

That You May Believe in the Cross Part 4

John 19:23-42

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, November 25, 2018

Well, good morning everyone. I invite you to turn in your Bibles to the Gospel of John this morning. So, if you want to open up your Bibles, if you're not already there, turn to the Gospel of John.

And as you're doing that, John is the fourth book in the New Testament. It's the fourth Gospel or story about the life of Jesus Christ. As many of you know, the Bible is divided up into two sections, two Testaments; the Old and the New. And the Old Testament tells us the story about Israel, God's people under the Old Covenant. And the New Testament tells us about the church, God's people under the New Covenant. And it starts off by talking about Jesus. And it gives us a story of Christ from four different authors; Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. John being the last of them ... (And he's last in order because he's last in time) ... John was the last one to write his account of the life of Jesus Christ.

We've got several testimonies that have come down to us from the early church telling us that after the other Gospel writers had written their accounts of Jesus, John gave us his. So, for example, Clement of Alexandria writing about a century or so after the Gospel of John says this. He says, "But John, last of all the Gospel writers, conscious that the outward facts had been set forth in the other books was urged on by his disciples to compose a spiritual Gospel." So, Clement says that John gave us a spiritual Gospel. He wrote a different type of book because he had seen the other books and he wanted to present something unique.

Origen says about writing at the same time of Clement. He says there were four books, four Gospel accounts; Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. And he says, they go in that order. The reason they're like this in your Bibles is because that's how they were written. Matthew came first, Mark came second, Luke, and then John came last. And since he came last (some say several decades after the others) he didn't want to repeat anything.

In fact, some of you have read through the Gospels and you know John is just a different kind of book, right? 90% of the material in the Gospel of John is found nowhere else in the Bible. 90% of it. That means nine out of every ten verses are totally original to John. The Gospels give us 35 miracles that Jesus performed, 35 signs and wonders. Eight of them are found only in John. The turning of water into wine, the raising of Lazarus from the dead - those types of things are only found in this book. Same thing goes for his teaching ministry. The Upper Room Discourse, the seven "I am" statements of Jesus ("I am the bread of life", "I am the light of the world"). That's only found here. John gives us the long prologue at the start of the book. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God." He tells us about the conversation with Nicodemus, and we could go on and on.

But all of this is to say that the Gospel of John is very unique in the pages of Scripture. It's one of a kind. And we're coming to the end of it here in the next couple of weeks. We're bringing it to a close, which is sad for me because I have a personal connection to the Gospel of John. It was the

first book I ever preached through. When I started preaching verse by verse through the Bible, I started in the Gospel of John. And in two years' time, I made it through eight chapters. So, I've sped up a little bit in my old age. I'm realizing if I keep going like that, I'm never going to get through many books in the Bible.

But it's a special book to me. I know it's a special book to you, because John is the Gospel of belief. That's why John is a special book because it was written so that you may believe. I've read this to you before, but John actually says at the end of the book in chapter 20:30-31, he tells you why he wrote. He says, "Therefore many other signs Jesus performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name." John says, "That's why I wrote. That's why this book is in the Bible, so that you may believe and be saved."

And the one thing John wants you to believe more than anything else is the cross. We sang about that some this morning. The one thing he wants you to trust in above all else is the death of Jesus Christ.

Just to introduce this a little bit (because this is the theme of our passage this morning) I told you last week it's hard to explain how repulsive the cross was to a first century audience. It's hard to describe how ugly it was, because it's not ugly to us anymore. I'm not going to ask you to raise your hand, but I'm guessing none of you have ever seen anybody die on a cross, right? It just doesn't happen anymore. So, this is something that's kind of removed from our world. As a matter of fact, today, it's a work of art. We draw paintings about the cross and sing songs about it. Some of you have cross jewelry, which is fine. But nobody had cross jewelry in the first century. That was totally foreign to the ancient world.

I did some study on this this week to see how this change came about. But early on, shortly after Jesus died, Christians started making the sign of the cross on their foreheads. You guys have seen certain sects of Christians do this. They would do the thing where, you know, they would make the mark. They would do that when they knelt down to pray or reading their Bible. They actually started drawing crosses on their door post to identify who was a Christian and who is not. And they put it on their tombstones. We do that all the time today, but that was brand new in the first couple of centuries, to bury someone under the sign of the cross.

