

John #53: A Prepared Body (John 19:31-42)

PRAY

At the young adults retreat last weekend, we pastors were asked to briefly share our testimonies
So I recounted how I had the privilege of growing up in a godly, Christian home
And committing my life to Christ from a very young age
But I also had monumental moments, especially in my teen years,
when I had to, as it's put, make my family's faith my own faith
To decide that yes, I was in this for life, and wanted an everyday faith
After sharing my story, I realized there was another critical season in my faith journey
It wasn't a specific event, but in my early 20s, I had an awakening of sorts
Particular passages, books, sermons, songs, and events all played together
To help me realize the indispensable centrality and beauty of the gospel
That is, the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection
Before, I could've said, "Jesus died on the cross for my sins" with the best of church kids
I believed it was all true... But I don't think I could've said I was captivated by it
I saw the cross as saving me in the past, not impacting my present and future
So 1 Corinthians 15 made a profound impact on me, where Paul says: *"Now I would
remind you... of the gospel I preached to you, which you received [in the past], in which
you stand [in the present], and by which you are being saved..."* [ongoing into the future]
He goes on: *"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that
Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he
was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures..."*
These truths have deeply shaped my life (and my ministry) ever since that season

I don't know if you've ever had that experience of being woken up to the beauty of the gospel
If you haven't, I hope even this holy week may do this for you
I know that it can be hard to believe in the first place
Or to understand why it matters, on an ongoing basis in our lives
But I hope you have had your eyes opened and your heart softened to the gospel

This past Sunday, we looked at the crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ, from John 19
And how, in the cross, his placement was offensive, his Word was fulfilled, his family
was formed, and his work was finished... Absolutely incredible stuff
Today, we'll continue in John 19, and look at the sombre moments right *after* Jesus died
So you can **OPEN** there in your Bibles now: John 19... Or use a Bible from the seats [page #906]
The mood here is sombre, but it is not hopeless—for those who know how the story ends
This passage is clearly preparing the way, or setting the stage, for something more

Speaking of preparation, earlier in this chapter there was a seemingly random note
about 'the day of Preparation'... That Jesus was taken away to be killed on this specific day
Every Sabbath day, the Jewish people were to rest from all their labours
But that meant that any cooking, cleaning, or running errands had to be done before then
Therefore, every 6th day of the week, or Friday, was used to prepare for Sabbath
They also counted their days as beginning at sundown... So Sabbath began every Friday evening

Why is this timing of things important? Well, it explains what happened to Jesus after he died:

READ v.30-31¹... What's going on here? A special Sabbath was fast approaching

But the Law of Moses, in Deuteronomy 21, insisted that anyone hung in an execution

couldn't remain hanging and exposed overnight, or it would desecrate their land

These people knew that crucifixions could stretch on and on, overnight and then some

So as the end of Friday approached, the Jews started to worry:

'We can't let them keep hanging here, especially on *today* of all days!'

That'd have major repercussions for Passover and Sabbath celebrations

So they returned to Pilate and asked if the deaths could be hurried up or hastened

In crucifixions, this was done by smashing the prisoners' legs,

Which would prevent them from hoisting themselves up to breathe—so they'd suffocate

In the Jewish leaders' callousness, they didn't mind further mutilating Jesus

In order to maintain the purity of their feast and their traditions

It wasn't about putting him out of his misery; it was about keeping their party going

We then move from the callousness of the Jews to the cruelty of the Romans in v.32

By approving the request, Pilate authorized further shock and blood and pain

Though at least death would come more quickly: **READ v.32**²

But when they moved on to Jesus, they were in for a surprise: **READ v.33**³

Jesus gave up his life on his own timetable; no one else took his life from him

So how'd the soldiers make sure he was actually dead? **READ v.34**⁴

[tr] Ask yourself: Why does John give us all these gory, post-mortem details?

After v.30, when Jesus died, he could've just moved directly to the resurrection

But instead, we get a really earthy, physical passage all about a dead body... Why?

