

John 19:17-42
January 18, 2026

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: Why do you think God decided on such an brutal form of death to take away the sin of the world? [Let people engage]

Transition: Today's passage leads us to Jesus's death on a cross, which is the climax of the history of the world. The OT prepares the way for Christ, showing us the terrible problem of sin and the complete inadequacy of people or animal sacrifices to take it away. But mixed in the OT are promises of hope, promises that one day someone will come to solve this problem – someone who would bless the whole world, which is Jesus.

We have already studied and processed how Jesus ends up on the cross:

- The Jewish leaders pushed for it because they wanted to stop Jesus, not help Him
- Pilate, the one who gave the verdict, didn't want to stop Jesus, but succumbed to the pressure of the Jewish leaders
- The disciples were fearful of it.
- But Jesus's crucifixion happened because it was God's plan to redeem the world and right the mistake of Adam.

So let's pick up the story by reading John 19:17-42.

BOOK:

The Crucifixion

So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. ¹⁷ Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). ¹⁸ Here they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle. ¹⁹ Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews. ²⁰ Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. ²¹ The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews." ²² Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."

²³ When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. ²⁴ "Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it." This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled which said, "They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing (Ps 22:18)." So this is what the soldiers did.

²⁵ Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," ²⁷ and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

The Death of Jesus

²⁸ Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.” ²⁹ A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips. ³⁰ When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” (Shout of triumph; In the Greek text, it is *tetelestai*; and it means, “It is finished, it stands finished, and it always will be finished!”) With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

³¹ Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. ³² The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. ³³ But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴ Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. ³⁵ The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. ³⁶ These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken,” (Exodus 12:46; Num. 9:12; Psalm 34:20) ³⁷ and, as another scripture says, “They will look on the one they have pierced.” (Zech. 12:10)

The Burial of Jesus

³⁸ Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate’s permission, he came and took the body away. ³⁹ He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. ⁴⁰ Taking Jesus’ body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. ⁴¹ At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴² Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What stood out to you? What questions do you have? [Let people engage]

This passage is filled with themes we can focus on: Jesus’s kingship, fulfillment of prophecy (read Isaiah 53), themes of love and obedience, the significance of eyewitness testimony, His control in suffering (asking John to care for his mother), the irony of the inscription Pilate made for Jesus’s cross, and the deeper meaning of “It is finished.”

Q: What did you learn about man? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit? [Let people engage]

Q: What is your takeaway? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

Our salvation rests entirely on Christ's completed work, not our performance. We don't *add* to the cross with good works, morality, or religious effort. This frees us as believers from guilt-driven obedience and replaces it with grateful obedience. So we are invited to stop trying to earn what Christ has already secured. Guard ourselves from legalism and performance-based Christianity.

Another consideration is that God is always in control – even in suffering. What looks chaotic is often sovereign. God is not reacting to evil but reigning over it. Our darkest moments may be fulfilling purposes we cannot yet see. Accordingly, let's trust God when circumstances feel unjust or senseless. Let's remember that God's sovereignty doesn't remove pain, but redeems it. Our story is not "out of control!"

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 382-386). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

John 19:17-42

The Apostle's Creed states it without embellishment: "He was crucified, dead, and buried." These three events are described in John 19:17-42, momentous events that we should understand not only from the historical point of view but also from the doctrinal. *What* happened is important; *why* it happened is also important, if you hope to go to heaven.

Crucified (John 19:17-27)

Pilate delivered Jesus to the chief priests; and they, with the help of the Roman soldiers, took Jesus to be crucified. “It was the most cruel and shameful of all punishments,” said the Roman statesman-philosopher Cicero. “Let it never come near the body of a Roman citizen; nay, not even near his thoughts or eyes or ears.”

Crucifixion probably had its origin among the Persians and Phoenicians, but it was the Romans who made special use of it. No Roman citizen could be crucified, though there were exceptions. This mode of capital punishment was reserved for the lowest kind of criminals, particularly those who promoted insurrection. Today, we think of the cross as a symbol of glory and victory; but in Pilate’s day, the cross stood for the basest kind of rejection, shame, and suffering. It was Jesus who made the difference.

