

John 19v31-42

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[0 : 00] I don't know if you've ever compared the biographies of famous people with the accounts of Jesus' life in the Gospels. There's a striking contrast, isn't there? One biography I've got on my shelf, and it's about 400 pages long, and there's got a page almost at the end that records the man's death.

These accounts of Jesus' life are completely different. Completely different. So in Mark's Gospel, for example, there is nothing about Jesus' birth whatsoever. You've got ten chapters covering the first three years of his public ministry, and then chapters 11 to 16 that cover the last week of his life. Or take John's Gospel. Chapters 13 to 20 all deal with the last 24 hours of him living and breathing. Well, chapters 13 to 19, I should say, that is resurrection, in chapters 20 to 21.

And Mark says nothing at all about Jesus' birth. John makes one theological comment about it. It doesn't describe any of the story. And yet they both dedicate space to Jesus' burial.

Mark, in fact, has only six verses on Jesus' burial and eight on his resurrection. So it's an interesting focus. Why is that? Why is it?

[1 : 14] Why does the Apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15, talking about the things of first importance, is that Christ died for sins according to the Scriptures, was buried, and then rose again according to the Scriptures?

Why is this being buried thing so important? Why does it get so much space? Is it just a bit of filler in the narrative? Well, let's look at the message John has for us here.

There are at least three things he wants us to see. Let's go through the story together. Let's start with verse 31. Since it was a day of preparation, so that the bodies would not remain on the cross for the Sabbath, that Sabbath was a high day, the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, that they might be taken away.

So Jesus was killed on Friday. Friday was the day of preparation, the day before the Sabbath, where things had to get done. This was a special Sabbath, because it was a Sabbath for the Passover week. Normally, the Romans would just leave bodies hanging on a cross for the vultures to come and get.

On the special days, and sometimes, for example, on the Emperor's birthday, they would take the victims down from the cross. If they weren't yet dead, they would break their legs. That way, the person would die more quickly.

[2 : 28] If their legs weren't broken, they could potentially push themselves up with their legs and still be able to breathe. By breaking the legs, they'd quite quickly run out of energy and die. And so that's what the Jewish leaders ask for here.

Take this man down. We don't want his body hanging up there. And there was a special reason for that. Back in the Old Testament, in Deuteronomy 21, God had said if there was a body hanging on a tree overnight, that will pollute, it will defile the whole land.

And they didn't want that to happen, especially at the Passover, their big religious festival. So they asked the Romans to bring the body down. Why does John record this?

He wants the disciples to see it is real. It is real. Jesus really was dead. He wasn't just mostly dead. He was really dead. Look at verse 32. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other, who'd been crucified with him.

But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. These soldiers were responsible for making sure executed people really were dead.

[3 : 32] But they were soldiers, so you don't want to do any work you don't have to do. Jesus is already dead. We don't need to break his legs. They don't need to take the big metal mallet they'd be used on the other guys to break the legs.

But they still want to make sure that Jesus really is dead. And so, verse 34, one of them gets a spear and pokes it up into Jesus' side just to make sure he really is dead. And so we read verse 34. At once, there came out blood and water. Now, medics have all sorts of different explanations for how this could be. In fact, bizarrely, someone's actually done experiments with dead bodies to show how this could happen. Back in the 60s, I think that was. But basically, in the chest cavity, when someone has suffered major trauma to the chest, as Jesus probably would have done, being flogged and beaten, the fluids can leak out into the cavity. The heavier ones sink to the bottom. The red stuff sinks to the bottom, leaving clearer stuff at the top. So you put a spear in, poking the chest cavity from underneath. What's going to come out? [4 : 42] The red stuff first looks like blood, followed by a clearer layer that looks like water. And that can be up to two litres of fluid. So that seems to be what they see here.

Why is John telling us? He wants us to know, firstly, that Jesus really was dead. This is real. But actually, there's another subtle point here as well. Yes, Jesus is really dead, but also, he's really a dead man. He has blood and flesh, like you and me. He was a real man. As John said at the start of his Gospel, the Word became flesh. The Word, the eternal Son of God, for whom everything was created. became flesh and blood, like me, like you. And this flesh and blood was dead. So he adds verse 35 to highlight it, underline it several times. He who saw it, probably John himself, has borne witness. His testimony is true, and he knows he is telling the truth. [5 : 42] This is real, John says. And why is he writing it? End of verse 35. That you also may believe. In contrast, the Quran, Surah 4, says this.

They did not kill him, neither did they crucify him, it only seemed to be so. John preempts that, hundreds of years earlier, saying, no, this is real. He really died. He was a real human. This is real. And he's telling us that, that you also may believe. In the next chapter, he writes that, all these things he's written, are so that we might believe, and have life in Jesus' name.

