew 27:54). Early Church tradition suggests this centurion became a believer. By not naming him, John may be protecting this centurion who may still be in the service of Rome. Of course, this is all speculation. Whatever the case, John wants us to know that this is eyewitness testimony. Jesus was really dead.

The passage closes with two of Jesus' “secret” followers going public with their devotion to Jesus. Joseph and Nicodemus come forward and request the body of Jesus. Pilate gives them permission and they quickly bury Jesus in Joseph's new tomb, setting up the greatest morning in history. For if there is no burial, there can be no empty tomb!

LESSON ONE: “Jesus Was Already Dead.” Through the centuries many have claimed that Jesus never died but merely went into a coma and revived later in the tomb. The events described here disprove this theory. Roman soldiers knew death! They were trained to know when a crucified person was dead. If Jesus were not already dead this piercing would have finished the job. Medically, “the blood and water” probably refers to blood and the pericardial whitish fluid that separate when the heart stops beating. There is no way Jesus survived the crucifixion. Why is this important? Because if you have no dead Christ, you have no risen Savior! The Apostle Paul would later write, “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:17). But we can confidently sing, “I serve a risen Savior. He's in the world today...”

LESSON TWO: “They Laid Jesus There.” Out of fear, these two men had not publicly identified with Jesus until now. If Joseph and Nicodemus had not stepped in, Jesus' body would no doubt have been thrown into a common grave by the Romans. Their actions exposed them to both Jews and Romans as followers of Jesus. There would be no more hiding! Everyone would now know where they stood. What makes you afraid to take a stand for Christ? Pray for the Holy Spirit to give you courage to live and witness for Christ no matter what others might think.