

John - Part 58 - Sermon Manuscript - From Dark to Light

Thursday - The Last Supper; The final teachings; The prayer; The Garden prayer; The arrest; The unusual and probably illegal trials in the middle of the night

Friday - Jesus goes before the Governor of Judea, Pilate; then to Herod; back to Pilate, flogged and presented to the Jews; Questioned more, Pilate released Barabbas and in exchange, hands Jesus over to be crucified; Jesus flogged again (worse!); Jesus (and Simon) carry the cross down the red stained road; Jesus is crucified; It is finished; Jesus dies.

John 19:31a - Now it was the day of Preparation (Friday), and the next day was to be a special Sabbath (Saturday).

For Jewish people, the day of Preparation is always Friday. That's the day where they prepare for their Sabbath on Saturday. So according to their Jewish laws, whatever work needed to be done, had to be done before sundown on Friday.

But this Sabbath wasn't like most other Sabbath days - it was special because it fell over the Passover Feast, but also happened to be a certain Jewish holy day where they celebrated a certain kind of offering - two Jewish "holidays" falling on the same day.

And because this was a special Sabbath...

John 19:31b - Because the Jewish leaders 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.

Sometimes it would take a couple days for someone to die while they were hanging on a cross. And usually you'd leave criminals on the crosses for a while as a gruesome warning to anyone that opposed Rome.

But the Jewish leaders didn't want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath. This goes back to Deuteronomy and some other passages...

Deuteronomy 21:22-23 - If someone guilty of a capital offense is put to death and their body is exposed on a pole, 23 you must not leave the body hanging on the pole overnight. Be sure to bury it that same day, because anyone who is hung on a pole is under God's curse. You must not desecrate the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.

This isn't talking about crucifixion. Notice that the criminal was to be put to death, and then hung on a pole. It's similar to crucifixion because it sends a clear message to those that can see it.

Note: I remember last year when we went to see Esther at Sight & Sound, one of the things they showed was this pole being raised up in the background by a guy named Haman. He wanted to impale Mordecai on it, but Mordecai helped king Xerxes, so the king had Haman hang on it instead.

Anyway, the reason they didn't want the bodies to hang overnight was because they believed it would desecrate the land that God was giving them.

In Jewish culture, dead bodies were impure - therefore if they were to leave the body up overnight, that would make their land impure.

Fast forward to Jesus being on the cross, the Jewish religious leaders asked that the bodies be taken down because for them to be left up overnight and during their special Sabbath would have been sacrilegious to them.

I find that interesting because they ignored their own Jewish laws just so they could get Jesus up on the cross. Now that He's there, all the sudden they're concerned with breaking their own laws? That's the definition of being a hypocrite.

John 19:32 - The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other.

Notice these guys were still alive.

John 19:33-34 - But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.

The death of Jesus happened pretty quick - but that's because He "gave up His spirit" (v30). He allowed Himself to be put on the cross, and He died on His own terms.

So instead of bashing his legs, one of the soldiers pierced His side. This was a way of testing whether or not Jesus was dead.

We often say that His death on the cross was the ultimate sacrifice that paid for our sins - and that's true! But think about Jewish culture. It's the day before the Sabbath... and on the Sabbath, they would have prepared a lamb for the Passover sacrifice.

But in order for the sacrifice to be legit, the lamb had to be alive - It was supposed to be a *living sacrifice*. In the same way, Jesus was a living sacrifice for us, and when the soldier pierced Jesus, that was proof that His sacrifice was legit.

Because during the time John wrote this, there were people saying that Jesus wasn't actually a human being. They said He only *seemed* to take on human form. And because He wasn't human, He never really died, He only *appeared* to die.¹

But John makes it crystal clear. Jesus was in fact both God and man. And giving his own stamp of affirmation, he says...

John 19:35 - The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe.

¹ Carson, D. A. [*The Gospel according to John*](#). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991. Print. The Pillar New Testament Commentary.