It was customary for the criminal to carry his cross, or at least the crossbeam, from the hall of judgment to the place of execution. Jesus began the mile-long walk carrying His cross, but He was relieved by Simon of Cyrene whom the Roman soldiers “drafted” to do the job. We do not know why Jesus was relieved of this burden; the Scriptures are silent. Was He too weak from the scourgings to carry the load? Was His weakness holding back the procession at a time when the Jews were anxious to get it over with so they could celebrate their Passover Sabbath? One thing is sure: the bearing of the cross was a mark of guilt; *and Jesus was not guilty* (see Mark 15:20–21 and Rom. 16:13).

It was also required that the criminal wear a placard announcing his crime. The only announcement recorded in the Gospels is the one that Pilate wrote: “This is Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews.” The chief priests protested the title, but Pilate refused to change it. It was his final thrust against the Jewish religious establishment. He knew that the priests and elders envied Jesus and wanted to destroy Him (Matt. 27:18). A shrewd politician like Pilate well understood the workings of the Jewish religious establishment. He knew that his placard would insult and embarrass them, and that is exactly what he wanted.

The fact that this title was written in Hebrew (Aramaic), Greek, and Latin is significant. For one thing, it shows that our Lord was crucified in a place where many peoples and nations met, a cosmopolitan place. Hebrew is the language of religion, Greek of philosophy, and Latin of law; and all three combined to crucify the Son of God. But what He did on the cross, He did for the whole world! In this Gospel, John emphasizes the worldwide dimensions of the work of Christ. Without realizing it, Pilate wrote a “Gospel tract” when he prepared this title; for one of the thieves discovered that Jesus was King, and he asked entrance into His kingdom.

Jesus was crucified outside the city (Heb. 13:11–13) between two other victims, possibly associates of Barabbas. We do not know where our Savior’s cross stood. There have been so many changes in the topography of Jerusalem since a.d. 70 when Titus and the Romans destroyed it, that it is impossible to determine accurately either our Lord’s route to the cross or where the cross stood. Pilgrims to the Holy Land today are shown both the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and “Gordon’s Calvary” near the garden tomb.

The Hebrew word *Golgotha* means “cranium, skull”; Calvary is the Latin equivalent. We are not told why it had this peculiar name. Certainly Jewish people would not permit unclean skulls to

be left at a place of public execution! For that matter, the bodies (with heads intact) were usually disposed of by burial (if the victims had friends) or by throwing them on the public garbage dump. “Gordon’s Calvary” does resemble a skull, but did the terrain look like that 2,000 years ago?

That Jesus was crucified with two notorious thieves only added to the shame. But it also fulfilled Isaiah 53:12, “He was numbered with the transgressors.” He was treated like a common criminal!

Modern executions are usually carried out in almost clinical privacy, but Jesus was nailed to a cross and hung up for everyone to see. It was Passover season and there were thousands of visitors in the city. The place of execution was outside the city where many people would pass. Jesus was a well-known figure, so His arrest and condemnation would be topics for discussion. It was natural for people to gather and watch the grim scene.

Of course, the soldiers had to be there; that was their job. At most Roman executions, a centurion would be assigned with four soldiers to assist him. Since Jesus was a popular teacher with many followers, Pilate may have assigned more guards to Golgotha. It was the privilege of the soldiers to share whatever personal belongings the victims had; so they divided up all that Jesus owned—His personal clothing. He would have had a turban, a pair of sandals, an undergarment (the seamless robe), an outer garment, and a girdle. The four men each took a piece of clothing, and then they gambled for the seamless robe. This fulfilled Psalm 22:18.

John does not record it, but the other Gospel writers tell us that some of the people passing by reviled Jesus, no doubt at the instigation of the chief priests and scribes (Mark 15:29–32). When you read Psalm 22, you see how David used the image of *animals* to describe the people who persecuted our Lord: bulls (Ps. 22:12), lions (Ps. 22:13, 21), and dogs (Ps. 22:16, 20). When men reject their Lord, they become like animals.

