



Title: Christ's Crucifixion Part 3

Text: John 19:31-42

Date: April 10, 2022

Main Idea: Jesus' fulfillment of the scriptures is recorded that you and I might believe.

Personal Study Guide

READ ENTIRE TEXT: JOHN 19:31-42

Highlight – What stands out?

1. What stood out to you as you read this text?
2. Who are the main characters?
3. What are the scenes and setting of this text?
4. Are there any repeated words or phrases in this text? What about words or phrases repeated before in the Gospel of John?
5. Look at verse 35. Write down what it says.

Explain – What does this mean?

This text is divided into two scenes, with the main purpose statement in verse 35. Let's look at the first scene:

Look at verses 31-37:

1. What is the Day of Preparation? Why was it important that the bodies not remain on the cross? (Look up Deuteronomy 21:23). How is this ironic that they are concerned with obeying the law here?
2. Verse 35 says that John wrote these things for what reason? What does this remind you of in John?
3. John focuses on Jesus fulfilling the scriptures in verses 36-37. Look up Exodus 12:46, Numbers 9:12, and 1 Corinthians 5:7. What is John communicating about Jesus?
4. Look up Zechariah 12:10 and Revelation 1:7. What is John communicating about Jesus here?

Look at verses 38-42:

1. How does this scene speak to verse 35?

2. There are two characters here. Let's look at the first one. Look up these corresponding verses about Joseph of Arimathea (Matthew 27:57-61; Luke 23:50-56; Mark 15:42-47). What does this tell you about him and how verse 35 is fulfilled in his life?

3. Let's look at Nicodemus. Look up John 3:1-21 and 7:50-52. What has happened in his life throughout the Gospel of John?

Apply – How does this change me?

1. Look at verse 41. Where have you seen a garden mentioned before in the scriptures? What happened in that garden? Considering all we've learned about Jesus in the Gospel of John (and in recent weeks) how does this verse speak about what Jesus came to do?

2. What do you think the mood is here in this scene? How does what you have learned in John give you hope beyond what your eyes see here?

Respond – What’s my next step?

1. It is tempting to rush beyond the crucifixion all the way to the resurrection, but John forces us to slow down and sit with the sadness. Is there a hard thing in your life that you’re tempted to rush past even though you know you need to deal with the sadness? How does what you’ve learned about Jesus this week give you hope in the hard?

2. Is there a person in your life or a conversation you need to have to point people to this “true testimony” about Jesus? Spend some time praying for them.

Commentary

Taken from *The Gospel According to John* by D.A. Carson

8. The piercing of Jesus’ side (19:31–37)

19:31. If *paraskeuē* (‘Preparation’) here refers to the same day as does its use in v. 14, and the reasoning in the notes on that verse are correct, then this sentence tells us that Jesus was crucified on Friday, the day before (*i.e.* the (‘Preparation’ of) the Sabbath. The next day, Sabbath (=Saturday), would by Jewish reckoning begin at sundown Friday evening. It was a *special Sabbath*, not only because it fell during the Passover Feast, but because the second paschal day, in this case falling on the Sabbath, was devoted to the very important sheaf offering (Lv. 23:11; *cf.* SB 2. 582).¹

The normal Roman practice was to leave crucified men and women on the cross until they died—and this could take days—and then leave their rotting bodies hanging there to be devoured by vultures. If there were some reason to hasten their deaths, the soldiers would smash the legs of the victim with an iron mallet (a practice called, in Latin, *crurifragium*). Quite apart from the shock and additional loss of blood, this step prevented the victim from pushing with

his legs to keep his chest cavity open. Strength in the arms was soon insufficient, and asphyxia followed.

By contrast, the Mosaic law insisted that anyone hanged on a gibbet (usually after execution) should not remain there overnight (Dt. 21:22, 23). Such a person was under God's curse, and to leave him exposed would be to 'desecrate the land'. Presumably this would be viewed as doubly offensive if the day on which the desecration took place was a 'special Sabbath'. So *the Jews* (clearly here a reference to the Jewish authorities; *cf.* notes on 1:19) *asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down*. They may also have been hoping that this further mutilation would in the eyes of the people make Jesus appear to be plainly accursed and abandoned by God.