Well, he wanted his original readers to be convinced of one simple truth: Jesus died

Jesus later being seen alive was such a strongly-attested claim in that day

That people had to come up with other ideas or theories to make sense of the data

One such theory, even in the first century, was that Jesus didn't really die

Maybe he fainted and was taken down from the cross too soon

Maybe he was just mostly-dead, and was able to be resuscitated

Maybe he wasn't really a man, so he only appeared to take on flesh or die

But John was having none of that... This was written so that all his readers, us included, would:

Believe Jesus really died (v.31-34)

[r] It's simple, but it's vital we are clear on this: We need to believe Jesus really died

Notice how this whole passage is about Jesus' body

v.31 talks about hanging bodies and breaking legs... v.32 describes the breaking legs

v.33 reveals that Jesus' body was already deceased

v.34 is all about blood and water flowing from his side

Later on, it'll be all about his body being prepared for burial with clothes and spices

But the main fact about Jesus' body here at the outset is that it was dead as a doornail

If there was one thing the Romans were good at, it was executions

And if crucifixion was certain to do one thing, it was to kill its victims

Now, if you want to figure out if someone is dead, you can check their pulse,
Or you can see if their heartbeat has flatlined on the screen
Or I suppose you could stab them with a spear: **READ v.34⁵**
If this happened, it was indisputable witness that Jesus was indeed dead
In most contemporary thought at the time, the human body consisted of blood and water
So if this flowed out from him, it showed his life force gushing away
But this is also consistent with what modern medicine would say could happen at death
In dead bodies with chest injuries, it's been observed that up to two litres of fluid
can gather in the lining of the rib cage and lungs, or around the heart and lungs
So if a spear pierced his heart, blood and a clear fluid would've poured out
In short: Jesus, as a man, was dead beyond the shadow of a doubt

As J.C. Ryle concludes: *"Christ's heart actually ceased to beat, and he actually died. Great, indeed, was the importance of this fact. We must all see on a moment's reflection that without a real death there could be no real sacrifice; that without a real death there could be no real resurrection; and that without a real death and real resurrection, the whole of Christianity is a house built on sand and has no foundation at all."*

John probably also sensed some spiritual symbolism behind the blood and water
Perhaps, like Eve's life was created from a rib out of Adam's side,
So the life of Christ's bride is taken from his side
Some scholars suggest the water hints at baptism and the blood hints at communion
Maybe it's a sign of the life (blood) and cleansing (water) that flow from the cross
It's even possible that John was alluding to Exodus 17, when God told Moses:
"Strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink"
Which would mean the Lord, who was known as the Rock of his people,
was being stricken, so that they could drink of his living water, the Holy Spirit

We don't know for sure... Any of these are possible
What we do know is that John later wrote this: *"This is he who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree."* (1 John 5:6-8)
So something about this picture shows the way Jesus came to the world, to live and die:
Both as a human baby, born out of the amniotic water of a mother's womb
And as a man with real flesh and blood—blood which would be spilled
This water and blood testify on his behalf... It's part of God's testimony to us:
"If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son." (5:9)

[tr] The main significance of these events is less the symbolism, and more the testimony
This really happened... Jesus really died
John really saw this... And even more incredible, Scripture really foresaw this
So: **Believe Jesus really died**

...as testified and prophesied (v.35-37)

[r] We need to believe that Christ really died, just as was testified and prophesied

Look: **READ v.35⁶**... That's why I said we need to believe in these truths

It's John's whole point in recording them for us... We need to trust him
After all, he was an eyewitness of it all: **READ v.35a, 35c**⁷
For the first time in all 19 chapters of his book, John essentially breaks the 4th wall,
And speaks directly to his readers... which includes us!
And for the first time in Jesus' passion, John gives us a clear application: believe!
It's like he's telling us: "This report is from an eyewitness, giving a truthful, accurate account"
He swears a form of an oath here, like a witness getting sworn into court: **READ v.35b**⁸
'I'm telling the truth, and I really hope and pray that you believe what I'm telling you'
Jesus' death has been strongly attested to by eyewitness testimony—and not only John's

But can you hear John speaking this *to you* today? This is highly personal!
Do you believe that Jesus really died? Do you believe he died and rose in your place?
Do you believe that, without him, you are condemned to face God's judgment?
But that with his bloody sacrifice, you are justified, cleansed, and redeemed?
I hope and pray that you will hear what John has to say, and choose to believe him
But we don't believe in John; he wants us to believe in Jesus as Lord and Saviour
So do you believe? Have you staked your life and your destiny on these claims?
I urge you: If you don't already, accept and believe the truth of Christ's death!
If you want to today, we'd love nothing more than to help you do so
And believer, you can cling to the truth of Christ crucified with confidence and assurance
His death really happened... Your debt really has been paid... Your sin really is forgiven
We truthfully can build our lives on it

We may wonder: Why does believing matter so much?
This is the means by which we receive God's grace and mercy
There is no other works we must do, because Jesus paid it all, and it is finished
This way, none of us can boast, like: "I did it my way! I fixed things! I did it myself!"
No, God did it all through Christ, and we can be saved only by grace through faith
John laid out the eyewitness evidence of Christ's death for this one reason: that we would believe
Our faith isn't a blind leap into the dark... It's a surrender—an agreement—to the truth

