

Jesus' Final Days

The Day Jesus Died

John 19:16-42

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Introduction

I am doing a short series by looking at three of Jesus' final days from the perspective of an eye witness, the apostle John. Last night, we looked at the night Jesus served, and tonight I want to look at the day Jesus died. And Sunday we will look at the day Jesus arose. The material for this series comes from a book I recently read by Carl Laferton titled, *Easter Uncut*.¹

Each message contains two sections. First, *what really happened*. We look at what John saw. And second, *why it really matters*. We look at why John believed it was so important for us.

What Really Happened

Let's begin by looking at what really happened the day Jesus died. Let's read John 19:16-42:

¹⁶ So they [that is, the soldiers] took Jesus, ¹⁷ and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. ¹⁸ There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. ¹⁹ Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." ²⁰ Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. ²¹ So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" ²² Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

¹ Carl Laferton, *Easter Uncut* (The Good Book Company, 2016).

²³ When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, ²⁴ so they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be.” This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, “They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.”

So the soldiers did these things, ²⁵ but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” ²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

²⁸ After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), “I thirst.” ²⁹ A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. ³⁰ When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

³¹ 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. ³² So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been 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 at once there came out blood and water. ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken.” ³⁷ And again

another Scripture says, “They will look on him whom they have pierced.”

³⁸ 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. ³⁹ Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. ⁴⁰ So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. 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 because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there. (John 19:16-42)

Why It Really Matters

It is hard for twenty-first century people to comprehend first century crucifixions. Condemned people first received a flogging, which sometimes was enough to kill them. Then they would lie on their backs on the ground and have their hands stretched out on to a cross beam. Nails would be driven through their wrists to attach them to the cross beam. The beam would then be attached to a pole, and raised upright. Nails would be driven through the person's feet. The condemned person would sag and have to push himself up to get a breath. Sometimes it took days for a person to die. But they eventually died, usually of asphyxiation.

Every aspect of a crucifixion was designed for maximum pain. Crosses were raised in public places so that passers-by could see condemned criminals dying. Because crucifixions

were so common, they did not shock people. They were, however, meant to scare people. The Roman government was sending a message to people that crucifixion is what would happen to anyone who opposed Rome.

As people passed by the three men hanging on their crosses, they would not have given it much thought. “I wonder who they are? I wonder what they have done?” they may have thought as they passed by and got on with the rest of their day.

Earlier in the day, the passers-by would have seen a man carrying his cross beam to Golgotha (the site of his execution), the soldiers gambling for his garment, him taking pity on his mother and ensuring that she would be cared for after he was gone, saying a few sentences while hanging on the cross, then dying (surprisingly quickly), and the soldiers breaking the legs of the other two men to hasten their deaths so that all three men could be removed from their crosses before the Sabbath began at sundown.

That was an everyday event.

But, as the apostle John looked closer at Jesus hanging on the middle cross, he realized that this was, in fact, a death like no other death. Jesus’ death was according to a plan. John realized that Jesus’ death “took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled.” John realized that God had given three clues to explain what was going on as Jesus died.

I. Clue #1: The Clothes

The first clue was the clothes.

A millennium earlier, King David wrote a song we now call Psalm 22. In this song, David wrote of a king who had been abandoned by God, of being mocked, rejected, defeated, and yet eventually being victorious. David wrote that at the

moment of abandonment, this king's clothes were being divided among his executors by casting lots for it.

Now, as Jesus hung on the cross, the soldiers were casting lots for his garment. And John realized that David's words were a clue to explain what was going on. Jesus was God's ultimate king, the all-powerful ruler promised throughout the Scriptures, who was in the process of being abandoned by God, but who would ultimately emerge victorious.

The question is: Why? Why was Jesus abandoned by God?

II. Clue #2: The Bones

The second clue was the bones.

A millennium and a half earlier, the people of God were in captivity in Egypt. God saved his people from Egyptian oppression through what became known as "Passover." God said that he would go through the land and kill every firstborn male. The way to escape death was to kill a lamb—without breaking its bones—and paint its blood on the doorposts and lintel of the house. When God saw the blood, he would pass over that house and spare their firstborn male from death.

Jesus was crucified on the Day of the Passover. The Jews asked Pilate that the legs of the crucified men might be broken so that they would die quicker. Then their bodies would not have to remain on the crosses, and they could be buried before the Sabbath began. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first man, and then of the other man who had been crucified with Jesus. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. As John looked at Jesus, who was now dead on the cross, he realized again that these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled:

“Not one of his bones will be broken.” Jesus was like the Passover lamb who died undeservedly so that others might live.

Jesus was the ultimate Passover “lamb” who took the punishment for his people’s sins so that they would not spend eternity in hell.

III. Clue #3: The Piercing

And, the third clue was the piercing.

To make sure that Jesus was already dead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. John realized that yet another Scripture was being fulfilled and he wrote, “They will look on him whom they have pierced.” He was referring to the prophet Zechariah, who wrote centuries earlier, “...when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child....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 12:10; 13:1).

John understood that Jesus was the one who was pierced and who opened up a fountain of blessing to cleanse his people from sin and uncleanness.

Conclusion

The day Jesus died was an incredible day.

Jesus’ death was like none other. Jesus died to save sinners like you and me. Jesus’ death, and the circumstances of his death, were foretold throughout the Old Testament. Let us thank God for Jesus’ death on our behalf. Amen.

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and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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