In the Middle Ages, after Constantine outlawed crucifixion in the fourth century, banned it from the empire, they started using the cross as a good luck charm. So, monks would carve little wooden crosses and sprinkle holy water on them so people could ward off evil spirits and silence barking dogs. I don't know if any of you have tried that with your neighbors, but I'm not monk. So, don't come ask me to give you a little wooden cross for that. But they would use it for that sort of thing.

They started collecting relics or splinters from the cross for people to see, and they would put the splinters under glass in churches. They'd put it under a glass display and charge fees to get into. And during the crusades (this is ironic), people fought under the banner of the cross. They

captured Jerusalem shouting, “God wills it” and holding up a large golden cross that went ahead of the armies.

It got to the point over time where one scholar said it this way, he said, “It wasn't long before the whole world was full of crosses.” Everywhere you look - north, south, east, and west, there was a cross. And it got to the point that it became familiar to us. It became commonplace to the point that we don't even remember how terrible this was. We don't even remember how repulsive the cross was.

One author said it this way, he said, “Jesus was not crucified in the church between two candles, He was crucified on a cross between two thieves, and it was very, very ugly.” Which is why we need to talk about it this morning because we need to remember what this was like for the people who saw it for the first time. And to do this, we're going to look in John chapter 19. So, if you want to turn over there with me, that's our passage for this morning. It was read to you a moment ago; John chapter 19. If you look down in verses 16 through 18, it says this, it says,

So Pilate then handed Jesus over to them to be crucified. They took Jesus, therefore, and He went out, bearing His own cross, to a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha. And there they crucified Him.

Now, I said a few words about this passage last week, so I don't want to repeat anything here, other than to say that after arresting Jesus and putting Him on trial and scourging Him or flogging Him, John says that they crucified Him. If you notice in this passage, that phrase is repeated twice for emphasis. Once in verse 16 and again down in verse 18. “But they made Him bear His own cross to the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha, and then they crucified Him.”

Now, again, we read that and we don't think twice about it, because a lot of us have grown up in churches and we've heard this story our whole lives. But that would have sent a chill down the spine of the first century audience. It would have been horrific to talk about crucifying a man.

According to the Greek historian, Herodotus, crucifixion was invented by the Persians in the sixth century BC to punish their enemies. Then it was picked up by Alexander the Great, and then it was perfected by the Romans. He actually used that phrase, “Crucifixion was perfected by the Romans.” They made it as horrible as it could be. Rome was a very sophisticated culture. They had a wonderful law. They had wonderful arts and entertainment, and they had horrific forms of torture.

I quoted this source to you last week, but Alexander Metherell was a research scientist for the University of California, who wrote extensively on the subject of flogging and crucifixion; all the things Jesus experienced here. He has a medical degree from the University of Florida. So, he has an interesting perspective on this. And he says this about crucifixion. He says,

The victim would have carried the horizontal bar of the cross to the place of execution. Once there, he would have been laid down on the ground and nailed to it. The vertical beam called the “patibulum” would have been permanently set in the ground. The

Romans used spikes that were five to seven inches long and tapered to a sharp point. They were driven through the wrists, about an inch or two below the palm. This was a solid position that would lock the hand. If the nails had been driven through the palms, His weight would have caused the skin to tear and he would have fallen off the cross. It's important to understand that the nail would go through the place where the median nerve runs. This is the largest nerve going out to the hand and it would be crushed by the nail that was pounded into it. Do you know the pain you feel when you hit your funny bone? That's another nerve called the ulnar nerve. It's very painful when you hit it. Well, imagine taking a pair of pliers and squeezing that nerve until it was crushed. That's the kind of pain you would experience on the cross.

And I want to go on here and quote him at length, because it's important to understand what this was like. He says,

The pain was unbearable. At this point, Jesus was hoisted as the crossbar was attached to the vertical steak and then nails were driven through His feet. And again, the nerves in His feet would have been crushed, causing a similar type of pain.