You could picture John in that imaginary courtroom, putting his hand on a Bible, and saying:
"I swear I'm telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth..."
Oh, and by the way: this Bible here... It's telling the truth and testifying to this too!"
That's effectively what he does in v.36-37, pointing to fulfillment of prophecy: **READ v.36-37**⁹
The testifying goes two ways here: Christ's death testifies to the truth of Scripture
And Scripture testifies to the truth of Christ
The long list of O.T. prophecies that Jesus fulfilled—many in his final days,
Should encourage us about both the reliability of God's Word,
And the historically special identity of God's Son
Kids: you can trust your Bibles... They are telling you the reliable truth
And kids: you can trust in Jesus... He is God's long-promised Saviour of the world
Even minor details of Jesus' death were foreseen and prophesied by Scripture
Jesus died in this particular way—without broken bones and with a spear wound—
In order to fulfill centuries-old prophecies about the Messiah: **READ v.36a**¹⁰

We're not positive where the first quotation comes from

It's either from Exodus 12:46, which says no bone of a Passover lamb was to be broken
Or from Psalm 34:20, which says God cares for his righteous people:

"He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken."

So Jesus is either being compared to a spotless Passover lamb being sacrificed
Or he is fulfilling words prophesied by King David about the righteous being preserved

The second prophecy is definitely from **Zechariah 12:10**... And pay close attention to this:

God says: *"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."*

Who does Zechariah prophesy that people will look upon? On the Lord himself!

God says, 'they will look on *me*, on him whom they have pierced'

And hundreds of years later, John sees all these things aligning at the same time,

and, lo and behold, *Jesus* gets pierced before the staring eyes of Jerusalem

And he goes, 'Woah... Scripture told us this would happen one day!

It was supposed to happen to God... And it's happening to Jesus...

[connects the dots] Woah... Jesus is the pierced Lord himself.'

John's readers would've known that just a few verses after that, Zechariah prophesied:

"On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness." (Zechariah 13:1)

Indeed: *There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel's veins
And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains*

But there's another layer here, in that Zechariah 12 is a prophecy about the end times

After all the unbelieving nations who attack God's people are defeated,

That's when they will look upon the one who was pierced

And they will mourn—most likely in contrition and repentance for their sin—

When God mercifully comes to them, himself, to rescue them¹¹

So it makes sense that this prophecy is also quoted by John in **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."

The question for us, whose sins sent Jesus to the cross, is: Are we ready to look upon him?

Because we will one day! ...We will see him exalted and returning in glory

So will we wail in grief and despair over his just judgment of us?

Or will we mourn over our sins against him, and weep because we love him?

How we respond to him now will determine everything about how we react on that day

[tr] Truly: *Christ died for our sins* in accordance with the Scriptures... *[and] he was buried*

In v.38, the story picks back up with how Jesus' dead body was handled—and buried

And so: We start by believing Jesus really died, and then we're to:

Behold Jesus tenderly buried (v.38-42)

[r] In death, Jesus was tenderly and carefully buried

In creeds that we confess as a church, we say we believe that

Christ “suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was *buried*”
Why is Jesus’ burial so important? Well, it shows the reality of his death
As well as marking the lowest point to where Jesus descended before his exaltation
Here in John, we get one of the most tender accounts of his burial:
READ v.38¹²... So, notice: Both paragraphs in this passage begin with a petition made to Pilate
One request was to have Jesus taken away broken; the other was to take him away gently
But the first is not actually carried out, as God protected his Son... The second is

This is the first time we meet Joseph of Arimathea, though he’s mentioned in all 4 gospels
We know he was a rich member of the Sanhedrin... And John says he was Jesus’ disciple
But up till now, he’d only been a secret disciple “for fear of the Jews”
He was afraid of what his colleagues would think or do if they found out
John had mentioned people like Joseph before, in 12:42, saying: “*Many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.*” ...But now something has changed
Joseph courageously approaches Pilate, not secretly, to ask for Jesus’ body
Maybe as he watched Jesus die, he was ashamed of his previous cowardice
Or maybe after seeing his brutal death, the desire to take care of his master outweighed it
He’s soon joined by Nicodemus, who also wasn’t very public before: **READ v.39a**¹³
He came at night before... Now he comes in broad daylight
And the implication seems to be that the cross inspired these men to not hide anymore
Jesus was changing lives, even as a dead man

