
Day 1

Learn: Prayerfully read John 19.30-37. Roman custom was to leave the crucified person on the cross to die slowly over several days, and then to leave the body on the cross as a warning to others, especially for those found guilty of rebellion [which was the accusation the Jewish religious leaders had made against Jesus]. Read Deuteronomy 21.22-23 to see the Jewish custom for immediate burial; by Jesus' day, those crucified were considered the same as those hung on a tree. The "day of preparation" was Friday before dusk, when the Sabbath would begin. Jews were especially sensitive to having everything proper before the Sabbath began; and this Sabbath was even more important, coming during the important weeklong celebration of Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread.

Crucifixion hurt, but the worst of it was not the nails and ropes holding you up, nor even just the discomfort of the position for hours or days, it was the difficulty breathing. The crucified person needed to raise himself up to take breath, so breaking his legs [with a heavy iron mallet] pretty well prevented breathing, thus hastening death. The soldiers did break the legs of the other two men hanging on crosses to either side of Jesus, but Jesus was already dead, so they did not break his legs. As we have seen in the gospel of John, Jesus was the ultimate sacrificial Passover lamb; read 1 Peter 1.18-19; 1 Corinthians 5.7. The Passover meal commemorated God delivering the Jews from physical death by the blood of a lamb during the Exodus, all of which symbolized how God would deliver people from physical and spiritual death by the blood of Christ, who was executed at the same time as the Passover lambs in Jerusalem that year. Read Exodus 12.43-47 for the symbolism about not breaking the bones.

Reflect: It is not pleasant, but take a few moments to reflect on what Jesus went through as part of this process. While doing ministry for a few years, he was scorned [even by family] and persecuted; he gave up everything we hold dear in worldly life to minister to people and to model for us a life of selflessness and humility; he was unjustly accused, prosecuted, insulted, mocked, beaten, whipped, tortured further, nailed to a cross where he had to struggle to breathe, and ultimately killed; and that still was not the worst of it! In his death, he somehow paid the penalty for our sin, at that moment God the Father heaped on him all our guilt and all our punishment! Being the divine Son of God, he *could* do this for us; but think of how much it must have *hurt*! Reflect now on how much love that shows, how much Jesus must love *you* to go through all this for *you*!

Day 2

Learn: Prayerfully read John 19.30-37. Seeing that Jesus appeared to be dead, the soldier stabbed him with a lance to be sure. There are medical opinions about how blood and water could have come out of the wound. One is that the lance pierced the heart such that blood mixed with the fluid from the pericardial sac to produce this flow. Another is that Jesus' severe injuries prior to the stabbing caused his chest to fill with up to two liters of hemorrhagic fluid between the pleura lining the rib cage and the lining of the lung, this liquid then naturally separated into a deep red layer on the bottom and a clearer serum at the top, and then both layers flowed out when Jesus was pierced.

More importantly, we have to ask why John provided this detail. One reason might be to provide a historical detail as evidence that Jesus really died on the cross. When John wrote, already a heretical theology was circulating, that Jesus only appeared to be human and that Jesus only appeared to die on the cross. John throughout his gospel testified that Jesus was fully human, and died a human death on the cross; in both Jewish and Greek culture at the time, people thought of the body as consisting largely of blood and water. Since John loves symbolism, it is tempting to look for some here. Scholar D.A. Carson suggests the blood and water signify both life and the cleansing that flows from Jesus' death, that the blood is the basis for eternal life of the believer [6.53-54] and the water represents cleansing, life, and the Holy Spirit [3.5; 4.14; 7.38-39]. John said the piercing of Jesus also fulfilled prophecy. He was referring to Zechariah 12.10; read Zechariah 12.1-13.9. These are end-times events, but they relate to the crucifixion of Jesus [both the Passover lamb and the Good Shepherd who represents God by laying down his life for the flock (John 10.11)] and his return to conquer God's enemies and restore Israel as his kingdom.

