

**Message of the Evangelists:
The Passion of Jesus
John 19:28-37**

Intro: John begins his Gospel with the amazing description of the Word which was with God and was God. Then he writes, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). He then declares, “No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known” (John 1:18).

John’s purpose for writing his Gospel is plain: “These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31). John wants to communicate clearly that Jesus is divine, the Son of God.

John records many sayings of Jesus where he says “I am:”

I who speak to you am he (John 4:26: ego eimi).

I am the bread of life (John 6:35).

I am the light of the world (John 8:12).

Before Abraham was born, I am (John 8:58).

I am the good shepherd (John 10:11).

I am the resurrection and the life (John 11:25).

These sayings of Jesus are intended to call to our memory the words of God from the burning bush when Moses asked him his name. He said, “I am who I am.” Tell them “I am has sent me to you” (Exodus 3:14). This is the root of the name Jehovah.

John will carefully unfold the true identity of Jesus through his account of his death. The crucifixion happens outside the city gates. The Jews did not want to execute their criminals within the walls of the holy city. So they took them on a little parade to a hill called “the place of a skull,” or Golgatha. It was also called Mount Calvary (call attention to two pictures of Golgatha on screens).

I. All was now completed (v28). The crucifixion of Jesus will become the center piece of Christian theology. Even more so than the resurrection, the crucifixion is the event that defines our world view and brings us our salvation.

A. Death is the common experience of humans. The death of Jesus, recorded so meticulously by his friends, is the death of every man, for all die.

B. The greatest spiritual struggle on this planet is the struggle with the very existence of evil in the presence of an all-loving and all-powerful God.

1. Most Christian theodicies end up blaming sin for evil in the world—either the sin of humans or the sin of Satan.

2. God is not the author of sin. He did not create evil. Who is left to blame? People.

C. On the cross you have the Son of Man, the Son of David, the Son of God, and the Suffering Servant dying. How can this be? It is a death that delivers, that liberates, and that demonstrates God’s amazing love.

D. At the cross we experience the collision of the force that seeks to destroy us and the force that longs to rescue us—the sin of the world and the love of God.

E. Get a drink:

***Nearing death thirst is a frequent experience. Many of us have slipped ice chips between the lips of those who could no longer swallow.

II. Break the legs: They asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down (v31)

A. Crucifixion is an ugly business. It is capital punishment rendered as painful as possible. Sometimes the victims did not die for days but hung on their crosses until they expired from dehydration. The Romans believed that executing criminals was a powerful deterrent as well as a just reward. They saved crucifixion for traitors, insurrectionists, and the worst offenders.

Breaking the legs is recorded only by John. He was standing there while the others had fled. He was supporting Mary, the mother of Jesus. This is John the Beloved, one of the Sons of Thunder, who turns out to be God's finest spokesman for the triumph of love on a planet full of blood and tears.

This process of breaking the legs reminds us again of the

B. No bodies on crosses for the Sabbath. Here we have the overriding concern of Jewish religion in the day of Jesus—the external form. The religion is only a hull of its intended purpose.

1. God intended to reach the heart of man through the law, and thus bring about true and lasting transformation. Instead, the law was used as a way to dress things up on the outside, leaving the inside of human beings full of dead men's bones.
2. God intended to reach the entire planet through Abraham and his descendants. They were to be a missionary people concerned about the whole world just like their mighty God was concerned about the whole world. Jonah is more than a single individual running away from his missionary call. Jonah is an entire nation of people running away from their true mission purpose.
3. God intended to address the greatest moral and ethical concerns through the law of Moses. Instead, these laws were emptied of their true applications regarding the spirit and heart of humans and were used to build houses of cards, trivial matters stacked upon one another.

“Break his legs” is the plan of an empty human system that no longer has capacity for the work of God.

III. He Was Already Dead: But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs (v33).

A. A news account: A Jewish man from Galilee, age 33, Jesus of Nazareth, was executed this morning for crimes against the Roman Empire. He claimed to be the King of the Jews. His execution was carried out in concert with the deaths of two other offenders. Jesus expired early on in the ordeal, but his companions on the crosses to his right and left died only after their legs were broken.

B. But what John is saying is this: God was at work on Mount Calvary that day. There are many great indicators for this truth, and there are many small ones. The small ones are to him the most persuasive and astounding.

Jesus was already dead because Pilate was carrying out “the predetermined counsel and foreknowledge of God” on the middle cross that day (Acts 2:23): This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

C. Breaking his legs was the idea of a group of lost religious leaders who could not discern the activity of God among them even though God’s own Son showed up to do miracles.

D. His legs COULD NOT BE BROKEN.

1. What day is it? The Day of Preparation for a “special Sabbath” (v31). It is the time of the Passover. On the Day of Preparation the Passover lambs are being slaughtered.

2. Jesus is our Passover, as the Scripture says. The Passover lambs could not have any broken bones. Therefore, Jesus’ legs could not be broken. And they were not.

3. The significance of this truth did not dawn on John as he stood by the cross. It occurred to him much later when he had an opportunity to reflect upon these events. After the Spirit filled him and became his Teacher, he traveled back in his mind and realized that God was watching over every detail of the death of Jesus.

IV. Pierce His Side (v34)

A. The startling nature of this event is evident in that John dwells on it and assures his readers that what he records is exactly what he saw there on Mount Calvary that day.

B. The postmortem piercing of Jesus was accomplished by a thoughtless underling who just had to stab somebody that day. He had no idea that he would accomplish anything other than venting his longing for blood.

C. This piercing, UNPLANNED by humans gathered at the cross, was an assault on impulse, on the spur of the moment. It stands in contrast to the command to break his legs, which was planned as a concern of the Jews for the externals of their religion.

D. This impulsive act was actually a fulfillment of the Scripture, as John notes at the end of this passage: “Not one of his bones will be broken” (Exodus 12:46) and “They will look on the one they have pierced” (Zechariah 12:10).

E. Blood and water gushed out of wound (Ps 69:19-22).

¹⁹You know how I am scorned, disgraced and shamed; all my enemies are before you.

²⁰Scorn has broken my heart and has left me helpless;

I looked for sympathy, but there was none, for comforters, but I found none.

²¹They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst.

Conclusion: It is finished. Jesus means by this the worst that men can do and the best that God can do. They are now accomplished.

He means by this the end of the ceremonial law that devolved into breaking legs, after premeditated murder, so no dead bodies would be hanging around on the day of worship.

It is finished. He means by this the fulfillment of every detail of God's promise and every Messianic prophesy.