A group of women, along with the Apostle John, stood near the cross. (Later, they would move farther away and join other friends of Jesus [Matt. 27:55–56; Mark 15:40–41].) John specifies four women: Mary, the mother of Jesus; His mother’s sister, Salome, the mother of James and John; Mary, the wife of Clopas (Cleophas); and Mary Magdalene. It took courage to stand there in the midst of such hatred and ridicule, but their being there must have encouraged our Lord. The first time we meet Mary in the Gospel of John, she is attending a wedding (John 2:1–11); now she is preparing for a burial. The hour had come! She was experiencing “the sword” that had been predicted years before (Luke 2:35). Her silence is significant; for if anyone could have rescued Jesus, it was His mother. All she had to do was announce that His claims were false—but she said nothing! What a testimony to the deity of Christ.

Jesus assured her of His love, and He gave His choicest disciple, who rested on His bosom, to be her adopted son and to care for her. Whether that moment John took Mary away from the scene and took her home, we do not know. We do know that he cared for her and that she was among the believers in the Upper Room as they awaited Pentecost (Acts 1:14). Even while He was performing the great work of redemption, Jesus was faithful to His responsibilities as a son. What an honor it was for John to take his Lord’s place in Mary’s life!

Do not confuse Mary Magdalene with the “sinful woman” described in Luke 7:36ff. Jesus had delivered Mary Magdalene from demons (Mark 16:9; Luke 8:2), and she used her resources to assist Jesus in His ministry. Salome had asked Jesus for thrones for her two sons (Matt. 20:20–29), and He had denied her request. You wonder what she was thinking about as she stood there and beheld Jesus dying on the cross. The scene must have rebuked her selfishness.

Dead (John 19:28–30)

Our Lord knew what was going on; He was fully in control as He obeyed the Father’s will. He had refused to drink the pain-deadening wine that was always offered to those about to be crucified (Matt. 27:34). In order to fulfill the Scriptures (Ps. 69:21), He said, “I thirst.” He was enduring real physical suffering, for He had a real human body. He had just emerged from three hours of darkness when He felt the wrath of God and separation from God (Matt. 27:45–49). When you combine darkness, thirst, and isolation, you have—hell! There were physical reasons for His thirst (Ps. 22:15), but there were also spiritual reasons (Ps. 42:1–2).

One of the soldiers took pity on Jesus and moistened His lips with the cheap vinegar wine the soldiers drank. We must not imagine Jesus hanging many feet up in the air, almost inaccessible. His feet were perhaps three or four feet from the ground, so it would be easy for the man to put a sponge at the end of a reed and give Jesus a drink. You and I today can “give Jesus a drink” by sharing what we have with those in need (Matt. 25:34–40).

Psalm 69 has strong messianic overtones. note Psalm 69:3, “My throat is dried.” Psalm 69:4 is referred to by Jesus in John 15:25, and Psalm 69:8 should be connected with John 7:3–5. Psalm 69:9 is quoted in John 2:17, and Psalm 69:21 is referred to in John 19:28–29. Note the emphasis on “reproach” (Ps. 69:7–10, 19–20) and the image of the “deep waters” (Ps. 69:14–15, and see Luke 12:50).

Our Lord made seven statements while He was on the cross; they are known as “the seven words from the cross.” First, He thought of others: those who crucified Him (Luke 23:34), the believing thief (Luke 23:39–43), and His mother (John 19:25–27). The central word had to do with His relationship to the Father (Matt. 27:45–49); and the last three statements focused on Himself: His body (John 19:28–29), His soul (John 19:30; and see Isa. 53:10), and His spirit (Luke 23:46). The drink of vinegar did not fully quench His thirst, but it did enable Him to utter that shout of triumph, in a loud voice, “It is finished!” In the Greek text, it is *tetelestai*; and it means, “It is finished, it stands finished, and it always will be finished!” While it is true that our Lord’s sufferings were now finished, there is much more included in this dramatic word. Many of the Old Testament types and prophecies were now fulfilled, and the once-for-all sacrifice for sin had now been completed.

The word *tetelestai* is unfamiliar to us, but it was used by various people in everyday life in those days. A servant would use it when reporting to his or her master, “I have completed the work assigned to me” (see John 17:4). When a priest examined an animal sacrifice and found it faultless, this word would apply. Jesus, of course, is the perfect Lamb of God, without spot or blemish. When an artist completed a picture, or a writer a manuscript, he or she might say, “It is finished!” The death of Jesus on the cross “completes the picture” that God had been painting,

the story that He had been writing, for centuries. Because of the cross, we understand the ceremonies and prophecies in the Old Testament.