19:32–33. Apparently the soldiers began by working from either side; John has already explained that Jesus was crucified between the two others (v. 18). They found Jesus already dead—an unusually speedy death that may well have been hastened by double floggings (*cf.* notes on vv. 1, 16a)—and therefore *did not break his legs*. The Scriptural significance of this is unpacked in v. 36.

19:34. Instead of breaking Jesus' legs, one soldier *pierced Jesus' side with a spear*. The verb *enyxen* ('pierced') could in itself suggest nothing more than a 'stab' to see if Jesus was alive, but the rest of the verse shows that there was significant penetration: the wound brought a sudden flow of blood and water. Medical experts disagree on what was pierced. The two most common theories are these: (a) The spear pierced Jesus' heart, and the blood from the heart mingled with the fluid from the pericardial sac to produce the 'flow of blood and water'. (b) By contrast, it has been argued that fluid from the pericardial sac could not so readily escape from the body by such a wound; it would fill up the chest cavity, filling the space around the lung and then oozing into the lung itself through the wound the spear made. In tests performed on cadavers, it has been shown that where a chest has been severely injured but without penetration, hemorrhagic fluid, up to two litres of it, gathers between the pleura lining the rib cage and the lining of the lung. This separates, the clearer serum at the top, the deep red layer at the bottom. If the chest cavity were then pierced at the bottom, both layers would flow out.³

However the medical experts work this out, there can be little doubt that the Evangelist is emphasizing Jesus' death, his death as a man, his death beyond any shadow of doubt (*cf.* Richter, *Studien*, p. 125; Bernard, 2. 647; Bultmann, p. 678 n. 1; Beasley-Murray, pp. 356–357). This is of importance to him, as the next verse makes clear; it is the counterpoint to the Prologue: 'The Word *became flesh*' (1:14). Already by the time this Gospel was written, there were docetic influences at work—influences that became much worse by the time the Epistles of John were written (*cf.* 1 Jn. 2:22; 4:1–4; 5:6–9). The docetists denied that the Christ was truly a man, Jesus; he only *seemed* (*dokeō*, 'it seems') to take on human form. And by the same token, he never really died; it only *appeared* to be so. John will have none of it: blood and water flowed from

Jesus' side, and in many strands of both Jewish and hellenistic thought at the time, the human body consists of blood and water.

Granted that this is the primary reason why John records the flow of blood and water, it must be asked if John intends some further symbolism. The most common suggestion, from Chrysostom on, has been that the water represents baptism and the blood represents the Lord's table. In this view, Jesus' death sanctions these rites and empowers them. The plausibility of this symbolism turns in part on how John 3:1–21 and 6:25–71 are read. But even if one were to find a more enthusiastic sacramentalism in those passages than is defended in this commentary, a sacramental reading of the flow of water from Jesus' side still faces problems. Nowhere in Scripture does 'blood' by itself signal holy communion. Even if this blood from Jesus' side is linked to the blood of Jesus that is the true drink (6:55), it is exceedingly difficult to make the analogous connection between water from Jesus' side and baptism. For this reason Richter (*Studien*, p. 139) rightly rules out such symbolism at even the second or third levels of overtone.

If there is a secondary level of symbolism in the verse, the comments of Dodd (*IFG*, p. 428) and Schnackenburg (3. 294) are most suggestive. The flow of blood and water from Jesus' side may be a 'sign' of the life and cleansing that flow from Jesus' death. The blood of Jesus Christ, *i.e.* his sacrificial and redemptive death, is the basis of eternal life in the believer (6:53–54), and purifies us from every sin (1 Jn. 1:7), while water is symbolic of cleansing (Jn. 3:5), life (4:14) and the Spirit (7:38, 39). All of these incomparable blessings are conditioned by the death of the Lamb of God; they 'flow' from the 'lifting up' of the Son. In the combination of this verse and the theme 'Near the cross' (v. 25) lies the inspiration for the first verse of the hymn by Fanny J. Crosby (1820–1915):