I don't know if you guys have ever heard the idea that Jesus resuscitated and walked away from the tomb. That's ridiculous. He'd be paralyzed for life. Even if they took Him down off the cross and He was still alive, He would never use His legs again. He says,

The arms would have immediately been stretched probably six inches in length and both shoulders would probably become dislocated. And once a person is hanging in that position, crucifixion is essentially a slow death by suffocation. So, the reason is that the stress is on the muscles and diaphragm put the chest into the inhaled position and basically in order to exhale, the individual must push up on His feet.

In doing so, the nail would tear through the foot, locking up against the tarsal bones, and you would have to rub against that bone over and over and over again to stay alive. After managing to exhale, the person would then be able to relax down and take another breath in. Again, he would have to push himself up again to exhale, scraping his back against the cross, and this would go on and on until complete exhaustion would take over and the person would suffocate.

I don't read all of that to you to be grotesque, but just to point out how horrible this was. I told you last week that they actually had to invent a new word to describe it; the word *ex crucio*, it means "out of the cross". Some of you have experienced excruciating pain before. That's where this word comes from. The crucifixion was so horrific that the Romans had to invent a new word to describe it. Every movement hurt because of the nails and the angle that you were at. Every gesture was agonizing, and there are accounts of people hanging on the cross for days, even a week or more in certain circumstances.

The question you have to ask is why? Why would Jesus do this? What was the point? And the point was to pay for our sin. To pay for our sins against God.

The story is told of a little boy who went to church and he asked his father, he said, “Daddy, who killed Jesus?” And his dad said, “Well, people did son. They crucified Him.” And the little boy's eyes got real big and he looked around the church and he said, “These people?” And the answer is yes, your sins and my sins nailed Him to the cross.

Another question I'd like to answer this morning is, what was this like for the people who first saw it? We talk about crucifixion from a 2,000-year perspective looking back, but what was it like to the people who were there for the first time? And to answer this, I'd like to talk about three responses to the cross from the people who were actually there. So, if you're taking notes this morning, that's our outline; three responses to the cross from the people who were actually there.

At this point in the Gospel, Jesus has been betrayed and arrested and put on trial. He's been scourged and forced to wear a crown of thorns and a purple robe. And now, it's time to execute Him. And as John describes this, he talks about the response of the people who were there. Matthew, Mark and Luke talk a lot about the cross itself. They tell you details as to what the crucifixion was like. John knew that, he didn't want to repeat anything. And so, he talks about the people who were looking on. That's what he focuses on.

Here's the first group that he describes, and that is Jesus' enemies. This the first group to respond to the cross. Jesus' enemies or the soldiers who were crucifying Him. In order to crucify a man in the first century, you had to have soldiers. You had to have professionals who were hired to kill. You couldn't do it yourself, this was a job for some very, very tough people. If you look in verses 23 through 25, these are some of the first eye witnesses that John tells us about. It says verse 23,

23 Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His outer garments and made four parts, a part to every soldier and also the tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece. 24 And so they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, to decide whose it shall be”; this was to fulfill the Scripture: “They divided My outer garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.” 25 Therefore the soldiers did these things.

Just a few comments on this, if you remember, chapter 18 says that Judas brought a cohort of Roman soldiers with him to arrest Jesus. If you remember, that term “cohort” refers to 600 soldiers, 600 armed men. And verse 23 here, says, “Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His outer garments and made four parts.” Implying there were only four soldiers at the cross. So, the numbers have gone from a detachment of 600 down to four. Once they got Him hoisted up there, there wasn't much to do. They wouldn't need a lot of them. Luke 23:47 says there was a centurion there or a commander of a hundred soldiers. So, there might've been more looking on. But at the cross itself, sitting around, there were only four men. And what were they doing? Well, John says they were dividing up His clothes.

It was the custom at the time to crucify a person naked. This was a death of humiliation. It was a death of total shame. And because clothing was expensive back then, the part of your payment for killing a person was you got their clothes. You can talk about a gory business. So, they would

have taken the clothes from the men being crucified beside Jesus, and they took the Lord's clothes as well and divided them up.