Perhaps the most meaningful meaning of *tetelestai* was that used by the merchants: “The debt is paid in full!” When He gave Himself on the cross, Jesus fully met the righteous demands of a holy law; He paid our debt in full. None of the Old Testament sacrifices could take away sins; their blood only *covered* sin. But the Lamb of God shed His blood, and that blood can *take away* the sins of the world (John 1:29; Heb. 9:24–28).

There was once a rather eccentric evangelist named Alexander Wooten, who was approached by a flippant young man who asked, “What must I do to be saved?”

“It’s too late!” Wooten replied and went about his work.

The young man became alarmed. “Do you mean that it’s too late for me to be saved?” he asked.

“Is there nothing I can do?”

“Too late!” said Wooten. “*It’s already been done!* The only thing you can do is believe.”

The death of Jesus Christ is a major theme in the Gospel of John. It was announced by John the Baptist even before Jesus had officially begun His ministry (John 1:29, 35–36). Our Lord’s first mention is in John 3:14, where the image is certainly that of crucifixion (and see John 8:28; 12:32). Jesus often spoke of “taking up the cross” (Matt. 10:38; 16:24). After Peter’s confession of faith, Jesus clearly announced that He would be killed (Matt. 16:21), and later He told the disciples that He would be crucified (Matt. 20:17–19).

In John’s Gospel, you find a number of pictures of our Lord’s death: the slaying of the lamb (John 1:29); the destroying of the temple (John 2:19); the lifting up of the serpent (John 3:14); the shepherd laying down his life for the sheep (John 10:11–18); and the planting of the seed in the ground (John 12:20–25). These pictures make it clear that Jesus’ death was not an accident; it was a divine appointment. He was not murdered in the strictest sense: He willingly gave His life for us. His death was an atonement, not just an example. He actually accomplished the work of redemption on the cross.

Some unbelievers have invented the idea that Jesus did not really die, that He only “swooned” on the cross and was then revived in the “cool tomb.” But there are too many witnesses that Jesus Christ actually died: the centurion (Mark 15:44–45); all the Gospel writers; the angels (Matt. 28:5, 7); the Jews (Acts 5:28); Christ Himself (Luke 24:46; Rev. 1:18); and even the worshiping hosts in heaven (Rev. 5:9, 12). Of course, Paul, Peter, and John mention the death of Christ in their letters.

His death was voluntary: He willingly dismissed His spirit (John 19:30; and note 10:17–18). He “gave Himself” (Gal. 2:20). He offered Himself as a ransom (Mark 10:45), as a sacrifice to God (Eph. 5:2), and as a propitiation for sin (1 John 2:2). In Luke 9:31, His death is called a “decease,” which in the Greek is “exodus,” suggesting the Passover lamb and the deliverance from bondage. It will take eternity to reveal all that happened when Jesus Christ died on the cross.

Buried (John 19:31–42)

Two groups of people were involved in our Lord's burial: the Roman soldiers (John 19:31–37), and the Jewish believers (John 19:38–42). It was not unusual for victims to remain on the cross in a lingering death, so the Jewish religious leaders did all they could to hasten the death of Jesus and the two thieves. However, our Lord was in control; and He dismissed His spirit at “the ninth hour,” which was 3 p.m. (see Matt. 27:45–50). The last three “words from the cross” were spoken within a short period of time just before He laid down His life.

It is remarkable that the Roman soldiers *did not do* what they were commanded to do—break the victims' legs—but they *did do* what they were not supposed to do—pierce the Saviour's side! In both matters, they fulfilled the very Word of God! The bones of the Passover lamb were not to be broken (Ex. 12:46; Num. 9:12; and note Ps. 34:20), so our Lord's bones were protected by the Lord. His side was to be pierced (Zech. 12:10; Rev. 1:7), so that was done by one of the soldiers. John saw a special significance to the blood and water that came from the wound in the side. For one thing, it proved that Jesus had a real body (see 1 John 1:1–4) and experienced a real death.

