

John 19:31-42 Jesus Our Passover

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro
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We're picking things up this morning in John 19, so turn there with me if you have your Bible. Over the past several weeks we have seen Jesus' arrest, trial, and His death on the cross - this morning we'll see His body placed in the tomb, but not for long, and we'll see that there was a lot more going on behind the scenes.

31 Therefore, because it was the Preparation *Day*, that the bodies should 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.

It kind of puts a damper on your big celebration to have men hanging from crosses ten feet tall, moaning or screaming as they slowly die, and it puts a bit of an odor in the air that you'd like to be rid of before all the guests arrive...

32 Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. 33 But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. 34 But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. 35 And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe. 36 For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, "*Not one of His bones shall be broken.*" 37 And again another Scripture says, "*They shall look on Him whom they pierced.*"

Make note of that, because we'll come back to it in a minute

38 After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being 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.

No doubt Pilate is just happy to get this thing finally done and over with.

So he came and took the body of Jesus. 39 And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. 40 Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury. 41 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. 42 So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews' Preparation *Day*, for the tomb was nearby.

So, what's going on here? What's all this stuff about crucifixion and breaking people's legs, and the Preparation Day, and Jesus already being dead so none of His bones were broken and that fulfilling Scripture... what's going on? What was that all about? Well, it turns out, it's all related in some very important ways.

In order to understand, let's start by talking about crucifixion. Crucifixion wasn't just for Jesus – history tells of the deaths of tens of thousands of people who died this way – after the Roman army crushed the revolt led by Spartacus, they lined the road back to Rome with 6000 rebels crucified on 6000 crosses. But crucifixion did not begin with the Romans, they just perfected it, it actually dates back to at least 1000 BC and was used by the Assyrians, Phoenicians, and Persians, to name a few. And early on, it was a form of punishment or humiliation for slaves. People didn't die just from the process of being crucified – originally they were tied to the cross with ropes.

Only later did the Romans come up with the idea of driving spikes through people's arms and feet as a grotesque way of holding them in place *as they died from other factors*. You could be nailed to a wooden cross today and hung upright, and as long as they took you back down quickly and got you stitched up from the puncture wounds, you'd live to tell about it.

So, it wasn't just being on the cross, it was all the other stuff that went along with it. Remember, people were most often beaten mercilessly before they were crucified. They had open wounds all over their bodies. There would be bleeding, possibly even internally. They would be exhausted. And then they would be tied or nailed or both to the cross where they would be exposed to the elements – baked by the sun, chilled by the wind, soaked by the rain.

And, do me a favor, and take a deep breath real quick – as you do, do you feel your chest rising? Well, it's kind of hard to do that when your arms are outstretched and the weight of your body is pulling down. So, it was hard to get a good deep breath while crucified. But again, the executioners weren't interested in a quick death – if that were the case they would just chop off your head – no, they wanted to intentionally prolong your experience of suffering – to bring you to that place where you really want to die, but you can't. I mean hey, why just suffer physically when you suffer mentally too, right?

So sometimes the cross would have a little seat on the upright, and that, combined with the fact that the victim's feet were also nailed in place, gave them the ability to push up a little bit and get that lung-full of air they were seeking. It kept you right there on the brink of suffocation. And to get that breath of air you had to push off of the wounds in your feet, slide up along the wounds on your back and use the wounds in your wrists as pivots.

It was agonizing, and the longer you stayed alive; the more things started working against you. You're not getting any rest to recover. If you're particularly unfortunate, infection begins to set in from your wounds and you start to run a fever. You're not eating. But you're also not drinking any water – which should hopefully cap you off at about three days of suffering max. So again, it wasn't a quick death.

But, as we mentioned earlier, the Jewish leaders don't have three days. They have this big party they want to get back to, they kind of need to hurry this thing up. So, they make what is apparently a familiar request – to just go ahead and break the legs of the victims by

shattering their shins with an iron bar or wooden club so they can't lift themselves up any longer to breath and they die a little faster.

Pilate says OK to the procedure and they carry it out on the two thieves Jesus is crucified with, but it turns out Jesus is already dead. You remember, we saw last week, His life didn't slowly drift away, but He intentionally gave up His spirit. It was like He flipped His own switch from the inside. But, to make sure He was really dead, the Roman soldier thrust a spear up into His side, which meant as John points out, that none of His bones were broken.