Verse 23 says they divided up some of His clothes, His outer garment into four pieces, but they couldn't do it with His inner garment because it was seamless, woven in one piece. The tunic was seamless, woven in one piece. Josephus says, the high priest garments were like this. They were seamless. It could be a reference to that. Or this could mean that Jesus had tough, sturdy inner garments. He had a nice inner garment to wear. And to avoid tearing it, it says they cast lots for it.

A “lot” was a piece of wood or bone that had some markings on it that you could gamble with. In other words, while He's dying and gasping for breath, while He's rubbing His back up against the cross in a painful, horrible way, they're gambling, they're rolling dice. Verse 24 says that God had a higher purpose in this, it fulfilled Scripture, Psalm 22:18. But the point here that John is making (and this is the first response to all this), they didn't care. They absolutely didn't care that He was dying on a cross. Matthew says they sat there. They didn't even stand up, because this was just another death for them. This was just another victim. They crucified man after man after man, and this is just another execution.

I wonder if there's any of you who feel that way today about this. Jesus is just another death to you. This is a sad story, but that's all it is – it's just a story. This is gruesome and bloody and brutal, but that's it. It's nothing more. You hear this talk about the cross and you say, “That's nice. I'm sorry about that, but when do we get to eat lunch? I've heard this stuff before. I've gone through Bible studies. When did we start Soup Sunday?” I don't know if you guys know what the word “apathetic” means, but it means “you have no pathos, you have no emotion”.

Churches are full of people with no emotion anymore. Would you agree with that? They have no feeling. You talk to them about sports and they feel something. You just mention the word “Canucks”, and they get a tear in their eye, right? Because they're having a tough season or they're having a good season this year? Well, I'm so out of this. I'm working on it guys. I can pronounce it correctly now – Canucks. You talk to them about politics and they feel something. You talk to them about their job, their family, their dog or their cat, and they feel something. You talk to them about Christ and you get nothing. You talk to them about the cross and you get nothing. That is called “apathetic”, you have no feeling at all.

The reason I bring this up, because that puts you in the same place as these soldiers. If you think about it, you would have to have a hard heart to gamble while crucifying a man. Amen? It doesn't matter who he was. You would have to be a cold individual. And that's what these guys were. They had seen so many crucifixions that it meant nothing to them anymore. And I'm afraid maybe some of you have heard so many sermons about this that it means nothing to you anymore. You're like the old woman who says she came to church because it was a great place to get some rest. Or like the old man or the young man who took his new wife to church because he said it helped her out. He didn't need it, but she needed it. Listen, I'm not saying this to embarrass anybody or to put you on the spot, I'm just saying it to warn you. The book of Revelation says ... let me read this to you, Revelation 3:15-16 says, “If you are lukewarm ...” God is speaking to a church here. So, He's speaking to a group of Christians. He says, “I know

your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. So because you are lukewarm, neither cold nor hot, I will spit you out of My mouth.” That’s the only time in the Bible where God (at least to my knowledge) says, “You make me want to vomit.” And it’s said in relation to people that don’t care anymore. You don’t want to be that way this morning.

Let me say it this way, if you don’t care anymore, you’re not neutral, you’re an enemy of God. These soldiers were enemies. They were not His friend because they didn’t care.

That leads to the next response to the cross that we see from the people who were actually there, the next set of eye witnesses. And that is the response of Jesus’ friends. So, we see the response of His enemies in verses 23 through 25; these soldiers who just sat around and gambled, cast lots. It doesn’t say what else they were doing, but you can imagine it was probably pretty debaucherous. I mean, not only do you have to be hardhearted to crucify a man, but you’ve got to be ... what’s the word? Almost insane. But after describing that, John goes on to give us the response of Jesus’ friends. His friends were not like that. They had a very different response. John puts these both together to make a contrast.

If you look in verse 25, it says, “Therefore the soldiers did these things. But ...” If you notice, it starts off with the word “but” there. That’s a contrast. “But standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.”