By the time John wrote this book, there were false teachers in the church claiming that Jesus did not have a truly human body. There may also be a symbolic meaning: the blood speaks of our justification, the water of our sanctification and cleansing. The blood takes care of the guilt of sin; the water deals with the stain of sin. Some students connect John 19:34 with 1 John 5:6, but perhaps the connection is weak. In 1 John 5, John deals with evidence that Jesus Christ is God come in the flesh; and he presents three witnesses: the Spirit, the water, and the blood (1 John 5:6, 8). The Spirit relates to Pentecost, the water to His baptism, and the blood to His crucifixion. In each of these events, God made it clear that Jesus Christ is what He claimed to be, God come in the flesh. In fact, in John 19:35, the apostle makes it clear that the water and blood should encourage his readers to believe that Jesus is the Christ (see John 20:31).

When the soldiers were through with their gruesome work, our Lord's friends took over; and from that point on, as far as the record is concerned, no unbelievers touched the body of Jesus. God had prepared two high-ranking men to prepare His body for burial and to place it in a proper tomb. Had Joseph and Nicodemus not been there, it is likely that the body of Jesus would have been “carried off to some obscure and accursed ditch,” as James Stalker states in his classic *The Trial and Death of Jesus Christ*. If the friends of any victims appeared, the Romans were only too happy to give them the bodies and get them off their hands.

When you assemble the data available about Joseph of Arimathea, you learn that he was rich (Matt. 27:57), a prominent member of the Jewish council (Mark 15:43), a good and righteous man who had not consented to what the council did (Luke 23:50–51), a member of that “believing minority” of Jews who were praying for Messiah to come (Mark 15:43, and note Luke 2:25–38), and a disciple of Jesus Christ (John 19:38). It was he who asked for the body of Jesus and, with his friend Nicodemus, gave the Savior a decent burial.

But there are some mysteries about Joseph that perplex us and invite closer investigation. Why did he have a tomb so near to a place of execution? Most pious Jews wanted to be buried in the Holy City, but a rich man like Joseph could certainly afford a better site for his final resting place. Imagine his relatives coming to pay their respects and having to listen to the curses and cries of criminals on crosses not far away! (note John 19:41.)

Matthew, Luke, and John all tell us that the tomb was new and had never been used. It was “his [Joseph’s] own new tomb” (Matt. 27:60); he had hewn it out for himself. *Or did he hew it out for Jesus?* John informs us that Joseph was a “secret disciple for fear of the Jews.” The Greek word translated “secretly” is a perfect passive participle and could be translated “having been secreted.” In Matthew 13:35, this same verb form is translated “have been kept secret.” In other words, Joseph was God’s “secret agent” in the Sanhedrin! From the human standpoint, Joseph kept “under cover” because he feared the Jews (John 7:13; 9:22; 12:42); but from the divine standpoint, he was being protected so he could be available to bury the body of Jesus.

We have already met Nicodemus in our study of John 1–12. Note that each time he is named, he is identified as the man who came to Jesus by night (John 3:1ff; 7:50–53). But the man who started off with confusion at night (John 3) ended up with open confession in the daylight! Nicodemus came out of the dark and into the light and, with Joseph, was not ashamed to publicly identify with Jesus Christ. Of course, when the two men touched His dead body, they defiled themselves and could not participate in Passover. But, what difference did it make? They had found the Lamb of God!

It seems evident that Joseph and Nicodemus carefully planned their activities at Calvary. They certainly could not secure a tomb at the last minute, nor would they be able to purchase sixty-five pounds of costly spices so quickly during the Passover when many merchants would not be doing business. No sooner had Jesus died than Joseph went to Pilate and received permission to take the body. Nicodemus stayed at the cross to make sure nothing happened to his Lord’s body. The two men might even have been waiting *in the new tomb*, with the spices and wrappings, ready for the moment when the Savior would lay down His life.

Haste was important and the men worked quickly. They could not give Jesus’ body the full ministry of washing and anointing that was traditional, but they did the best they could. It was important to get the body safely away from the Romans and the Jewish leaders. Of course, Mary of Bethany had already anointed His body for burial (Mark 14:8; John 12:1–8). Some of the other women watched the two men minister to Jesus, and they witnessed His burial (Matt. 27:61; Mark 15:47). They planned to return after the Sabbath and complete the burial procedures (Luke 23:55–24:1).