And John says that is significant. But why?

Well, ironically enough, it has to do with the very same party His death almost got in the way of.

They were preparing to celebrate Passover. Passover was, and is for Jews today, a major holiday celebrating the time that God delivered their forefathers from slavery in Egypt, effectively birthing the nation, but it was also a preview for what God would do one day for the world.

Go all the way back to the beginning with me – God made the world, and the world was perfect. But then Adam and Eve sinned. As we said last week, that meant a law had broken, now there was going to be a penalty. But it was a penalty too great for us to pay. Humanity has broken something we could not fix. But, mercifully, God took it upon Himself to do something - something grand, something that would play out across the course of human history with the death, burial, and resurrection of His own Son as the focal point.

So, in order to set everything in motion, God chose one man – Abraham. He came to Abraham and made a promise – that God was going to use Abraham and his family to be a blessing to the rest of the world. But in order to do that, God was going to have to give him a son and a land to live in. That son was Isaac.

But first, God brought Abraham to a decision point one day – do you remember? He told Abraham, take your son, your only son Isaac, and offer him up to Me. Abraham was backed into a corner, would he trust God? He did. And do you remember how it turned out? Instead of putting Isaac to death, God provided a lamb for the sacrifice. Isaac's life was spared, and the God's great work began, by the blood of a lamb.

So Isaac lived on and had a son of his own. That son was Jacob. Jacob's name was eventually changed to Israel, and he had twelve sons.

They all wound up going down to Egypt one day where their growing clan was eventually enslaved. Some 400 years later God says, "Well, that's enough of that," and raises up a man called Moses to tell the pharaoh, "God says it's time to let the Jews go."

To which Pharaoh replied, "No way, they're a cheap source of slave labor." So God used Moses to deliver ten plagues on Egypt, each one intended to make them give up their stiff-

necked resistance to His demands. They get progressively worse and still pharaoh won't give in. So, the tenth and final plague is the death of the first born of everything in Egypt – in one night, the first born of every herd of cows, every flock of birds, every family – including pharaoh's own son, his next in line for the throne, will die.

BUT, there is a way to escape this tragedy for those who participate in a ritual given by God. Turn with me to the front of your Bible – the first book is Genesis which tells the story of Abraham and his family, the next book is Exodus which picks up with the story of Moses that we've just reviewed.

Exodus 12: 1 Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, 2 “This month *shall be* your beginning of months; it *shall be* the first month of the year to you.

What God is about to do here is so significant, He says, ‘Reset your clocks, Reset your calendar based on this. From here on out, this will be your new year – for the rest of history you will mark your calendars from this event.’”

3 Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: ‘On the tenth of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of *his* father, a lamb for a household.

Men! Take note of this, and take for yourself the Lamb of God, and bring Him to your household, be the spiritual head of the home!

4 And if the household is too small for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next to his house take *it* according to the number of the persons; according to each man's need you shall make your count for the lamb. 5 Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take *it* from the sheep or from the goats. 6 Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight. 7 And they shall take *some* of the blood and put *it* on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it. 8 Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread *and* with bitter *herbs* they shall eat it. 9 Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted in fire—its head with its legs and its entrails. 10 You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire. 11 And thus you shall eat it: *with* a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD's Passover.

12 ‘For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I *am* the LORD. 13 Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you *are*. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy *you* when I strike the land of Egypt.

14 ‘So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance.

So this is supposed to be done the first time in Egypt, but it's also supposed to be done every year throughout history to remember what God did, and to look forward to what He would do next.

Skip with me down to

21 Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Pick out and take lambs for yourselves according to your families, and kill the Passover *lamb*. 22 And you shall take a bunch of hyssop, dip *it* in the blood that *is* in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that *is* in the basin. And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning. 23 For the LORD will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike *you*. 24 And you shall observe this thing as an ordinance for you and your sons forever. 25 It will come to pass when you come to the land which the LORD will give you, just as He promised, that you shall keep this service. 26 And it shall be, when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' 27 that you shall say, 'It *is* the Passover sacrifice of the LORD, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households.' " So the people bowed their heads and worshiped. 28 Then the children of Israel went away and did so; just as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.