John is talking about himself - He witnessed the death of Jesus. That's important because people were reluctant to believe in Jesus as the Messiah if they thought He didn't actually die. John follows this up by saying...

John 19:36 - These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Now one of his bones will be broken," and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced."

The first quote refers to a few passages in the Old Testament. The second refers to Zechariah 12:10 which says...

Zechariah 12:10 - "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son."

This verse is talking about people who pierced Yahweh God, and afterward they will mourn for Yahweh as they would mourn for their only son.

Imagine John standing at the cross, witnessing all that happened to Jesus. As he's standing there, passages like this are running through his mind. So for John, Zechariah 12:10 was fulfilled at the cross.

Jesus, being Himself God in the flesh, was pierced. He was God the Father's one and only Son... pierced for our sins. And as John stands there with the mother of Jesus, they and any other disciples there mourned bitterly for their Lord.

Sometime later, John says...

John 19:38 - Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away.

Who's Joseph?

This isn't Joseph, Mary's husband. Joseph of Arimathea was one of the Jewish religious leaders. He was a member of the Sanhedrin. These guys were the highest ranking Jewish authorities. Think of them like Jewish judges. There were 72 of them, one of them being the High Priest.

The Sanhedrin were the ones that brought Jesus to Pilate. They were the ones that yelled "Crucify! Crucify! Crucify!"

But it's interesting - Not all 72 of them were on the same page. Here we have Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin, but also was secretly a disciple of Jesus.

Think about that for a moment.

As a member of the Sanhedrin, Joseph attended the trials of Jesus the night before. He was there when his colleagues were demanding that Pilate would have Jesus crucified. He would have witnessed Jesus walking down the red stained road to the cross. And He would have seen Jesus lifted up.

I don't know this for sure, but I wouldn't be surprised if Joseph was one of the last members of the Sanhedrin to leave the place where Jesus was crucified. Maybe someday when we get to the other side of eternity we'll remember to ask him...

So we can only imagine the position that Joseph was in. Clearly he didn't agree with crucifying Jesus (in fact, Luke 23:51 tells us that)...

So should he have spoken up? Maybe? But we can understand why he didn't because verse 38 says that he feared the other Jewish leaders.

But Joseph wasn't the only secret disciple there... check out who was with him...

John 19:39a - He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night.

Nicodemus was also a member of the Sanhedrin! So he was there with Joseph and the others the whole time!

It's interesting that John reminds us that Nicodemus was the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. That happened all the way back in John 3.

I remember saying that it was significant that Nicodemus came to visit Jesus at night. He didn't want anyone else seeing that he was talking with Jesus. At this point, Nicodemus still wasn't sure about Jesus, but he had to see for himself who Jesus really was.

And Jesus must have had quite the impact on him, because in John chapter 7 when the religious leaders are planning to kill Jesus, Nicodemus is the only one who speaks up and basically says, "Shouldn't we give Jesus a fair trial before we condemn Him to death?" The other leaders scoffed at him, and that was that.

Fast forward several chapters and we see Jesus being tried, but these trials were anything but fair. Nicodemus had spoken up once and was shot down - so he and Joseph knew that to speak up now would have been a whole lot more dangerous!

Now, we don't know when they decided to become disciples. And as far as I know, we also don't know if the other disciples knew Joseph and Nicodemus believed in Jesus.

But what I find interesting is the heart change that they went through. John sort of spotlights Nicodemus throughout the gospel, and because of that we can see Nicodemus going from darkness to light.

And so by the time Jesus died, these two had a plan. Joseph was to go to Pilate and ask for the body of Jesus, and Nicodemus would go get what they needed for a proper burial.

If these guys had not done that, Jesus would have been thrown into a pit with the other bodies and burned somewhere outside the city. And I may be reading into this a bit... but it seems that the other religious leaders were okay with that. All they asked was that the bodies would be taken down from the crosses. There's no mention of whether they cared what happened to the bodies or not.