*Jesus, keep me near the cross:
There a precious fountain,
Free to all, a healing stream,
Flows from Calv'ry's mountain.*

It is also possible, but not certain, that the Evangelist is alluding to Exodus 17, esp. v. 6: 'Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink.' John has already used water to refer to the Holy Spirit, and has apparently alluded to the two water-from-the-rock episodes (Ex. 17; Nu. 20) as mediated by Nehemiah 9 (*cf.* notes on 7:37–39). The long-suffering Yahweh, himself the Rock of his people (e.g. Pss. 18:31; 46, 95:1), discloses himself in his Word, his Self-Expression, who becomes a man (1:1, 14) and is stricken for his people, that they may receive the promised Spirit (*cf.* Burge, pp. 93–95, 133–135). So the church sings:

*Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood,*

*From Thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanse me from its guilt and power.*

Augustus M. Toplady (1740–78)

19:35. The importance of v. 34 is emphasized by the inclusion of v. 35: there was nothing less than eyewitness testimony to Jesus' death, to the flow of blood and water, to his escape from *crurifragium*. Just as John the Baptist saw and testified that Jesus is the Son of God (the verbs first come together in 1:34), so also did the witness see and testify what has been described in v. 34; *and his testimony is true*. It is generally inferred, probably rightly, that this witness is the beloved disciple (vv. 25–27), responsible for the Fourth Gospel as a whole: 'This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down' (21:24). In fact, the issue is compounded by several other variables, including what is meant by the demonstrative pronoun *ekeinos* in the second half of the verse: 'He knows that he tells the truth'. The principal possibilities are the following:

(1) The pronoun *ekeinos* (NIV 'He') refers to Christ (e.g. 3:5, 16) or to God (e.g. 1:33; 5:19; 8:42): that is, none less than the Son or the Father attests the veracity of the witness (*i.e.* 'God knows that the witness tells the truth'). This is exceedingly artificial when we bear in mind that the Fourth Gospel, while it uses *ekeinos* to refer to Deity, uses the same pronoun to refer to others (e.g. John the Baptist, 5:35; Moses, 5:46; Peter, 18:17, 25; and, most importantly in this context, the beloved disciple, 13:25; 21:7, 23). The context must decide.

(2) The pronoun *ekeinos* (NIV 'He') refers to the Evangelist, but the eyewitness is someone else. In this view, the eyewitness communicated the information regarding what he saw to the Evangelist, not *as* the Evangelist. Speculation has ranged far as to who this particular eyewitness could be, the most recent proposal being the soldier who pierced Jesus' side. This still makes for rough reading: 'He knows [*i.e.* I the Evangelist know] that he [*i.e.* the eyewitness] tells the truth.' This view is often made to depend on the assumption that the beloved disciple was no longer present at the cross when the flow of blood and water took place, since by this time he had taken Jesus' mother Mary home (v. 27). This reads too much into v. 27. There is nothing to suggest that the beloved disciple took Mary home *that instant*, *i.e.* before Jesus had died. Indeed, *From that time on* (v. 27) might more literally be rendered 'From that hour [*hōra*] on'—and 'hour' is so consistently a pregnant term in John referring to the entire death/exaltation of the Son (*cf.* notes on 2:4; 12:23) that it is easy to suppose that Mary and the beloved disciple left only after Jesus had died. Thus, there is no justification from v. 27 for the supposition that the beloved disciple was absent at the effusion of blood and water. In short, this second view is without adequate contextual defence.

(3) By the pronoun *ekeinos* (NIV 'He') the eyewitness refers to himself. This is certainly the easiest way to untangle the pronouns; *ekeinos* then resumes the

referent in the preceding clause, 'and *his* testimony is true'. Certainly *ekeinos* can be used by an author about himself (cf. Jos., *Bel.* iii. 202; Bernard, 2. 649). In this case, the most likely person is the beloved disciple himself—not only because he is in the vicinity (v. 27) but also because this verse bears formal similarity to 21:24 where the beloved disciple is contextually identified.

