

They Will Look On the One They Pierced

LORD'S TABLE REFLECTIONS FROM JOHN 19:37

I. CONTEXT

A. John 19:31-37 Exposition

1. The day of preparation was the day before Sabbath (Friday; cf. Mark 15:42).
 - a) Some have found this to be a "discrepancy" within the Canon of Scripture. If Jesus already celebrated the passover with His disciples the night before His crucifixion, how could the day he died be the "preparation of the passover" (John 19:14)?
 - b) It was customary to prepare for the rest of the Sabbath day the day before (Friday). In Scripture, when one refers to the preparation day, he refers to the day before the Sabbath.
 - c) In the case of John 19:14, the Apostle means that this particular preparation day was special because it was a part of the entire Passover week ("for that sabbath day was an high day" v. 31). Hence, why he (and probably every other Jew!) referred to this particular preparation day as "a preparation of the passover" (or, "the preparation which happens to fall during the passover week").
2. The Jews did not want to violate the command to take a person whom they hung down from a tree by nightfall (especially on such a special week like the week of the Passover!) so they appealed to Pilate to speed up the process.
3. The Romans customarily left crucified men to hang on the cross for days. However, sometimes they wished to speed up the process to acquiesce to people such as the Jews. They would break the legs of the malefactors with an iron mallet (a practice referred to as *crucifragium*).¹ The result led to a quicker death by asphyxiation.
4. When the soldiers came to Jesus, they saw that He had already died (v. 33) so they did not break His legs. However, they did pierce his side from which flowed water and blood.
 - a) Why does John include this information so emphatically (for he insists in the very next verse that what He has seen is true and he wrote it so that all who read might believe)?
 - b) The implication seems to be on the humanity of Christ. He was not a phantom (like the ancient heretics *Docetists* suggested). Jesus was a true human.
 - (1) In the early church Christians sought to understand how Jesus could be God and man. They faced opposition from various heretics who wished to downplay or even misrepresent the person and nature of Jesus.
 - (2) Through the convening of various councils the church came to this recognition: Jesus is *vere homo, vere deus* ("truly man, truly God").²
 - c) Furthermore, John wishes to emphasize the death of Christ. Jesus did not swoon; He died, and unmistakably so.

¹ Don Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 622.

² This formula came from the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD.

5. John argues that these things which happened (specifically the Roman soldier's failure to break the bones of Jesus and their act of piercing His side) happened in accordance with the Old Testament Scriptures.

a) Broken Bones (v. 36)

(1) John quotes from Psalm 34:20 which states that the righteous person will not experience physical deliverance ("He keepeth his bones: not one of them is broken").

(2) God instructed Israel to not break the bones of the Passover lambs (Exod. 12:46; Num. 9:12). Jesus, as the Passover Lamb, fulfilled the requirements which the Lord laid out hundreds of years before.

b) Pierced Side (v. 37)

(1) John quotes from Zechariah 12:10. This passage refers to the future time when Israel will "look upon me whom they have pierced." God makes it clear in Zechariah that they ("the house of David" and "the inhabitants of Jerusalem") will one day look upon Him—Yahweh—Whom they pierced.

(2) Notice that John, when quoting Zechariah, changes the wording from "Me" to "Him." In doing so, John highlights what he has been arguing for throughout the entire book of John, viz. Jesus is God.

(3) The fulfillment of Zechariah 12:10 will not be fully realized until the day which Christ returns and "every eye shall see Him...which pierced Him" (Rev. 1:7).

B. Christ the Passover Lamb

II. REFLECTIONS

A. In 1 Corinthians 11:23–34 Paul lays out what we would describe as an apostolic injunction. We are commanded to observe the Lord's Table. This we do with joyful obedience.

B. Why do we observe Communion?

1. We do so because the Lord Himself commanded that we do it ("this do in remembrance of Me").

2. When we "do this in remembrance of [Christ]" we are, in a sense, looking upon the One whom we have pierced. We remember the immense weight of sin which our Lord placed upon Himself on our behalf. In many ways *it was me who pierced Christ* ("He was pierced through for our transgressions" [NASB] Is. 53:5). My sin cost the Lord Jesus Christ His very life.

3. We do so as means of coming together in love for one another. This celebration can happen only because Christ in His death and resurrection made a people for Himself who know no ethnic, sexual, or social boundaries.