So John wants us to see, Jesus' burial was real. He really was a man, and he really was dead. Now, not often we hear, don't we, in the, for example, with the terrible, terrorist attacks that happened today in Brussels.

We can hear, about the tragedy, of people's lives being taken. And it is a tragedy, that someone doesn't get to, fulfill their potential, doesn't get to, to live a life, that they could live.

[6 : 52] But John wants us to see, that Jesus' death, was not accidental. It was purposeful. It was purposeful. We see that as we move on. As he tells us, in verses 36 and 37, that everything that's happened, has happened to fulfill the scriptures.

Look at verse 36. These things took place, that the scripture might be fulfilled. Not one of his bones, will be broken. Now, John is referring here, to the Old Testament, to Exodus chapter 12, verse 46. Back then, the people of Israel, had been slaves in Egypt. God had been, was rescuing them from Egypt. And as a part of that rescue, he had sent the angel of death, to kill the firstborn child, in every home in Egypt.

And that was God's just judgment. Because in every home in Egypt, Israelites and Egyptian, everyone was a sinner. Everyone had rejected God, as their rightful king. Everyone was deserving, of God's judgment. But at that time, God had provided a way, for people to escape the judgment. He had given instruction to Moses, the Israelites, the Israelites could take a lamb, slaughter it, paint the blood over the doorstep.

[8 : 01] The lamb would die, instead of the firstborn child. The lamb was the substitute. It took the punishment, instead of the person. And Moses, God commanded through Moses, that that event should always be commemorated, year by year.

The highlight of the Jewish religious year, which was the Passover time, the time Jesus was crucified. And in giving the instructions for that, Exodus 12, 46, God was explicit, the lamb's bones must not be broken.

And in what sense does Jesus fulfill that? It's not a promise, after all. What happens is, Jesus is fulfilling the pattern. Back at the start of John's Gospel, John the Baptist had pointed to Jesus, chapter 1, verse 29, and says, Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.

The lamb that first passed over, died as a substitute for the sins of the firstborn, in those houses. Jesus is the greater lamb, the truer lamb, the proper lamb, who takes away, not to the sin of the firstborn in the household, but the sins of the world, the sins of whoever will believe in him. He dies in place. And so he fulfills the pattern, of that lamb. Because not one of his bones was broken. He is the fulfillment, of all that was demonstrated, by that Passover lamb.

[9 : 21] If we believe in him, our sins can be taken away as well. The judgment will pass over us, and is passed on to him. The first clue John gives us, that Jesus' death was purposeful.

It was to fulfill the patterns and promises, of the Old Testament. And that's further given weight, in verse 37. See what he says there. And again, another scripture says, they will look on him, whom they have pierced.

Now that was a prophecy, from 500 years, before Jesus' birth. From Zechariah, in the Old Testament. And the context there was, was very significant.

The context was that, God was going to revive, and restore, his people. And he was going to do it, through this, around, through this person, who was pierced.

So you imagine the scene, as John, is looking on, he's thinking back, on what he saw, as he writes it down. There are these Roman soldiers, bringing this body down, from the cross, shoving his spear in, piercing him.

[10 : 27] And out flows the blood and water. And there is John, and Mary, Jesus' mother, and a few other onlookers, looking on, weeping, over the death, of this man.

And so it brings this verse, to John's mind. That verse, in its original context, Zechariah says this, Zechariah 10, verse 12, 12, verse 10.

I, God, will pour out on the house of David, that is Judea, 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.

In the original context, the people would weep, over the sin they caused, the living God. And this one who is pierced, is indeed the one that, figuratively pierced, by rebelling against him, by their idolatry.

And here we see, literally pierced, with a sword, with a spear in his side. The result is weeping. For those who are looking on, they're weeping, for Jesus' loss.

[11 : 39] Weeping ultimately, for their own sin, that held him there, that led him to the cross. But actually, there's two ways, in which this verse, is read in the New Testament.

So here, John uses it as weeping, for remorse over sin, weeping the loss of Jesus. But later on, Revelation chapter 1, verse 7, another kind of weeping, is mentioned, with the same phrase.

Behold, he, that is Jesus, is coming with the clouds, coming in judgment, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him. And all the tribes of the earth, will wail on account of him, even so.

Amen. See, there the weeping, is not weeping over remorse, over sin, but weeping because of the judgment to come. Weeping because this Jesus, whom they pierced, will return as judge.

And so people then will weep, when they didn't repent, and turn to him when it was time. See, John wants us to see, that Jesus' death, had a purpose. It wasn't a terrible accident.

[12 : 44] He was the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. He was the one through whom, we can be forgiven, and brought back to God. And by showing us, the pierced Son of God, down from the cross, John is implicitly asking us a question.