Now, the circumstances of Jesus’ burial are very unique
Because the Romans normally handed corpses over to family members—the next of kin
However, those crucified for sedition, as Jesus allegedly was, weren’t
They were intentionally left hanging there for the vultures
Also, the Jews never refused to bury executed criminals
But they wouldn’t allow them placed in family tombs where they’d desecrate the dead
Rather, they provided a burial site specifically for criminals—a common grave
So on the one hand, Pilate made an exception to their habits by allowing Jesus’ body down now
And on the other hand, a Jewish leader wants to keep Jesus out of the common grave,
And bury him in his own family’s new and unoccupied tomb... A place of honour
The contrast between the other leaders’ and the soldier’s violent treatment of Jesus,
And his followers’ tender treatment of his dead body couldn’t be starker
READ v.38d-40¹⁴... 75 pounds! That’s a lot of spices! ...Because decomposing flesh stinks
It was the custom to bury people with many spices to mask or disguise the smell of death

And again, the focus is on Jesus’ body... Wrapped in linens and adorned with ointments
Which draws attention to Jesus’ humanity, and the dignity of him coming in a human body
Makes me think of **Hebrews 10:5**, which describes Jesus quoting Psalm 40:
“*Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me...*”
Shortly after, Hebrews says: “*And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*” (10:10)

When was the last time you thanked God that Jesus had a physical body just like yours?

It's because of that body that he can be our once for all sacrifice for sin
God prepared a body for him to be born, live, die, be buried, and rise in
And here, we get a little reflection of that in his followers preparing his body for burial

This also forever dignifies physical human bodies, like our own

Our bodies are to be treated with respect, honour, and esteem

So be mindful of what you put in it or on it, what you watch with it, how you use it

As J.C. Ryle said: *"It is the body, which may be the instrument of committing the greatest sins or of bringing the greatest glory to God. It is the body, which the eternal Son of God honored by dwelling in it and dying in our stead. It is the body, with which He rose again and ascended up into heaven... It is the body, which is now the temple of the Holy Spirit, while the believer lives."*

Then when it comes to death, funerals are a special thing... Burials are a good thing

I don't believe it's a rule that we must bury our dead, as opposed to other means

But this is why Christians have traditionally preferred burying bodies

READ v.41¹⁵... It's no coincidence he ends up back in a garden—

Where man was created and fell into sin, and where Jesus was betrayed

What had been the place of creation, and become a place of corruption,

Was about to become a place of new creation

They were quickly running out of daylight... And all work would have to stop soon

So talk about convenient: **READ v.42¹⁶**

John doesn't mention that this fulfilled another prophecy, from Isaiah 53:9:

Which says he'd be appointed a grave with the wicked, yet buried with the rich in death

He was destined to be buried with criminals, but ended up in a rich man's tomb

We know from elsewhere that this was Joseph's own tomb, where Joseph would've been buried

There's maybe a hint of Jesus being buried in place of his followers here

You ask, What's the big deal about Christ's burial? Let me tell you...

Granted, it doesn't have the same level of significance as Jesus' death or resurrection

But listen to these words from Romans 6:3-4 *"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."*

So as Christ was laid in a tomb, we might as well have been laid there too

And this is the motivation, Romans says, for resisting sin and living righteously

So picture it: On the dusk of Good Friday, as Jesus was tenderly laid in the grave,

Your old life was laid to rest once and for all

Are you living in light of being buried with Christ?

CONCLUSION

READ v.42b¹⁷... And there we have it: the end of the book of John... Just kidding!

But that's the thing: It would be the end of the book for every other person, ever

Every other religious leader... Everyone with a biography of any kind...

Their story ends at their death

Maybe there'd be an epilogue describing their lasting impact

But the book would be done... John's book is most decidedly *not* done

I find it telling that 'the day of Preparation' is mentioned 3 times in this chapter

Including at both the front and the back of today's passage... Preparation, preparation
As Jesus' people prepared his body for burial, they unknowingly prepared for something more

The tension is high here... We're on the edge of our seats for what will happen next
But first, the Sabbath was at hand... It was time to rest...

Jesus' work was finished... And on the seventh day, God rested

So what about you? Have you beheld Jesus' death and burial? And do you believe it?

PRAY

LORD'S SUPPER

Benediction: prayer, 5min,

¹ When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. 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

² So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him.

³ But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.

⁴ But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.

⁵ But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.

⁶ 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.

⁷ He who saw it has borne witness... that you also may believe.

⁸ his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth

⁹ 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."

¹⁰ For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled

¹¹ HT Carson

¹² 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.

¹³ Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes

¹⁴ 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 seventy-five 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.

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.

¹⁷ since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there