And then drop down to verse 46 and we find the last few notes of instruction about the meal:

46 In one house it shall be eaten; you shall not carry any of the flesh outside the house, nor shall you break one of its bones. 47 All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. 48 And when a stranger dwells with you *and wants* to keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it. 49 One law shall be for the native-born and for the stranger who dwells among you."

50 Thus all the children of Israel did; as the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did. 51 And it came to pass, on that very same day, that the LORD brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt according to their armies.

So, the way to avoid the tenth plague was to sacrifice a lamb for your family, a perfect lamb, without spot or blemish – you couldn't just take some sickly thing or some runt, the one you wouldn't miss much – and you had to kill it in your place, and the put the blood over your door post as a sign to those outside that you were trusting in God to receive the blood of the lamb instead your own. Pharaoh and everyone else were doing their thing, but you were trusting God.

And you were supposed to keep doing that every year, as a reminder of what God had done to deliver Israel from slavery to Egypt and to remind you of what God would do one day to save us for all eternity from slavery to sin.

So with all that in mind, do you remember that one of the names for Jesus is, “The Lamb of God?” Does that make a little more sense now?

Remember how John the Baptist, when he had seen Jesus in the very beginning (John 1:29), told everyone, “Behold! The lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” And how many years later, after Jesus’ life, John the Apostle had a vision of Heaven where he saw “a lamb as though it had been slain” standing before the throne of God. Jesus was the fulfillment of the Passover. It was all meant to point us to Him.

Jesus was executed on a hill outside the city, overlooking the Temple where they were busy slaughtering countless lambs for the Passover, which He was fulfilling forever. They had these iron hooks they would hang the animals from to quickly slaughter, bleed, gut and skin them. If you’ve ever seen a deer hung up for dressing you know what I’m talking about. You hang it up by two legs that spread apart so you can get to the abdomen. And here was Jesus also being hung up and spread apart – just as God had ordered. And like a sacrificial lamb He was without blemish, unstained by personal sin, and not one of His bones was broken.

You understand how afterward as they reflected on all this, the lights were just going off for the disciples? They didn’t understand it at the moment, as it was all going on, but in the coming days, it would all begin to make sense and their eyes would grow big and their hearts would race as it began to click.

As you prepare to celebrate another big festive meal this week – as you prepare to celebrate Thanksgiving – I hope your thoughts will turn to the Feast of Passover and you will consider again what all of this means, and maybe share the truth with someone you love.

But as you think, or as you share, remember two important points.

1. It wasn’t the life of the lamb that saved people, it was the death. You can’t just admire the life and teachings of Jesus and not embrace the cross. Jesus was our substitute – He died in our place so the Bible says in **1 Peter 1:18-19** that we were “not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold... 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”

2. The blood had to be applied to *your* door. It wasn't enough that the blood was shed – it had to be received and displayed – you had to identify with it. Remember, God promised, “When I see the blood, I will pass over you.” Are you able to say with confidence that Jesus is not just a savior, not even the savior, but that He is MY savior? Because everyone who takes refuge behind the blood of Christ will be saved as well – not from physical death, but from eternal separation from God.

But let me warn you - it’s possible to know the facts, and not be changed. At this point, even the men who knew Jesus best, who had heard Him most, didn’t fully understand what was going on. You might know a lot of facts about Jesus. You

might have heard a few sermons or sat through a few Sunday School lessons. Maybe you watched some movie or saw some special on TV. But let me ask you this – has it changed you? Does what you know about Jesus affect the way you live? Does it affect the choices you make? Does it affect your dreams and goals? Does it affect the way you respond to things that come your way?

Yes, you know that Jesus lived. You understand that He died on a cross. You understand that the tomb was reported empty. But what does that mean?

Do you understand that there is a direct line drawn between the cross and your life? Do you realize that He was *your* Passover? Have you asked for His blood to be *your* covering? If not, you can do that right now. You just simply pray something like this: “Heavenly Father, I thank you for sending Jesus to be the sacrifice for my sins. I confess that I have been like Pharaoh and the others, living life the way I wanted to and at times ignoring what You have to say. Please forgive me, help me to receive Jesus, and change my life from this moment on. Be my Passover and save me. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

Do that, and you’ll have something to be truly thankful for this week.

Let’s pray.

Next week when we gather we will celebrate communion – remember that Jesus’ death was for us – that He was slain as a sacrifice for us, to deliver us from the grips of sin, and then to launch us out in freedom to live for God.