



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

John 19: 31-42

Summer 2023

"Water, Blood, and Burial"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and good morning to all of you. Those Scripture verses you read, it's interesting, I've got them in my lesson this morning—which wasn't planned or coordinated with anyone! Our text this morning is John chapter 19, verses 31 through 42—so we will conclude the 19th chapter this morning. If you were here last week, you'll remember the last verse that we covered, verse 30, is "And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit."

So now we come to the burial of our Lord. And you might not think that a burial would be all that involved and all that significant—but it is very significant as we will find as we read through this text. In fact, as I was reading over it and considering the lesson I thought, 'There's a lot of detail in here, and hopefully we don't get lost in all the detail, —we don't lose 'the forest for the trees.'

But it's a very significant passage that you would not expect, I think, from such a simple act as burial. But all of the events that lead up to that are contained here; and as we'll see in a moment, John considered them very, very significant. So, we read in verse 31,

<sup>31</sup>Then the Jews, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and *that* they might be taken away. <sup>32</sup>So the soldiers

came, and broke the legs of the first man and of the other who was crucified with Him; <sup>33</sup> but coming to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. <sup>34</sup> But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. <sup>35</sup> And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe. <sup>36</sup> For these things came to pass to fulfill the Scripture, "Not a bone of Him shall be broken." <sup>37</sup> And again another Scripture says, "They shall look on Him whom they pierced."

<sup>38</sup> 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 permission. So he came and took away His body. <sup>39</sup> Nicodemus, who had first come to Him by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds *weight*. <sup>40</sup> So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. <sup>41</sup> 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. <sup>42</sup> Therefore because of the Jewish day of preparation, since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

John 19: 31-42

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study in it together. Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, what a privilege it is to be together with Your people on a Sunday morning, on this LORD's day and to be able to open our Bibles, and do so freely, and read a text of Scripture like this, and then consider its meaning and its application to us. And so, LORD, this is a text with much detail, and much involved in terms of prophecy and theology—and in terms of the meaning of Your Son's death. We pray that You would teach us that, and teach us the great blessings that follow from it. So we look to You to bless us.

And we thank You, that, as Your people, as believers in Jesus Christ, we all have the third Person of the Trinity dwelling within us: Our hearts are sealed with the Holy Spirit, who protects us, and who guides us, and who illuminates the text for us and teaches us. And we pray for His teaching ministry, that we would be given insight, light, and that we would be enabled to understand the application to us and be encouraged by it. Build us up on the faith, LORD.

And we pray that not only for us in this auditorium, but for Your people throughout this city, where Your church meets, and the Word of God is taught. Bless Your people here, throughout this nation, and throughout the world. And I think, especially at this time, for the church in Cuba where the saints are suffering—spiritually and materially. Bless them Father, this morning as they preach Your Word—and give them strength.

Bless all Your people, wherever they are, LORD. We are built up in the faith, and we are made strong through Your Word. And so we pray it will have its good effect upon us, now. And we thank You, LORD, for that salvation that's in Your Son. May we magnify Him in all that we do this morning. We pray this in His name, Amen.

*(Message)* You've heard the expression, 'whistling past the graveyard.' It means, 'Acting calm when actually afraid.' Apparently its origin is an old Scottish poem titled, *The Grave*, about a schoolboy walking past a churchyard at night, who whistles to distract his fear—because graveyards, to a lot of people, are scary.

And there's reason for that. The Bible gives a graphic picture of the grave in Isaiah 5, verse 14, where the prophet writes that "Sheol", (the grave), "has enlarged its throat and opened its mouth without measure", swallowing up souls. We're all destined for that. We're all destined for the grave, "For you are dust", the LORD told Adam, "And to dust you shall return." (Gen 3:19). That is solemn. That's serious.

But for the Christian, it's not reason to fear. Christ, the Savior, has gone before us. He has entered the grave, and He's robbed it of its power and terror. That's the subject of our passage, the Lord's burial, and it's an important subject in the Bible.

In 1 Corinthians 15, the classic chapter on the resurrection, the apostle Paul reminded the Corinthians of what he preached to them when he first came to Corinth, and what was, as he puts it, "of first importance." He told them that He, "...that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. .." (vs3). The Lord's burial was one of those details that was "of first importance."

The early church understood that, and mentioned it in the Apostle's Creed, (not written by the apostles, but the oldest creed). It states that Christ, "...suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell. On the third day He rose again from the dead..."

John describes the Lord's burial here in John 19, verses 31 through 42—and he described it in some detail. It was on Friday, when these things happened; the 'Day of Preparation', meaning the day that the Jews prepared for the Sabbath—and that had the authorities worried.