All of this raises the question, “How did Joseph and Nicodemus know to prepare for His burial?” What follows is only conjecture on my part but, to me, it seems reasonable. When Nicodemus first visited Jesus, he was impressed with His miracles and His teachings; but he could not understand what it meant to be born again. Certainly after that interview, Nicodemus searched the Scriptures and asked God for guidance concerning these important spiritual matters.

At the critical council meeting recorded in John 7:45–53, Nicodemus boldly stood up and defended the Savior! His associates ridiculed him for thinking that a prophet could come out of Galilee! “Search, and look!” they said—and that is exactly what Nicodemus did. It is likely that Joseph quietly joined him and revealed the fact that he too was more and more convinced that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed Israel’s Messiah, the Son of God.

As Nicodemus and Joseph searched the Old Testament, they would find the messianic prophecies and discover that many of them had been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Certainly, they would see Him as the “Lamb of God” and conclude that He would be sacrificed at Passover. Jesus had already told Nicodemus that He would be “lifted up” (John 3:14), and this meant crucifixion. Since the Passover lambs were slain about 3 p.m., the two men could know almost the exact time when God’s Lamb would die on the cross! Surely they would read Isaiah 53 and notice verse 9- “And He made His grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death.” Jesus would be buried in a rich man’s tomb!

Joseph arranged to have the tomb hewn out, and the men assembled the cloths and spices needed for the burial. They may have been hiding in the tomb all during the six hours of our Lord’s agony on the cross. When they heard, “It is finished! Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit!” they knew that He was dead; and they went to work. They boldly identified with Jesus Christ at a time when He seemed like a failure and His cause hopelessly defeated. As far as we know, of all the disciples, only John was with them at the cross.

The Sabbath was about to dawn. Jesus had finished the work of the “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17), and now He would rest.

Blum, E. A. (1985). *John*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 339-341) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

19:17–18. **Carrying His own cross**, Jesus **went out**. These words fulfill two Old Testament symbols or types. Isaac carried his own wood for the sacrifice (Gen. 22:1–6) and the sin offering used to be taken outside the camp or city (cf. Heb. 13:11–13). So Jesus was made sin (2 Cor. 5:21). **Golgotha** in **Aramaic** (**The place of the skull**) was probably called this because the hill with its stony barren top looked like a skull. The **two others** who were crucified with Jesus are mentioned to make understandable the following sequel in which their legs were broken but not those of Jesus (cf. John 19:32–33). Luke added that the two were “criminals” (Luke 23:32–33), and Matthew called them “robbers” (Matt. 27:44).

19:19–20. The game between **Pilate** and the priests continued with the writing of the **notice** (Gr., *titlon*; Latin, *titulus*) which was usually attached to a criminal’s **cross**. **It read**, jesus of nazareth, the king of the jews. Since **the sign was written in** three languages—**Aramaic, Latin, and Greek**—and the Crucifixion was in a public **place**, all who could **read** saw a clear proclamation.

19:21–22. **The chief priests** naturally did not want this to be proclaimed as a fact. They wanted Jesus to die for *claiming* to be the Jews’ **King**. So they **protested to Pilate** to change the superscription. **Pilate** refused to do so. Doubtless he felt he had done enough dirty work for the leaders of the nation, and he enjoyed his little joke against them. His haughty answer, **What I have written, I have written**, completes a series of amazing utterances by Pilate (cf. 18:38; 19:5, 14–15; Matt. 27:22). Irony was also shown by John, who recognized that Pilate wrote those words but that God wanted His Son to die with this proclamation on His cross. The words in

another sense are a fitting judgment on the life of Pilate. He had played his part and had his moment of truth. He, a Gentile, would be judged accordingly by the King of the Jews!

19:23–24. The soldier’s activity in stripping **Jesus** and dividing **His clothes** was part of the customary cruelty of those times. Clothes were handmade and therefore expensive in comparison with clothes today. The executioners received the pieces as their due. The **seamless tunic (undergarment)** may be significant as the type of garment which the high priest wore, yet John did not expound on this point. John saw the significance in the fulfillment of Psalm 22:18, in which the poetic parallelism in that verse was fulfilled in two separate acts: (a) **They divided My garments** and (b) they **cast lots for My clothing**. That Jesus died naked was part of the shame which He bore for our sins. At the same time He is the last Adam who provides clothes of righteousness for sinners.