Before telling you who these people are, it probably helps to say there are four women and one man standing by the cross here, Jesus’ friends. There were times in the Lord’s ministry when He had thousands of people following Him. If you remember in John 6, it says that Jesus fed the 5,000. But I told you if they were going to the Passover and bringing their wives with them, it says they were 5,000 men, that could have been 15 or 20,000 people. So, He’s had thousands of people following Him at times. Now, He has four; four standing by the cross. I’m sorry, four women and one man - so five standing by the cross. And the reason for this is Jesus is being executed. He’s being put to death for a capital offense and you don’t want to be next to someone in that situation because the authorities may tie you to Him. You may end up on a cross.

So, this was a very brave thing to do. They put their necks on the lines here. And it says Jesus’ mother was there. So, Mary is there watching her Son die like this. It also says His mother’s sister was there. These towns (Nazareth, places like that) were very small, small communities. So, there were a lot of family connections in this group. Matthew and Mark say this was Salome, the mother of John. So, John’s mother is standing there along with Jesus, mother, Mary. Jesus and John were cousins. “Along” it says “with Mary, the wife of Clopas.” Clopas is another way of saying Alphaeus. If you remember, there was a disciple by the name of James, the son of Alphaeus. This is this guy’s mother. So, you have three mothers standing there at the cross. Three mothers, we might add, of grown sons. Women in the twilight of life at a time when most people stay at home and take it easy, and here they are at the cross. These are just some very brave women. It also says there was Mary Magdalene there. We don’t know a lot about her. This is the woman who Jesus cast seven demons out of. Some suggests that she was a younger lady at this time, could be, I’m not sure either way. And then verse 26 mentions “The disciple whom Jesus loved.” That’s another way of saying John.

John's account of the crucifixion is maybe the most interesting because he was actually there. Matthew, Mark and Luke weren't there. If you remember, Matthew ran away. Mark and Luke got the perspectives of other disciples. They weren't there. John was there. When everyone else left, he stayed. Putting this together, if you look in verses 25 through 27, it says,

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 then 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!" From that hour the disciple took her into his own household.

At this point, we don't know what's going on with Joseph, Jesus' father. But many suggest that he was dead at this time, passed away. And Jesus is dying on the cross, and so, Mary is about to be left destitute. Jesus had some brothers, but they don't believe in Him at this point. They rejected Him. We don't know where they are. So, to take care of her, Jesus turns to the only person He has left. By the way, it says a lot about the Lord, that He's caring about Mary while He's dying on a cross, amen? He turns to the only one still left, the Apostle John, and He says, "Woman, behold, your son!"

Now, I'm hoping most of our men in this room don't refer to their wives or mothers as "woman". I don't recommend that. It's not a derogatory term here. It comes off that way in the English. In the original, it just means "ma'am" or "miss". It's a term of politeness. He's saying this to say, "Mary, I'm giving you over to this son now to take care of you." And it says, "From that hour, the disciple took her into his own household."

But the point as you read this encounter, is simply that these people cared, didn't they? They cared what was happening to Him. The soldiers were apathetic, they didn't care. Their reaction (His friends' reaction) were very different. If you notice, verse 25 says they were standing by the cross. While the soldiers were sitting, they were standing. You can see the contrast there. While the soldiers did nothing, they tried to help.

A crucified person would typically hang three feet off the ground. Their feet would be somewhere around here. Which means that if you were standing, you could reach out and touch them. If you were close by, you could do something to help. At least, Jesus knew they were there. Standing is in the continuous tense in Greek, it's ongoing. It means that while all this was happening, while He was dying, while He was suffering, they were standing through the whole thing. Which also means that whatever He went through, they went through to a lesser degree.

I didn't mention this earlier, but a crucifixion was kind of a group activity. And what I mean by that, is people would often throw things at a crucified person. They would throw rocks or filth or dead animals. They would taunt them. It was a whole mockery involved in this. Matthew 27:42 says the Jews said, "He saved others; but He cannot save Himself. Let Him come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him." That's just a mockery, and these people would have heard the whole thing and felt it. They would've felt helpless, they couldn't stop it. But the point is, when they said they believed in Jesus, they meant it. When they said they would follow Him, they followed Him until the end.