According to Jewish reckoning, the Sabbath began at sundown on Friday evening. This was a special Sabbath; John called it a "high day", (vs31), because it fell during the Passover week. And for that reason, the Jewish leaders wanted the bodies taken down from their crosses. According to the Mosaic Law in Deuteronomy chapter 21, 'A criminal who was hanged on a tree was cursed and was to be removed and buried before sundown; otherwise, the land would be defiled.' (vs23). The Roman practice was to leave the crucified person on a cross until he died, (and that could take days for it to occur), and then leave the corpse hanging as a warning.

But if they needed to hurry the deaths, they had a procedure: The soldiers would take an iron mallet and smash the victims legs. If the shock didn't kill them, then the

inability to get leverage and breath would. So, for the sake of the Sabbath, the authorities asked Pilate to speed up the deaths of these crucified men.

Pilate granted their request, and the soldiers went about their grim task of breaking the legs of the man on Jesus' right, and then the legs of the man on His left. But when they came to Christ, they found he was already dead. So John wrote, "...they did not break His legs." (vs33).

Instead, one of the soldiers took his spear and thrust it into Jesus' side, (evidently to make sure that He was dead), and John wrote that, "immediately blood and water came out." (vs34). None of this meant anything to the soldier—but it meant a great deal to John and made a deep impression on him. He made mention of witnessing it: "And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true..." (vs35).

This was a very important thing in John's mind, and he wanted people to know this. It impressed him greatly; and it's impressed others over the centuries. More recently, it's impressed physicians who have given various explanations for how this would have happened—how this outflow of blood and water would have occurred: Most common is that the spear pierced the heart; and blood from it mixed with fluid in the pericardial sack, (the membrane that contains the heart), so that both fluids flowed from the wound.

Well that may be a physiological explanation but John's interest was not so much medical as prophetic and theological. It was a fulfillment of prophecy and it demonstrated the Lord's humanity. Providentially, John's interest and statement here would forestall, or counter, some strange ideas that became popular in his day. I mentioned this, I think, briefly last week.

One of those ideas was *Docetism*. The name is taken from the Greek word, *dokeō*. It means 'to seem', or 'it seems'. Docetism taught that Jesus was not truly a man; He only seemed to be. It denied that He had flesh and blood; He only *seemed to* have that. This idea, this thought, goes back to Greek thought which held that the material,

the physical, was evil—and the spirit is pure and good. So the idea that Christ was human, and that He had a body was considered disgraceful, profane.

But John stated from the beginning of this Gospel, back in chapter 1, in verse 14, that the Lord became, 'A genuine man with a true body and a reasonable soul'. As he put it, "The Word became flesh." —and I don't think John could have put it any more clearly, and starkly, than that: 'He was human'; 'He became flesh'. And here he stated that a soldier's spear pierced His side, "...and immediately blood and water came out." Then in verse 35b, he added that, "...he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe".

Now why is that so important? Because if Christ were not a true man—flesh and blood, body and soul—then we did not have a substitute on the cross. Only a human being can substitute for human beings. John's leading point in this Fourth Gospel is the *deity* of Christ. He is the eternal Son of God, distinct from the Father, but of the same essence and equal in power and glory. He is the second Person of the Trinity, there is One God who subsists, (or exists), in three Persons. But that is not to the exclusion of His humanity: Without that there could be no substitute, and therefore, no sacrifice. We needed a man to represent mankind, and Christ was that man—He bled.

John's interest here in the blood and water may also be symbolic, though. And there is a reason to think that: Blood, of course, speaks of *atonement*—the death that satisfied God's justice. It is a specific kind of death, though. It is a death that involves the shedding of blood because it was a sacrificial death, (and that those animals in antiquity, the lambs, the goats, the bulls, prefigured). He died a *sacrificial* death. And as the author of Hebrews reminds us in Hebrews 9:22, "...without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."

Water is also important. In chapter 3, where Jesus spoke of the necessity of being "born again" in order to enter the kingdom of God, He referred to being, "born of water and the Spirit". (vs5). There is a lot of debate as to what those two terms mean—but I

think we find the answer to that back in Ezekiel 36, verses 25 through 27, and a reference there to 'the cleansing ministry of the Holy Spirit.' Water speaks of cleansing, and the Spirit of God will cleanse. That's the promise of the New Covenant that would be established by Christ's sacrifice.

