

The Cross and the Hypocrisy of the Heart

Lessons from Jesus' Death and Our Call to Witness

In beautiful nearby downtown Monrovia, we're located in the People's Republic of California, the Gulag known as Los Angeles County, about 20 minutes northeast of the bomb crater known as the city of Los Angeles. Nice to have you here. It was kind of an overcast, rather cool day, but it was a nice day, and has some good reports and blessings. So, let's go to the Lord in prayer, shall we? Father, we thank you for your goodness. We appreciate so much the opportunity that we have together for prayer. We would ask that you might help us to be discreet, that we might be discerning, that we might be willing to express our gratitude based upon what the word of God says, because we quite literally have it so good here in comparison to so many other places, so many brothers and sisters in Christ who are located in different parts of the world, who find just living life day-to-day is so vastly more challenging than what we have to deal with. And so we have it so, in comparison, we have it so good.

Our government is relatively benign, the irritants and the agitations associated with living for you, loving you, and serving you, we live in a relatively benign environment, and we are safe in comparison to Nepal, in comparison to the Middle East, in comparison to South America, in comparison to the Far East and Eastern Europe. We have it so good, and so I pray that you might help us to be grateful, help us to be appreciative, help us to recognize that in this era in which we live, we are experiencing a real anomaly.

We live in a country and we live during a time of great safety and prosperity in comparison to what Christians have endured almost everywhere for the last 2,000 years. So, help us to take things into perspective, help us to be discerning, help us to be grateful, help us to be focused, because we have challenges. Help us to live for you and love you and serve you effectively, to engage in a hearty prayer life, not only for ourselves but also for others. Help us to be not so much concerned with stuff, not so much concerned in our prayers with things, as with discernment and insight and understanding of spiritual reality. Pray your blessings upon those around us, influenced and affected by our lives, who are dead in trespasses and sins. They sometimes think they're very smart, they sometimes think they're very wise, but the reality is that they are spiritually dead. Having eyes, they see not; having ears, they hear not, and they live in a spiritual stupor, not really understanding what the big deal is with you and the Savior and the Holy Spirit and the word of God. And I pray that you might bless our witness to them, our testimony before them, that you might make them alive. Bless, we pray, our study of your word this evening. Please also bless Ruby Slooik's family and bless Tim and Fine. Pray for Joe and Jackie and Sakura and Nazarin and Brian. We pray for Jim and Dan. We pray for Erica, and we pray for Sarah, and we pray for

Bayong's pregnancy. We pray for Greg Dixon, for our loved ones who are facing health challenges. We pray also for our through-the-Bible reading program, that we might be ruthlessly diligent when it comes to taking the time to read the word of God. Bless to that end and bless our Bible study, we ask in Jesus' name, amen.

I want you to turn in your Bible, if you would, please, to the Gospel according to John. We're going to begin considering those portions of the gospel accounts that deal with the disposition of the Lord Jesus Christ's body. The eternal Son of the living God gave Himself a ransom for the sins of many, offering Himself as the satisfaction for God's righteous demand of my sins' payment. Isn't that amazing? You know what's also astonishing? The number of people that don't know, and they don't know that they don't know, and when you try to make it so they do know, they don't care. They just don't care, and they think there's something wrong with the people who do care, not realizing that they are the ones who are dead. They are the ones whose thinking, their minds, have been turned over by God to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient. And one of the consequences of God's judgment having already begun to be visited upon them is they care nothing for the things that God cares for. They care nothing for the things that are important to believers because they're dead. It's heartbreaking.

So, the Lord Jesus Christ, having accomplished what only He could do—only He could do what He did as the God-man—He then yielded up His spirit, and He died. After verifying crucified men were dead, the Roman governor's permission allowed for the removal of the crucified men's bodies, and at least with the Lord Jesus Christ's body, they were permitted to then arrange for His burial. Passages, gospel accounts, and there are two matters recorded in what is immediately before us: verifying, first of all, that He was dead, and then burying His body. So, let's look, first of all—we begin tonight, we're not going to finish tonight—verifying that He was dead. So, in John chapter 19, that's where we begin, with verse 31. We'll read through verse 37. That is a passage dealing with matters not recorded by the other gospel accounts. So, begin reading along with me, if you would, from verse 31.