The issue has become more complex in recent discussion because a growing number of commentators have suggested that this verse was written by the same editorial hand, different from the beloved disciple and probably from the Evangelist, that composed 21:24. Certainty is impossible, but this theory appears unnecessarily cumbersome, a means for inserting various 'layers' between the beloved disciple and the readers that does not seem warranted. In 21:24, there is an apparent distinction made between the 'we' who attest the veracity of the witness of the beloved disciple, and the beloved disciple himself. The demands of publication may well have encouraged such public attestation (cf. notes on 21:24, and Introduction, § IV). But that distinction is precisely what the most natural reading of 19:35 does *not* support. Here the witness and the Evangelist are one, and the most compelling assumption, as we have seen, is that he is also the beloved disciple. This last connection becomes yet more likely when we recall the critical announcement in the Prologue, often overlooked in this discussion: *we have seen his glory*. In the theology of the Fourth Gospel, the glory of the Son is nowhere more brilliantly displayed to a fallen world than in the shame and suffering of the cross (cf. notes on 1:14). For the Evangelist not to have been present at the supreme display of the Son's glory would be a betrayal of the anticipation called forth by the Prologue. The theme of eyewitness testimony thus links not only 1:14 and 21:24, but 19:35 as well, especially since this is the hour for the Son of Man to be glorified (12:23).

Whoever the witness may be, his purpose is plain: *that you also may believe* (cf. notes on 20:30–31, where not only the same thought occurs, but the same textual variant, *pisteuēte* [present subjunctive] or *pisteusēte* [aorist subjunctive]). The benefits that flow from the death of the Son are appropriated by faith, and the witness of the Evangelist is given to foster such saving faith.

19:36. The events of vv. 31–33 happened in order to fulfil two passages from the Bible (vv. 36–37; cf. Freed, pp. 108–116). Negatively, the fact that Jesus was spared the *crurifragium* fulfills one Scripture: *Not one of his bones will be broken*. The wording does not coincide precisely with any one Old Testament passage, but three texts are possible.

(1) Two are related. The source of the quotation may be Exodus 12:46 or Numbers 9:12, both of which specify that no bone of the Passover lamb may be broken. Certainly these chapters in John are laced with the Passover motif—indeed, the same could be said for much of the Fourth Gospel, even if we dissent from those who argue that in John Jesus dies at the time the Passover

lamb is being killed in the temple complex. Elsewhere in the New Testament Jesus is portrayed as the Passover lamb slain for his people (1 Cor. 5:7; 1 Pet. 1:19).

(2) Alternatively, Psalm 34:20 describes God's care for the righteous man: 'he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken'. In the context of this Psalm, this is a metaphorical way of declaring God's care over the righteous. If this is the text being applied to Jesus, the Evangelist is telling us that the fact Jesus was spared the *crurifragium* is a symbolic way of declaring that God's providential care over his righteous, suffering Servant never wavered—a kind of Johannine equivalent to the witness recorded in Luke 23:47: 'Surely this was a righteous man.'

If one must choose between the two options, the former is preferable because it turns more immediately on a literal sense (granted the Passover typology!), the same literal sense with which 19:32–33, 36 must be read. Lindars (p. 590) thinks both typologies were in the Evangelist's mind.

19:37. Positively, the fact that Jesus' side was pierced fulfills Zechariah 12:10. In the context of the prophecy, God speaks after the defeat of the Gentile nations who have laid siege to Jerusalem at the end-time, and says, 'And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. *They shall look on me, on him whom they have pierced* [so, rightly, NEB, reflecting the strange mix of pronouns in the Hebrew MT], and mourn for him as one mourns for an only child ...' The interplay between *on me* and *on him* has prompted many commentators, probably rightly, to understand that God is 'pierced' when his representative, the Shepherd ('Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered', Zc. 13:7; cf. 11:4, 8–9, 15–17), is pierced. What is less clear is the reason why the people mourn, but it appears that their tears have less to do with desperation and despair than with contrition and repentance for their past sins when God mercifully comes and rescues them from their enemies (cf. also Zc. 13:1–2). When Zechariah 12:10 is quoted in Matthew 24:30 (cf. also Rev. 1:7) with reference to the parousia, the argument appears to be *a fortiori* (cf. Carson, *Matt*, p. 505): just as the Jews in Zechariah 12 wept in contrition and repentance when they saw the one whom they pierced, *how much more* will the nations of the earth mourn at the parousia when they see the exalted and returning Christ coming in glory, the Christ whose followers they have been persecuting, the Christ whom they pierced since it was their sins that sent him to the cross?