I don't know if you read this account and do this, but I read this account and wonder would I have been standing here, right? I mean, would I have done this?

It's been said that there are three types of believers in the church; true believers, unbelievers, and make believers. And these people weren't make believing anything. I mean, they were the real deal.

It's also been said that a hypocrite is a Christian until it costs them something. And these people were Christians when it cost them something. And may we all be that way this morning.

A communist once wrote to a Christian (wrote a letter to him) and he said, "We communists have a high casualty rate. We're the ones who get shot at and hung and lynched and worse." He said, "But there's one thing in my life which I'm dead earnest about, and that is communism. It's my life, my business, my religion, my sweetheart, my wife and my bread. I've already been in jail for my beliefs and I don't mind going again. But you, what have you ever done for yours?" I think that's a fair question, isn't it? What have you done for your beliefs? What have you done for Christ? Let me say it this way because this is important. You don't get your sins paid for if you're not willing to do this. You don't get the forgiveness and the benefits of the cross if you don't stand by the cross. They go together. The disciples that left came back again and that's how they were saved. Judas left and he never came back and he went to hell. You stand by the cross. In Luke 9:23, Jesus gives us a very sobering reminder of this. If you just want to write that verse in your notes, Luke 9:23. Jesus says, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his ..." what? "... cross, daily." He goes on and He says, "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it." Jesus said that, "The only way to follow Me, is to take up your cross. The only way to keep your life, is to lose it for My sake." Charles Spurgeon said it this way, he said, "There are no crown bearers in heaven who were not cross bearers on earth." If you want a crown in heaven, you need to take up a cross here on earth. Steve Lawson said, "Being a follower of Christ will cost you something, but not following Christ will cost you more." And this is the picture that we have of this. These people got that. They understood and they stayed by Him on the cross.

Which leads to a final response to all of this. Kind of a sobering passage, isn't it? It's a very serious thing to talk about a man dying. Just to review this, we've seen the response of the soldiers or Jesus' enemies, and they didn't care about Him. They simply gambled and cast lots for His clothes. And then we see the response of His friends. You got four women and one man. It says a lot about the courage of women. By the way, women were the first ones to the empty tomb as well. And one reason we know that that account is true, and one reason we know that this account is true, is because in the first century, nobody would have trusted the testimony of a woman. So, there's no reason to make that story up if it didn't happen. Women were not allowed to testify in court in the first century. They were not allowed to testify in their own defense if something happened to them. And so, to say there were four women standing here and then women were the first ones to the tomb, shows that it really did happen. And it also speaks to the courage of these ladies. Three mothers, one of them watching her Son die, and the Apostle John and Mary Magdalene.

It leads to a final response to the crucifixion here, the final eyewitness. And this one is ... well, they're all interesting. I often tell you something is interesting just because in that moment, it's interesting. It's all interesting to me, I guess. But the response of Jesus' undertakers. That's the last eye witnesses: the response of Jesus' undertakers. John closes this out by telling us about the men who buried Him.

Now, we're going to say more about some of this next week, and I won't read it just for the sake of time. But in verses 28 through 30 it tells us that after saying, "I am thirsty" and "it is finished," Jesus dies. That's how this gruesome ordeal comes to an end. By the way, this is the last time the Son of God would ever suffer. Amen? This is the last time Jesus Christ would be put down in any way whatsoever. He'll have nail prints in His hands (in His resurrected body) but the suffering is over in verse 30. It says that He bowed His head and He gave up His spirit. Jesus would actually say seven things from the cross, seven final words. And what I want to do next week is walk you through these so you can see what that moment of death was like or what was on His mind in His final moments. So, we'll talk about that next week. But if you notice, there's nothing despairing in this statement. That phrase "it is finished!" in verse 30, has an exclamation mark at the end of it to show you that He shouted this out. He screamed it at the top of His lungs. It doesn't sound like a defeated man, does it? I don't know if you've ever been with someone when they die, they don't typically shout. This is the call of victory: victory over sin, victory over death, victory over grave, victory over hell. That's how Jesus dies. He gave up His spirit.