The Jews, therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath day (for that Sabbath day was an high day), besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then came the soldiers and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with Him. That's the first thief and then the second thief; their legs were broken. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was dead already, they brake not His legs. But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that you might believe. For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they have pierced.

Now, notice, note—and I'm, you know that I'm a pronunciation snob, right? Everybody knows I'm a pronunciation snob. You see that last word in verse 37, s-a-t, it is

pronounced “seth.” S-a-i-t is pronounced like it is spelled: s-e-t-h. “Saith” is spelled s-a-y-t in the Bible. So, if it says s-a-i-t-h, you pronounce it “seth,” not “saith.” See? Well, why not? Because it makes you sound like a rube, and you don’t want to sound like a rube when you’re reading the Bible, amen? Help me now, help me. Okay, so let’s look at John chapter 19:31. The Jews, therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath day (for that Sabbath day was an high day), besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.

It is a tragic consequence of anti-Semitism in our day that little attention is paid to such phrases as “the Jews, therefore.” That phrase, “the Jews, therefore,” and people who are influenced by and have a little bit of anti-Semitism to them will come to a passage like this, and they will conclude that all Jewish people are referred to by that phrase in this verse, when the context does not support that assumption. Please understand, despite the fact that we actually have dictionaries, okay, and I use dictionaries all the time, the reality is that no word has really a definition. There’s no such thing as a definition of a word. You say, “Well, how do you know that?” Let’s go to South Central LA in the 60s, 70s, 80s, and 90s. In South Central LA in the 60s, 70s, 80s, and 90s, “bad” meant good. “Bad” did not mean bad; “bad” meant good. Somebody say, “That’s bad,” what he means is, “That’s really good.” It is the context in which the word is used that determines what the word means, okay? That’s why you have in the New Testament, you have the word “cosmos,” translated “world,” has actually seven different meanings in the New Testament alone. Seven. That’s the reason why we know that the word “all” doesn’t always mean “all.” Sometimes “all,” according to context, means that a representative of each ethnic group is included, not everybody worldwide, okay? So, “all” can sometimes mean one red, one black, one yellow, one Hispanic—you know, red, yellow, black, white, all are precious in His sight, all right? And so, in when the word is used in that way, it means one of each grouping, not all people everywhere.

So, “Jews” here doesn’t refer to every descendant of Abraham through Isaac and through Jacob. Sometimes it does, but it is wrong to assume that it always does, because sometimes context shows that it does not. That’s the reason we say, “Context rules,” okay? It’s the context in which the word is used that actually carries the day. So, what did “the Jews, therefore,” do? They “besought Pilate.” The Jews besought Pilate. Let me suggest how unlikely it was that ordinary Jewish people did or ever would have besought anything from Pilate. Most Jewish people stayed as far away from Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, as they possibly could. They wanted nothing to do with the man. They wanted nothing to do with Romans. They would never think of approaching Pilate about anything, and it was highly probable that the actual ones who besought Pilate were the same who had attended Christ’s trial before Pilate. Did all Jews attend the trial of Pilate, the trial of Christ before Pilate? How about the second trial of Christ before Pilate? Were all Jews there? No, no, no, not at all. It was the religious leaders. They were members of the Jewish Sanhedrin, probably numbering 70, 100, maybe no more than that.

So, just as there are nuanced meanings in the word “world” and nuanced meanings in the word “all” in Scripture, so—and, by the way, there are nuanced meanings with the words that you do in normal conversational language. You always nuance words and phrases; you always do. We all do that. That’s the way we talk; that’s the way human beings actually communicate. So, there are nuanced meanings of the word “Jew” in the New Testament. These Jews were from the religious leadership class. Say, “The Jews crucified Christ.” Not all Jews everywhere. Now, understand, they were nationally responsible for what the few at the top decided to do and then did, just as our country, we as citizens, are nationally responsible for what our president does and what our secretary of defense does and what a general or two will do. We are nationally responsible for the consequences of what they do, okay? That doesn’t mean we do it, okay? Just as it doesn’t mean that the average, ordinary, run-of-the-mill Jewish person of the first century was necessarily involved in approaching Pilate, pleading as these guys pleaded.