So John recognized in the blood and water, (that literally flowed from our Lord's side), *symbols* that showed the meaning of Christ's sacrifice for us. It cleanses us from sin. It cleanses us from guilt and from the power of sin. It's what Augustus Toplady wrote of in his hymn:

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,  
Cleans me from its guilt and power.

But all of this was also important, clearly important, to John because it fulfilled prophecy. Two passages are fulfilled in one act when Jesus was pierced with the soldier's lance. It was the providence of God which must have astonished John, because the soldier set out to do just the opposite—he set out to break bones. But God prevented it to fulfill prophecy. As John wrote in verse 36, "For these things came to pass to fulfill the Scripture, "Not a bone of Him shall be broken." "

Now that's very similar to Psalm 34, verses 19 and 20,  
Many are the afflictions of the righteous,  
But the LORD delivers him out of them all.  
He keeps all His bones. Not one of them is broken.

Well, that fits. Christ is the righteous one. Perhaps he was thinking of that text.

But if John was thinking of one text in particular, had one in mind, then it was, no doubt, Exodus chapter 12, verse 46—which instructed Israel that, ‘No bone of the Passover lamb was to be broken.’ Remember, this is the time of the Passover; and John had made that connection with Christ—between the lamb and the Lord. Maybe this was the moment, when the soldiers didn't break a bone, that he realized ‘the Passover lamb’ pointed to Christ. And Paul makes a great deal of that later in 1 Corinthians 5:7. He states, ‘Christ is our Passover, who has been sacrificed.’

The Passover celebrates deliverance; deliverance from slavery in Egypt—but now deliverance from slavery to sin in this life. We are delivered from that! We are free! And so John sees all of this in these events that take place; these fulfillments of prophecy and also this elaboration of what it meant for Christ to die for us.

But the fulfillment of that Scripture resulted in the fulfillment of another passage, when instead of breaking a bone, the soldier pierced His side. Verse 37, “And again another Scripture says, “They shall look on Him whom they pierced.” “ Well that's Zechariah chapter 12, verse 10, which is a prophecy about future blessing on Israel, when God will defeat the Gentile nations surrounding Jerusalem in the last days; “God will pour out the Spirit of grace on the house of David, and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem. They will look on Me, whom they have pierced, and mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only Son.”

Notice the pronouns in that prophecy: “They will look on Me, whom they have pierced.” Well, that's the Lord God. How can God be pierced? By His representative being pierced, who is the next pronoun, “They will mourn for Him.” God is pierced in His Son, the ‘suffering servant’ of Isaiah 53, who, “was pierced through for our transgressions.” (vs5). John recognized that this happened—that the piercing of Zechariah's prophecy was literally fulfilled when Jesus was pierced with a Roman spear.

And the rest of that great prophecy will be fulfilled later. John quotes it again in Revelation chapter 1, verse 7, and he applies it to the Lord’s second coming. That's when



the Jewish people will, "look upon Him and mourn" with repentance and faith. It will be a time of great salvation.

That's what Zachariah also promises later in chapter 13 of his prophecy. It begins (in verse 1), with the promise of, 'a fountain being opened in that day for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and impurity' to cleanse them of that. And John saw that fountain pictured in the wound that was opened in Jesus' side, that flowed with "water and blood", and speaks of cleansing from sin.

We sing of that fountain in William Cowper's great hymn:

There is a fountain filled with blood,  
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;  
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,  
Lose all their guilty stains.

It's a mighty flood, an abundant supply of grace that is more than sufficient to cleans us from all our sins. All one must do is 'plunge beneath it' —all one must do is believe. Christ has done everything. He has finished the work of salvation. He declared it so; and then He gave up His spirit. He willingly, deliberately, gave up His spirit, gave it into the Father's hand.

But, His body still remained. Yet, before the priests could take it and dispose of it with the bodies of the two thieves, two men of influence came forward to claim it and to give it an honorable burial. —That's how the chapter ends.

All of the Gospels record the burial in some detail. As we saw from 1 Corinthians 15, verse 4, Paul emphasized the fact that Jesus was buried. He entered the grave. So clearly, the Gospel writers and apostles recognized that the burial of Jesus was important. Important, (first), because it is proof that Jesus really died. He was laid in the tomb.

But in addition to that, the Lord's burial was the final stage of His humiliation. It's what theologians call, 'His *passive* sufferings.' He was *active* in everything else: He allowed them to arrest Him in the garden; He submitted to the trial at the priest's home; He carried His cross; He fulfilled prophecies on the cross. And He finally gave up His spirit, deliberately doing it—in control of everything.