But Joseph and Nicodemus cared. This was their Lord! In their minds, He deserved a proper burial, even if it meant that word got out they believed in Jesus.

They were pretty much the only hope that Jesus would get a proper burial. In fact, scholars agree that the only reason Pilate agreed to speak with Joseph was because of Joseph's status on the Sanhedrin. And the only reason Pilate released the body to Joseph was probably because Pilate still believed Jesus was innocent.

So Joseph is successful, and here's what John says next...

John 19:39b-40 - Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about 75 pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs.

John 19:41-42 - At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. 42 Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Matthew 27 tells us that this was Joseph's tomb. Tombs like this in the first century were for your entire family. Here's one that dates back to the first century...

[Tomb Pictures] (with professors John Soden & Tony Shetter)

[Blank] It's interesting that once Joseph and Nicodemus were done, Matthew tells us that Joseph rolled the stone in front of the entrance and went away. But they weren't the only people there - Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph were there (Mark 15:47).

Most likely both were there mourning for their Lord. And that's where our scene in John ends.

So, as I thought about this passage this week - especially with Nicodemus and his transformation from darkness to light. I couldn't help but think about the night that Nicodemus came and had a private conversation with Jesus.

Look at the last thing Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3...

John 3:14-15 - "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."

While Nicodemus was watching Jesus being lifted up to the cross, I wonder if he remembered these words from Jesus?

I assume he did... Aside from just pure inspiration from the Holy Spirit, how else would John know about the John 3 conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus?

I'm thinking those words from Jesus ... "the Son of Man must be lifted up" ... must have hit Nicodemus like a ton of bricks.

Nicodemus would have understood the Son of Man reference. It's a phrase that equates Jesus with God - All the religious leaders knew that. In fact when Jesus claimed to be the Son of Man in front of the entire Sanhedrin, that's what ultimately put Him on the cross!

So the Son of Man - God - must be lifted up. Why? So that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.

Nicodemus came to believe in Jesus. And as he was watching Jesus, the Son of Man, being lifted up, I'm thinking maybe he realized that Jesus thought of Himself as the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of the world.

And it's that belief in Jesus that motivated Nicodemus to stand out from the religious crowd and serve Jesus. It seems like a little thing...

All he did was help to bury Jesus... but in his world, that was a huge deal. If the other religious leaders found out what Joseph and Nicodemus were up to, at the

very least they would have been kicked out of the Sanhedrin... and maybe worse?

So that makes me think:

What are we willing to do for Jesus? Are we willing to stand out from the crowd and serve Jesus no matter what other people say?

That might be an easy yes for all of us... but wait a minute...

I was talking with Chad Frey (relative of Paula & Randy) in our latest BIC Life Podcast (which comes out tomorrow btw). We were talking about what it looks like to love our neighbor.

And Chad brought up this experiment that was done at a Christian college... (explain)

The point: Those that didn't help all said that they didn't because they were too busy.

And so, I do think the biggest roadblock of serving Jesus is our own busyness. We don't necessarily fear for our jobs, our social standing, and our lives like Joseph and Nicodemus would have. But we are busy.

I'm guilty of this too! We're all busy! The question is...

Are we busy with the things that matter?

In other words, what impact for Jesus are we having with the people around us? Do the people around us know that we're followers of Jesus? Or are we sort of followers in 'secret'? Is there a certain level of fear that we have with going "all in" for Jesus?

And if people know we're Christians... Is it because they know we go to church? Or would they say they know we believe in Jesus because of our love for God and our neighbors?

The Gospel of Mark says that Joseph of Marimathea went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body (Mark 15:43). May we have the same spirit that lives up to our own Mission and Vision here at Refton which is...

Connecting people to Jesus by being bold in prayer, quick to care, and eager to share the live saving message of Jesus.

Let's Pray