The Jews, therefore, because it was the preparation—that refers to the same day before the high holy day that is referenced in John chapter 19 and verse 14. Look back up there, John chapter 19 and verse 14, where the gospel writer inserted one of his numerous editorial comments. John put in a lot of editorial comments in his gospel account, and one of his editorial comments is in verse 14 of John chapter 19: “And it was the preparation of the Passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your king.” So, that’s what Pilate said, according to verse 14. Since the high holy day was the Sabbath, and that Sabbath was also a Saturday, it is established that our Lord, therefore, was crucified on a Friday, okay? Sometimes people believe that He was crucified on Wednesday. Those same kind of people also believe the earth is flat, but we have evidence here that He was crucified on a Friday, and I can tell you that the world is not flat, okay? Some people who believe the world is flat, they have foreheads that are flat, but the world itself is actually round.

Next phrase: “that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath day.” It was a violation of the law of Moses for someone to be hung on a tree past sundown. Whenever someone was executed for a capital offense, even by stoning, what they would do is they would hang the body up on a tree, if there was one around, and they could get that done, with the understanding that body was to be taken down before sundown. Deuteronomy chapter 21:22 and 23 are very, very clear about that, if you would want to look that up. Therefore, in the case of the execution of a criminal for a capital crime, if he was hung on a tree, his body was to be taken down before sundown—all the more important to the Jewish people, then, if that following day was a high holy day. So, they didn’t want anybody’s body hanging from anything like a tree or a cross when the sun went down, because that would be terrible. It would be even worse if that next day was a Sabbath, such as we have here.

Thus, while the members of the Sanhedrin had no compunction about framing the Savior for crimes He did not commit—oh, they didn’t have any problem with framing an innocent man; oh, they had no problem with that at all—they had no problem with insisting on His crucifixion for crimes He did not commit. They had no problem with

that at all. They were very punctilious about this particular detail of the law of Moses. There's a modern-day counterpart to that. Do you remember, about 30 years ago, when a little boy from Cuba, Elian Gonzalez, was taken back to Cuba? Nobody cared that he was sent back to Cuba, but the people who didn't care that he was sent back to Cuba are very, very upset that an MS-13 gangbanger was sent back to his country. So, people haven't changed; people are the same. There's nothing new under the sun, okay?

So, while the weekly Sabbath would always fall on a Saturday, because, you know, "for that Sabbath day was an high day," the Jewish calendar, let us remind ourselves, was a lunar calendar, and our calendar is a solar calendar, okay? Therefore, the Passover, the Jewish observance of the Passover, because they have a lunar calendar, would always fall on a different day of the week each year, while the weekly Sabbath, of course, was always on a Saturday, starting Friday night sundown to Saturday night sundown. On that day, however, that day, it was both a Passover Sabbath and it was also a weekly Sabbath. So, the Passover Sabbath fell on the same day as the weekly Sabbath, so it was kind of a double Sabbath, and that's what is referred to in this phrase, "for that Sabbath day was an high day." The Greek word translated "high" is the preposition "mega." It was a mega day; in other words, it was a big day, right?

Notice the next phrase: "besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away." The religious leaders, who were so insistent on freeing the actual criminal—now, has it dawned on you that these guys seem to have no grasp of irony? Hypocrites never see irony. They never see it; they never see it, okay? You say, "Well, well, what? Well, they violate this law of Moses, and they violate this law of Moses, but they're very punctilious about that law of Moses." Isn't that ironical? I think it is, and they don't see it. You're willing to accuse an innocent man, you're willing to condemn an innocent man, you're willing to let a career criminal go free, but we must make sure that the bodies don't hang on the cross one minute past the time they're due. So, you're very punctilious about obeying this part of the law while ignoring this part, this part, this part, and this part. Maybe that's one of the reasons why James chapter 1 points out that if you're guilty of part of the law, you're guilty of all of the law, because you can't segment the law up into pieces: obey this part, disobey this part, obey this part, disobey—no, it's all, it's all or nothing. It's all or nothing.

So, they "besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away." So, these religious leaders, who are so insistent on freeing the actual criminal, who was Barabbas, recall, they are determined to convict and see punished the innocent one, and now they are exerting themselves—now that He's on the cross, they are exerting themselves once more to Pilate to expedite the deaths of those who were hanging on the crosses. They want them to hurry up and die. Why? Well, because we got to get them down off the cross; they have to be dead, or we can't take them down, and so we need for them to be dead before the sun goes down, because we don't want to violate the law—violate the law, violate the law, violate the law, violate the law, but oh, now we can't violate the law. You see the irony? I hope you—you should nod

and say, “Yes,” because if you don’t see the irony, you may be a hypocrite, okay? So, yeah, I see the irony; yes, I see the irony.