As John cites the text, however, the focus is on the piercing, now literally fulfilled in the spear-thrust of the soldier: that is the point of the introductory *and, as another Scripture says*. John does not explore *when* 'They will look on the one they have pierced'. If John has in mind a referent for *They*, he does not tell us; yet as at the cross both executioners and disciples saw the wound but in time perceived quite different significance in that wound, so also both in this world and at its end men and women are confronted by the one whom they have pierced and perceive very different things. One day, however, all will look on him and mourn, whether in deep contrition or grim despair.

But if there is uncertainty in the referent of *They*, and debate as to when all will see the one they have pierced, there is little doubt about John's Christological purpose. John's first readers, familiar with their Bibles, would remember the references in Zechariah to God's promised shepherd, and remember that Jesus said, 'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep' (10:11). They might also remember that the next chapter of Zechariah begins with the words, 'On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.' And it would be hard for them not to reflect on the flow of blood and water from Jesus' side, the promise of the Spirit (7:37–39) and the cleansing and life that issue from these new covenant promises (3:3, 5).

9. The burial of Jesus (19:38–42)

19:38. Joseph of Arimathea appears in all four Gospels, and only in connection with the burial of Jesus. The Synoptists tell us he was a member of the Sanhedrin (Mk. 15:43 par.), that he was rich (Mt. 27:57), and that he was looking for the kingdom of God (Mk. 15:43; Lk. 23:51). Matthew (27:57) and John refer to him as a disciple of Jesus; John alone adds, *but secretly because he feared the Jews*. Normally this would condemn him in John's eyes (12:42–43), but Joseph exculpates himself by the courageous action he now undertakes.

Almost as if his previous faintheartedness was shamed by the crisis of the cross, Joseph *asked Pilate for the body of Jesus*. Under Roman law, the bodies of executed criminals were normally handed over to their next of kin, but not so in the case of those crucified for sedition. They were left to the vultures, the culminating indignity and shame. The Jews never refused to bury any executed criminal, but instead of allowing the bodies of such sinners to be placed in family tombs, where they might desecrate those already buried, they provided a burial site for criminals just outside the city (*cf. Jos., Ant. v. 44*). Doubtless the request of the authorities that the bodies be taken down (v. 31) assumed that they be buried in this common grave. As a member of the Sanhedrin, however, Joseph used his rank to gain access to Pilate, and thus stood out from his fellow councillors. Joseph would have known that, if Jesus' brothers were present in Jerusalem, they would not have dared to approach Pilate even if they wanted to, and in any case they would have been refused. Joseph's act doubtless made him a pariah in some quarters of the Sanhedrin; it was doubly courageous since the charge under which Jesus had been executed was sedition. That Pilate acceded to the request probably reflects the governor's conviction that Jesus was not really guilty, and may have been a final snub against the Jewish authorities.

19:39. Only John mentions the part Nicodemus played. Nicodemus was most likely himself a member of the Sanhedrin (*cf. notes on 3:1*), and the Evangelist takes pains to call to mind one of his previous appearances in the

Fourth Gospel—he is *the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night* (3:1–15; cf. 7:50–52). If *at night* (3:2) there has the moral overtones suggested by the context of ch. 3 (cf. esp. 3:19–21), John may be telling us that by this action Nicodemus shows he is stepping out of the darkness and emerging into the light.