To make sure that that's actually what happened, Pilate tells the soldiers to break His legs. You can read about that in verses 31 through 35. But the Sabbath was coming up ... it says in verse 31 – yeah, mentions the Sabbath there. You're not supposed to do any work on the Sabbath. You weren't supposed to be crucifying a man on Passover by the way. That's not supposed to be happening. They killed Him on Friday, the Sabbath is on Saturday. So, to speed it up, what they would often do to speed up a crucifixion is they would break the person's legs. Because that would keep them from breathing. If you shattered their shin or their knee bones, they couldn't reach up and take in air.

So, Pilate tells the soldiers to do that. They do it to the criminals on both sides of Him. And when they come to Jesus, verse 33 says that they saw He was already dead, due to all the pain He had experienced, due to all the horrific beating, all the events of the whole night before the flogging ... I didn't tell you this last week, but one author, Cicero, said that flogging was an intermediate death. In other words, it was like a death before death. Because of all of that, He already died. And to make sure of that, verse 34 says that one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. It's a very important thing to make sure the person on the cross was dead. There're some accounts that say things to the effect that if a Roman soldier didn't really kill a man, it could be his life or his.

So, he pierced His side with a spear to make sure - blood and water flowed out. There's been some discussion as to what that's referring to. Some say it's a reference to the ordinances, to the Lord's Supper and baptism. I don't really know if that's the case. Others refer it to salvation, a picture of salvation. I did ask some of the doctors in our church about this and they told me that when someone dies (and if you have questions, I'll ask the doctors to raise their hands and you

guys can go ask them), I think I got this right, but when someone dies, their blood can clot up in the heart and separate into chambers allowing other things like serum to creep into the heart, or maybe even water or a watery type substance. So, there could be a physical explanation to this. When they pierced His heart at an upward angle, it could have gone through His heart, maybe His lungs. Blood and water could have literally flowed out. That seems to be what John's saying.

But the point here is that Jesus was dead. And that's why you get all the detail here. He was really and truthfully dead. Even though they didn't break His legs, even though they didn't crush them, they didn't have to because He was already gone. And to prove it even more, John goes on to tell us how they buried Him. You don't bury a man who is still alive. Amen? I mean, that's just common sense. If you look in verses 38 through 42, this is the account of His burial. It says,

38 After these things Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate granted him permission. So he came and took away His body. 39 Nicodemus, who had first come to Him by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight. (Some of your translations say 75 pounds, so it's somewhere in that vicinity.) 40 So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen wrappings 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 Therefore because of the Jewish day of preparation, since the new tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Now, let me just walk you through some of this. This is a very interesting account. Joseph of Arimathea is not mentioned before this in the Gospel of John, but the other Gospels tell us he was a member of the Sanhedrin, the group who crucified Jesus. You can talk about a conflict of interest. Talk about an awkward place to be. He sat in on the trial where Jesus was pronounced guilty by the Jews. Nicodemus did as well. He was also a member of the Sanhedrin and he was here.

Nicodemus is the guy, if you remember, he came to Jesus at night and Jesus said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” And apparently, that had an impact on him. Apparently, here he is, years later doing this. And it says, the two men took Jesus' body, and verse 41 says they put it in a new tomb.

The interesting thing about that is that crucified people were typically thrown into a mass grave. Or in Jerusalem, they would have been burned in the Valley of Gehenna. The two men crucified next to Jesus would have been tossed out like trash and forgotten. Nobody would've thought twice about them. And Jesus is buried like this. Because they were cut into rock, new tombs were extraordinarily rare and extraordinarily expensive.

Verse 39 also says that Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight. If you remember in John 12, Mary poured a whole jar of perfume on Jesus' head. Do you remember that story? Mary, the sister of Lazarus. (There's a lot of Marys in the Bible because the word “Mary” comes from the Hebrew, *Miriam*. She was Moses' sister, so they were all called Mary. A lot of them were.) And when she poured that jar of perfume on Jesus' head,

Judas said, “Why was this perfume not sold for 300 Denarii?” That story sounding familiar? I told you that 300 Denarii was about a year's worth of wages. It's about \$60,000 in our modern economy. And I can assure you that Mary did not dump a hundred pounds worth of perfume on Jesus' head. We don't know how much it weighed, but she picked the whole thing up and broke it - 15 pounds at the most, 20 pounds; \$60,000. And here, we read that they put a hundred pounds worth of spices on His body. They would have put that into the linen cloths that would wrap Him up in, to keep the stench away.