Reflect: Both Gentile [Roman] and Jewish leaders brought about the death of Jesus. Zechariah says in the end all will look on Christ, the one they have pierced, and lament or mourn. Some look "upon" Jesus today and believe,

others scoff; in the end some will mourn that their sins brought about his death so they could have life, while others will mourn in despair that they have no life. Take some time today to speak aloud [or write down] a statement about your faith in Jesus, about who he is [all that you can remember learning in this gospel!] and what he offers you through his crucifixion and resurrection. Then pray confession of your sins, allow yourself to lament and mourn [!] at the feet of Jesus, because your sins as much as anyone's brought about the need for his unjust suffering and death. Then pray thanks for his love, grace, mercy, and deliverance of you to eternal life and freedom! Rejoice!

Day 3

Learn: Prayerfully read John 19.35; 20.30-31; 21.20-25. The apostle John says he witnessed the crucifixion and is testifying truthfully about it in this gospel. Why is he testifying? [Write your answer before going on...] John wants you to be able to believe that Jesus is the Christ – the promised Messiah-savior from Jewish prophecy – and for you to be able to believe that Jesus is the divine Son of God, all of which includes believing in what he accomplished on the cross. John wants you to believe these things, because if you believe, really believe, in Jesus as your personal savior, as the divine Son who came as a man to pay your penalty for sin on the cross and thus offer you spiritual life, forgiveness, and reconciliation with God, then you will have those blessings!

Reflect: Why do you think God *gives* us salvation – *paid for it* through Jesus – instead of *making us earn it*? Why do you think God is willing to bless us with grace and mercy, instead of punishing us like we deserve? Are you thankful? How can you show that thankfulness in the ways you worship and how you live?

Day 4

Learn: Prayerfully read John 19.38-40. Joseph was a wealthy member of the Sanhedrin ruling council [Matthew 27.57; Mark 15.43; Luke 23.50]. Joseph used his influence to gain access to Pilate and take Jesus' body away. Normally, criminals were buried in a special place outside the city, for fear that their guilt and execution would desecrate the graves of their families. The Roman pound was about twelve ounces by the US standard, so these two men brought about seventy-five pounds of myrrh and aloes. These powerful and wealthy men would have had servants to help carry this mixture, take the body down from the cross, and prepare the body for burial. Myrrh was a fragrant resin, which the Jews used in powder form. For burial, Jews mixed the myrrh with quick-drying juice of aloe plants, and covered the body in it, wrapped tightly in linen cloths, to stifle the smells of decay.

Nicodemus also was a member of the Sanhedrin [John 3.1]. No doubt the decision of Joseph and Nicodemus to honor the body of Jesus made them stand out as pariahs in their social circles! They now would be hated and persecuted by the other Jewish religious leaders, shunned by polite society. They likely lost their friends, social position, maybe even some of their family, and put their lives at risk during the coming persecution of believers. Joseph had been afraid to admit his faith before, but now he chose to stand with Jesus, even though Jesus had just been killed! Nicodemus had previously come at night – representing his own interest in secrecy and symbolizing the spiritual darkness in which he dwelled due to his incomplete faith – but now he chose to identify himself with the body of Christ in the glaring spotlight of the crucifixion event! This is real faith!

Reflect: Are you openly identified with Christ in public, such as at your job and in your neighborhood? Are you intimidated or embarrassed at all about being known as a believer, a follower of Christ? Does the story of these two men have any impact on your emotions or thoughts about this? Do you know others who try to be secretive about their faith? Do you know people who are open about their faith but not offensive? What can you learn from them?

Day 5

Learn/reflect: Prayerfully read John 19.38-42. Many assume this was Joseph's tomb, but scripture never says that [a non-scriptural writing does]; though if it did not belong to either of these men, they certainly were presumptuous to put an executed prisoner into it! It was convenient that the tomb was close to the cross, since dusk [and thus the Sabbath] was approaching. No body had yet lain in the tomb when they put Jesus there. Not too long later, he would rise from the dead and leave the tomb!

Reflect: Reflect on the many details God organized for his plan and on the significance of the resurrection. Take time to worship Jesus in some way today.