The mixture of spices brought by Nicodemus, one hundred *litrai* (cf. notes on 12:3), was a little less than the *seventy-five pounds* specified by the NIV—65.45 pounds, to be more precise (hence NEB's 'more than half a hundredweight', where a hundredweight is 112 pounds avoirdupois). Mention of so large an amount is neither an error nor an exaggeration (despite Lagrange, p. 503; Dodd, *HTFG*, p. 139 n. 2). Five hundred servants bearing spices participated in the funeral procession of Herod the Great (Jos., *Ant.* xvii. 199). In the fifth decade of the first century, Onkelos burned about eighty pounds of spices at the funeral of Gamaliel the elder (SB 2. 584; cf. also 2 Ch. 16:14). The implication in the present narrative is that two wealthy men used their servants to carry the spices, help take Jesus' body down from the cross, and then prepare him for burial. At a guess, Joseph saw to the legal steps while Nicodemus secured the spices.

As used by Egyptians in embalming, myrrh was a fragrant resin. The Jews turned it into powdered form, and mixed it with aloes, a powder of aromatic sandalwood. The mixture provided a pleasant fragrance in a variety of circumstances (e.g. Ps. 45:8; Pr. 7:17; Song 4:14). Used in connection with burial, its purpose was not to embalm (since the Jews did not remove internal organs and fill the space with spices, as the Egyptians did) but to stifle the smell of putrefaction.

19:40. The spices were apparently laid the length of the *strips of linen* (*othonia*), which were then wound around Jesus' body. More spices were laid under the body, and perhaps packed around it (cf. Robinson, *John*, p. 283). Some have objected that John's use of *othonia* (NIV 'strips of linen'), a word found only in John (cf. 20:5, 6, 7) and in a variant in Luke 24:12, generates an inevitable conflict with Mark 15:46 par., which states that Joseph wrapped Jesus' body in a *sindōn*. But a *sindōn* can refer either to a single piece of cloth, or to the material used (hence NIV's suitably ambiguous 'some linen cloth', Mk. 15:46). Conversely, some suggest that the plural *othonia* can be a plural of category, thus referring to only one object, or a plural of extension, reflecting the size of the piece, and Brown (2. 942) goes so far as to argue that the Jews never used strips of cloth like those used to wrap Egyptian mummies. There appears to be insufficient evidence to reach a firm decision.⁴⁷

19:41–42. Only John tells us that at the place (*topos*, as in vv. 17, 20) where Jesus was crucified *there was a garden and a new tomb* (almost certainly an artificial cave). We are not told in the canonical Gospels that the garden and its tomb belonged to Joseph of Arimathea (although that is asserted in the apocryphal *Gospel of Peter* 24). Sabbath was almost upon them (on 'Preparation' cf. notes on vv. 14, 31), sundown on Friday evening, when all work

would have to cease, and so the nearness of the tomb was a great help (*since the tomb was near by, they laid Jesus there*). John emphasizes not only that the tomb was new, but that *no-one had ever been laid* in it. From the perspective of the Jewish authorities, this was doubtless less offensive than burying a crucified sinner in an occupied tomb (*cf.* notes on v. 38); but the Evangelist's concern is unlikely to have been to mollify their scruples. More likely his purpose is to prepare for ch. 20: if on the third day the tomb was empty, only one body had disappeared, and only one person could have been resurrected. The word for 'garden' (*kēpos*) suggests something substantial, an orchard or a plantation (*cf.* 18:1), and this prepares the way for mention of a gardener (20:15).

The site is almost certainly not the 'garden tomb' to which tourists are directed (though that is the sort of appearance the genuine tomb doubtless had in the first century), but the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. In the fourth century the Emperor Constantine tore down the temple of Venus erected there by Hadrian after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 135, and built in its stead the Church of the Resurrection, now replaced by the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (which goes back to Crusading times).

John does not mention that Joseph rolled a stone across the tomb's mouth, or that Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus saw where Jesus was laid (Mk. 15:46–47 par.), but both details are assumed by the opening verses of the next chapter.¹

¹ Carson, D. A. (1991). *The Gospel according to John* (pp. 608–631). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.