But now, this final phase is carried out by others. It was part of the sufferings because the grave is the conclusion of judgment. It's where man turns to dust—and the Son of man was put there, in a humiliating place, where men turn to dust.

Now Psalm 16, verse 10, prophesied that 'He would be kept from corruption'. But He was put there, in the grave, to demonstrate that He had suffered completely for our sins and all of the effects of the judgment that had come upon mankind. He bore the full curse for His people, entering even into the grave itself, to do that and complete His sufferings for us. And again, prophecy was fulfilled in all of that.

It happened when Joseph of Arimathea approached Pilate and asked the he might take away the body of Jesus. F. F. Bruce pointed out that Joseph is given honorable mention in all four Gospels in connection with this last service that he rendered, by taking care of the Lord's body. Matthew called him, "a rich man." (Mat 27:57). Luke stated that he was a member of the Sanhedrin and called him "a good and righteous man", who, "had not consented " to the Sanhedrin's action against Jesus. (Luk 23:50-51). Luke also stated that he was looking 'for the kingdom of God.' And he knew that he had found the King in Jesus Christ, because John calls him, "a disciple of Jesus", and who also identified him as, "a secret *one* for fear of the Jews." (v38).

So something had obviously happened to Joseph that changed him—that gave him the courage of his convictions. Maybe it was the sight of Christ suffering unjustly and courageously that shamed him into throwing caution to the wind and showing his true colors. Well, he does do that, for whatever reason. He went to Pilate and he asked for the body. And Pilate released it to him, which is very unusual, since Joseph had no legal claim on the Lord's body. But, Pilate *avored* him—it was a work of God. It was

Proverbs 21, verse 1, that states, "The king's heart," (or in this case 'the Governor's heart), "is in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes."

So Joseph took the body down from the cross. You can just imagine how he carefully pulled the nails out of the Lord's hands, and out of the Lord's feet, with the care of one who loved the Lord—and then wrapped Him in a linen cloth. It was a bold act on his part. We have these disciples, deserting the Lord when He was arrested for fear of the authorities—and here is this man coming out into the open, which would certainly have made him an outcast among his colleagues on the council. It took great courage for him—but this was an act of faith on his part. There are no secret disciples, at least not for long, and he came out boldly and courageously.

And he wasn't alone. John wrote that Nicodemus assisted him. Nicodemus has appeared twice earlier in this Gospel. In chapter 7, (vs51), some six months earlier, he challenged the Sanhedrin for condemning Christ without a trial. He said, 'We don't do that. That's against our principles.' And then earlier, in chapter 3, he came to Jesus in Jerusalem under the cover of night, and the fact that John mentions that here, (vs39), mentions his visit to the Lord in John, chapter 3, may be his way of indicating that he too, 'stepped out of the shadows' to openly identify with Christ as one of His disciples.

And he came with "a hundred pounds" of spices for the burial. (vs39). It was custom to put spices in the linen sheets, or the strips of linen as they wrapped the body, so that the graveclothes were filled with them. The spices, usually a mixture of myrrh and aloes was to offset the effects of decay. What was unusual was the amount that Nicodemus brought. —A hundred pounds of spices would have been purchased at great expense. But it was an act of love on his part, a way of honoring Christ in His death. It's how the kings of Israel were buried. When King Asa was buried, 2 Chronicles 16, verse 14, describes his tomb as "filled with spices of various kinds." Both Nicodemus and Joseph gave the Lord a burial fit for the King of the Jews.

The time was short, sundown would bring the Sabbath when their work would have to stop. When they completed the task, John wrote that they placed Him in “a new tomb”, in a garden that was near the site of the crucifixion. (vs40). According to Matthew, it was Joseph's tomb, ‘cut into a rock’. (Mat 27:60). So into the stone they cut this tomb; and it'd never been used, obviously. But in doing that, in placing Him in this new tomb, Joseph's tomb, another prophecy is fulfilled, Isaiah 53, verse 9. It states that His grave, (this is the grave of ‘the suffering Servant’, the grave of Christ)—His grave was ‘assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death.’

The priests had a grave already appointed for the Lord outside of the city.; it was the common grave for criminals. But again, providence overruled through Joseph and Pilate. Just as God would not allow His Son's bones to be broken, He would not allow His body to be dishonored in a common grave of bandits. He was laid in a new tomb; He was laid in the tomb of a rich man. ‘Man proposes, but God disposes.’ He is sovereign, and nothing can frustrate His will or break His Word. Even the Lord’s passive sufferings, even in those, the Father insured that the Son, that His body was protected, and even honored, in His humiliation, when He suffered. And His suffering was completed in the grave and the burial.