But this was a burial fit for a king. They nailed Him on a cross in the most revolting way possible and they buried Him like a king, because that's how they looked at Jesus. They looked at Him as their King. These two members of the Sanhedrin, these two members of the ruling council, they treated Him like royalty. No gift was too great for the Saviour. No sacrifice was too much. In a sense, you could say they worshiped Him. They worshiped him.

We can look at the way other people responded to Jesus. There are lots of accounts of this around the cross. There was the centurion in the Gospel of Luke who said, “Surely this man was the Son of God.” He made an amazing statement. And then you read that he did nothing. He did nothing. The Gospel of Matthew tells us about the crowd who saw all of this, and they beat their breast and they wept, and they mourned, and they did nothing. But the question I want to ask you this morning is this, which one of these groups are you? What is your response to the cross this morning? Are you like the soldiers who say, “It's no big deal. I don't care. When do we get to eat lunch?” Or are you like His friends who stayed with Him till the end? Even though it costs them everything, even though it would have put them in a very difficult spot? Are you like the centurion who said those wonderful things and did nothing? Or are you like these men, Joseph and Nicodemus, who treated Him like a king? What's your response to Jesus this morning? How do you look at the cross of our Lord? I can't think of a bigger question to ask you this morning. I can't think of anything more important. The answer to that question will get you into heaven or hell. It will determine your place in eternity. How you respond to this event.

In his book, “The Cross of Christ”, John Stott says that one of the oldest surviving pictures of a cross comes from a painting on a house in Rome, dating back to the second century about a hundred years after Jesus. Somebody drew it on the wall as a piece of graffiti. So, one of the oldest pictures we have of the cross is a piece of graffiti. It was actually a joke someone made. Because on the painting, you see the body of a man being crucified with the head of a donkey, the head of a farm animal. And underneath it is a man with his arms stretched out in worship and the words *Alexamenos sebete theon* under it, which means makes “Alexamenos worships his God”. Because the idea of worshipping a crucified man was so stupid to the Romans. It was so ridiculous that they compared it to worshipping a donkey. They said it was like worshipping a farm animal.

But I want to tell you something my friends this morning, that is what we do, isn't it? We worship a crucified man. Amen? As a matter of fact, let me say it this way, we worship a risen Man. You go into some churches and you see pictures of Jesus hanging on the cross, that's fine. That's how we're saved. But I want to tell you something, He didn't stay up there. Three days later, He rose again. And that's the Man that we worship this morning. We treat Him as our King because He died for us. We treat Him as our Lord because He paid for all our sins. As the song

says, it says, "I owed a debt I could not pay. He paid a debt He did not owe." Do you believe that this morning? Has He paid for your debts? Will you worship Him? Let's close in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank you for this Saviour - this amazing, amazing Saviour. And we thank you that men like the author, the Apostle John was so bold to put all this detail about what He did for us. We're so far removed from this. If we didn't have the detail, we wouldn't know what a crucifixion was like, and yet your servant John spelled it out for us. And just as importantly, he told us what the people thought about it, who were first there.

And Lord, I pray this morning as my friends here have heard this and have considered this passage, if there's any here who are not responding in worship, responding in sacrifice, that You would draw them to repentance. You would open up their hearts to the good news of what Christ has done, and You would save them this morning.

If there are ones who are here, Lord, who have already done that, I know we have so many who are trusting in the cross. Father, I just pray this time would be an encouragement to them as they reflect back on their salvation.

Father, thank you for saving any of us. Thank you for paying for any of our sins and our debts on the cross. And Lord, as we go out today, as we celebrate a time of fellowship, as we interact with lost people this week, maybe we draw them to the cross. May we tell them about our Saviour and about the one who died for our sins. We pray this all in His name, for His glory, in Jesus name, amen.