Let me just read to you what one commentator writes about this. He writes, “Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate” —and remember, the Sabbath begins at sundown; that’s the reason they have to get the body down off the cross before the sun goes down, because, in the Jewish day, begins with sundown. Our day begins with sunup; the Jewish day begins with sundown— “Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. The Jews’ attitude was based on Deuteronomy 21:22 and 23, which I’ve cited to you, according to which bodies of hanged criminals must not defile the land by remaining on a tree overnight. The Romans would leave crucified persons on their crosses until death ensued, which could take days. There are records of some people hanging on a cross for way more than a week, sometimes approaching two weeks; they just lasted, and their bodies were devoured by vultures. There is also evidence that, at times, especially during feast days, bodies were taken down and given to relatives. In order to hasten death, the victim’s legs, and sometimes other bones, would be smashed with an iron mallet, a practice called ‘crurifragium,’ which means to break the shin bone.

This prevented the person from prolonging life by pushing himself up with his legs in order to breathe. Arm strength soon failed, and asphyxiation ensued. In the case of the body of a man crucified in the first century and found in 1968 north of Jerusalem, they uncovered a body: one leg had been fractured, and the other was broken to pieces.” The Jews’ request is their last action recorded in this gospel. There’s no more mention of Jewish people commenting or asking anything in the Gospel according to John after this verse. And then the next phrase, the last phrase of verse 31: “and that they might be taken away.” So, to this point, the Lord Jesus Christ’s dead body hung on the cross, along with the two thieves, both of them presumably still being alive at this point. And this verse is the record of the Jews seeking permission from Pilate to expedite, to speed up, the deaths of those who were crucified, with the Savior’s death not having been yet confirmed. Does anybody know what will be the confirmation that the Lord Jesus Christ was actually dead? What would be the confirmation to the Romans, “This is a dead guy”? That’s right: the spear thrust up under His rib cage and the coming out of blood and water—clear plasma and blood coming out, yeah. And we’ll look at that, Lord willing, next time.

So, think about this: take a step back, consider, and ponder, reflect on what we have here. What grisly work the chief priests and scribes were involved in. These are supposed to be guys who live for, love, and serve the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They officially occupy positions of honor, responsibility, and they minister in and around the temple. They handle the holy vessels, they teach the word of God, they obey Scripture, and yet these guys, it is safe to say, they loathed Jesus of Nazareth, because His earthly ministry threatened their corrupt scheme of religious profiteering at the expense of the ordinary people. These guys made a lot of money off of ordinary religious Jews coming to town a couple of times a year. They made a lot of money off

of them. And the Lord Jesus Christ, He was of the light, while they were of the darkness, and they opposed Him again and again and again throughout His earthly ministry, as we recall. And their conspiracy against Him reached fruition when Judas betrayed Him, and their devious manipulations through the night presented God's Son, by dawn, just after dawn, presented Him first to Pilate and then to Herod Antipas and then back to Pilate again, who condemned Him, despite twice declaring, "I find no fault in Him," John chapter 18 and verse 38, and then in John chapter 19, verse 4, "I find no fault in Him."

Crucified, hanging on the cross for all those hours, from 9:00 until about 6:00 in the afternoon, about nine hours, His spirit has left His body, to return after three days and three nights. So, what it falls upon the Romans to do is to verify His death, take His body from the cross, and others will then attend to His burial. And little could they have imagined—surprise, surprise—little could they have imagined what would happen in three days, despite Him telling them again and again and again what was going to happen. They did not have the ears to hear, did they? He told them that He was going to die, He told them He was going to be offered up, He told them He was going to rise from the dead. But He also said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And people didn't listen to Him then, and they won't listen to Him then, and they won't listen to Him then, and what's going to happen to them is eternal torment if they do not repent of their sins and turn to Christ.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for your goodness, the opportunity that we have to begin considering this portion of the gospel accounts. We pray your blessings upon us. Help us to learn, help us to glean, help us to grow. We pray that you might use your word to challenge us to live for you and love you and serve you effectively, and for this we will thank you, in Jesus' name, amen.