Are you going to weep now, over your sin? Are we going to weep now, over our sin, that put in there? Or will we not weep now, but only weep, where he comes back as judge, and weep, at the despair, and the judgment coming to us?

See, John wants us to see, that Jesus' death is real, burial is real, and it is purposeful, it is no accident. And finally, he wants us to see, it is personal.

It is personal. You can see that, if you look at the contrast, the responses between, the Jewish leaders, verse 31, and then Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus, in verses 38 to 42.

See, how did the Jewish leaders, respond to Jesus' death? They just wanted him out of the way, didn't they? That's why they got him killed. Now he's up on the cross, as a kind of public disgrace, about to ruin the party at Passover.

[13 : 54] Get him down, get him out, please Romans. We want this bad dream, done away with. We want to carry on, with our religious performance. We want to carry on, with being in control.

We want to carry on, with looking important, and good. He's just an inconvenience, and embarrassment, we want him dealt with. But look at Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus, down in verse 38.

We're told in verse 38, that Joseph of Arimathea, who Mark tells us, was a member of the Sanhedrin, so was part of a Jewish, ruling establishment. John says, he was also a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews.

But now, he gets this point of decision, it's his personal. Jesus has been done away with. What is he going to do? Just carry on with his friends, the Jewish leaders?

Or will he show his true colours, and show he does believe, something about Jesus, even if he doesn't understand, what's happened? See, at great personal cost, he goes to Pilate. He could do that, because he was one of the, Jewish leaders.

[15:00] He'd have access, to the Roman governor, to Pilate. So he goes, and asks for this man's body. Typically, someone like Jesus, who's been crucified, for treason, and sedition, would just be, thrown into a common grave, outside the city, so he's not going to desecrate, anyone else's grave.

But Joseph steps up, and says, I will take him. I'll be identified, with this dying criminal. I'll get myself, ritually unclean, so I can bury him.

I'll do it at my great cost. And so too, Nicodemus. We learn back in chapter 3, verse 1, when we first met Nicodemus, that he was, a leader of the Jews. Then he came to Jesus, at night.

He didn't want to be seen. He came in moral darkness, not really understanding. But it's as if here, now Jesus has died, Nicodemus steps out, into the light, and sides with Jesus, publicly, and goes to bury him.

It's a bold move, for both these men. They're sticking their necks out. It was social suicide, for them, to be, to be seen, to be siding, with this crucified criminal.

[16:11] It was certainly, career suicide. The rest of the Jewish leaders, have wandered Jesus, out the way. See how personal, it is, for them. Jesus' death, forces the decision, what are we going to do?

Are we going to be true, to what we believe? Or are we going to be true, to just what is easy, and expedient? So it's personal for them, it's personal for the religious leaders.

They act as their own personal interest. And actually, it's personal for us too. How do we respond, to Jesus' death, to John's claim, that Jesus' death, was for our sin, so we might have life?

Are we going to be like, the Roman soldiers, who were just doing a job, just going on with life, saw no personal involvement, for themselves? Are we going to be like, the Jewish leaders, who will perhaps cling, to our identity, as being good, as being religious, as being nice?

Which at heart, did not want to submit, to God's ways? Or will we be like, Joseph and Nicodemus, who no longer, sat on the fence, no longer, lived undercover, but came out, and publicly, showed themselves, at great cost, to identify, the crucified saviour, who identified, that they believed, that he was indeed, God's rescuer, this is personal, this is personal, the apostle Paul, a little bit later on, in Romans chapter 6, verse 3, lays out the personal, aspect of this, even more clearly, says that for those of us, who have been baptised, into Christ, do you not know, you were baptised, into his death?

[17:51] We were buried, therefore, with him, in 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.

See, for those of us, who believe, there's a sense in which, as we look at Jesus, being wrapped up, and laid in act to you, if we've trusted in him, we are united to him, and that is our old way, of life, the things we once held dear, the things we once trusted on, to give us meaning, to give us security, all that is died, and buried with Jesus Christ, and on Easter Sunday, we celebrate, being raised to new life, with him as well.

So you see why John, gives us this detail, about Jesus' burial? He wants us to know, this is real, Jesus really died, and he really was a man, he was human, like you and I.

Jesus' death, was purposeful, it was no accident. He is the Lamb of God, who takes away, the sins of the world, he is the judge of the world, who will one day come back, who either weep over our sin now, or we weep over the judgment coming, when he returns.

And this death is personal, we all need to respond, we cannot ignore it. Are we going to come out, of the darkness, as Nicodemus did? Or are we carrying our own way, as the Jewish leaders did?

[19:11] Let me pray for us.