Now, there should be comfort in this for all of us. Christ has finished the work of salvation. He has died in our place to end the fear of judgment, and He preceded us into the grave to end the fear of that. In Hebrews chapter 2, verse 10, Jesus is called, “the author of our salvation.” That word *author* also means *captain*. Both are true. —He is the source of our salvation, but He's also the leader of the saved. He leads us through this world as we journey to our heavenly rest; He goes before us so that we follow Him. And He goes before us into the grave. He has done that, and He has emerged from the grave, untouched, triumphant. —And we will, too. He has removed the fear of death for every believer, and has removed the terrors of the grave.

The grave could not hold Him—and it will not hold us either. In fact, of course while our bodies will go into the grave, our souls enter into heaven. Which is to say, our

selves enter into heaven: "Absent from the body", and at home with the Lord. That's 2 Corinthians 5, verse 8.

But the grave will hold the body—and yet it cannot hold it forever. It's only temporary—a temporary resting place awaiting the resurrection. And we have all of that. As believers in Christ we have all of that: Forgiveness, Heaven, and the Resurrection! —Because Christ has finished with our sins. It is as though He went into the grave, carrying the curse, suffering the final indignity of judgment as our sin bearer; but He came forth three days later, glorified, having left our sins behind. They are buried. They can never rise again to accuse us. Every believer in Jesus Christ is justified, forgiven, declared innocent of all wrongdoing—and not only that...but righteous, fully righteous in God's sight.

We are now completely acceptable to Him. Nothing can change that. No one can unbury our sins. No one can undo Christ's salvation. It is forever finished and complete. And that means every believer is absolutely and eternally secure in Him. We are now "Christ's body", that's how the church is described in 1 Corinthians 12, verse 27. Christ is the head, and we are His body, spiritually. And just as none of His bones was broken, so too, not one of His members will be broken off. In the end, all His saints will be gathered in one body—and none shall be missing.

All of these last details of Christ's passive sufferings remind us of our security in God's family: If the Father took care of His Son in death, will He not take care of us in life? —Of course He will.

That doesn't mean there won't be trials. That repentant thief suffered agony at the hands of the Roman soldiers when they hastened his death. But God, in sovereign wisdom, uses such things, uses such hardships and afflictions, for our good. He always has a proper purpose for us in our trials. Even the repentant thief's suffering was a means to blessing. It was the means of entering paradise and fulfilling Christ's promise that he would be with Him that very day.

We know that, we understand it, we accept it by faith—not by sight, but by faith. We live by faith. We live by faith in God's Word, and we live by faith in it as true. So we can say with the psalmist, "It is good for me that I was afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes." (Ps 119:71). And through faith in Christ, we can say with the apostle Paul, "Death is swallowed up in victory." (1 Cor 15:54).

So there is no reason for us, 'to whistle past graveyards.' A grave is a reminder that life ends, that it is short, and so we are to be busy using the time that God has given us to serve Him. Don't be fearful when you see a graveyard, or a churchyard. Be encouraged to work diligently with the time that the LORD has given you to serve Him. It goes quickly.

The grave also reminds us that heaven is before us—and the resurrection will come. So we should rejoice! That's the hope of every believer in Christ. That's our hope, and that's how we're to live—with hope, and with *that* hope. May God give us that strength and that understanding to live in that way—not for the things of this world that pass away, but for what is eternal, and what is certain. The grave will give up the body in the resurrection. The moment we die, we are in His presence. We are victorious! "More than conquerors!" as Paul said. (Rom 8:37).

Well, that is so for the believer in Jesus Christ. But if you don't know Christ as your Savior, then you don't have that hope; and you are 'whistling through this life' with false hope. In this case, the grave is a terror, and it will swallow you up.

Come to Christ. He is the Savior. Recognize your guilt and your need of His sacrifice—and trust in Him. He receives all who do. He cleanses us from sin's guilt, and power, and penalty to give us life everlasting. And then may you, with us, live out a life of active service for the LORD with the hope that we have before us.

*(Closing prayer)* LORD, when that day comes, and we are in Your presence, we certainly will sing, "Thy power to save and give all the glory to You." What a great, great

work You've done for us. We can't even imagine it. We'll spend all eternity trying to fathom what You've done for us—and praising You for it.

But here, now, we do praise You. We give You thanks for the sacrifice that You made at Calvary for us: We thank You for that—the blood and the water, the cleansing ministry of the sacrificed Son of God on behalf of His people. Thank You, Father.

And now the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance on you and give you peace. In Christ's name, Amen.

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