19:25–27. In stark contrast with the cruelty and indifference of the soldiers, a group of four women watched with love and grief. The anguish of Jesus’ **mother** fulfilled a prophecy of Simeon: “A sword will pierce your own soul too” (Luke 2:35). Seeing her sorrow **Jesus** honored **His mother** by consigning her into the care of John, **the** beloved **disciple**. His brothers and sisters being in Galilee, were not in a position to care for or comfort her. The words of Jesus to Mary and the beloved disciple were His third saying from the cross (the first one recorded by John). In the other Gospels Jesus had already given a respite to the Roman executioners (Luke 23:34) and a pardon to one thief (Luke 23:42–43).

19:28–29. Jesus’ fourth of seven sayings from the cross, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” is not recorded by John (cf. Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34). John recorded the fifth saying, **I am thirsty**. The wording in John 19:28 indicated that Jesus was fully conscious and was aware of fulfilling the details of prophecies (Pss. 42:1–2; 63:1). The paradox of the One who is the Water of life (John 4:14; 7:38–39) dying in thirst is striking. Giving Him **wine vinegar**, a sour wine, fulfilled Psalm 69:21. Putting the vinegar-soaked **sponge** on the end of a **hyssop plant** stalk seems odd. Perhaps this detail points to Jesus dying as the true Lamb at Passover, for hyssop was used in the Passover ceremonies (cf. Ex. 12:22).

19:30. The sixth word or saying that **Jesus** spoke from the cross was the single Greek word *tetelestai* which means **It is finished**. Papyri receipts for taxes have been recovered with the word *tetelestai* written across them, meaning “paid in full.” This word on Jesus’ lips was significant. When He said, “It is finished” (not “I am finished”), He meant His redemptive work was completed. He had been made sin for people (2 Cor. 5:21) and had suffered the penalty of God’s justice which sin deserved. Even in the moment of His death, Jesus remained the One who gave up His life (cf. John 10:11, 14, 17–18). **He bowed His head** (giving His seventh saying, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit” [Luke 23:46]) **and** then dismissed **His spirit**. This differs from the normal process in death by crucifixion in which the life-spirit would ebb away and then the head would slump forward.

E. The burial (19:31–42).

19:31–32. In the only known archeological find of a crucifixion, which came to light in 1968, the skeletal remains revealed that the lower legs had been shattered by a single blow. This illustrates

this passage. **Because** of the Law (Deut. 21:22–23) a body was not to remain exposed on a tree (or cross) overnight and certainly not on a **Sabbath**. A person so executed was under God’s curse and his body if left exposed would defile the land (cf. Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:13).

The smashing of the lower leg bones was called in Latin the *crurifragium*. This caused death to occur fairly quickly by shock, loss of blood, and inability to breathe (the chest cavity would bear the pressure of the body’s weight after the legs were broken). Without this procedure, a person could live for many hours or even days. This *crurifragium* was done to the two thieves on each side of Jesus.

19:33–34. **Jesus** had **already** died so **His legs** were not broken. **Instead**, just to make sure, a soldier **pierced Jesus’ side with a spear**. The result was **a sudden flow of blood and water**. This flow has been interpreted in various ways. Some have seen this as evidence that Jesus died of a broken heart so that His pericardium was full of blood and serum. Others see a symbolic or sacramental significance of the stream which heals people. More likely, it indicates that Jesus was a real human who died a real death. Possibly the spear struck the stomach and the heart, which accounted for the flow. The one who saw this (v. 35) saw saving significance in the sign. At the time of the writing of this Gospel, Gnosticism and Docetism were current problems. These ideologies denied the reality of the Incarnation and of His death. But the blood and water are firm answers against those heresies.

19:35–37. This section relates the **testimony** of the eyewitness who is also most probably the writer of this Gospel, John the disciple (cf. 13:23; 21:20–24). The value of His **testimony is** an important claim of **truth**, given so that others may grasp the facts and discern their significance (cf. 20:31). John explained that soldiers not administering the *crurifragium* to Jesus but simply piercing His side **fulfilled** two specific prophecies or types. Jesus, as the true Passover Lamb, did not have any **of His bones ... broken** (Ex. 12:46; Num. 9:12; Ps. 34:20) and people in the future **will look on the pierced** One (Zech. 12:10; cf. Rev. 1:7).

19:38–39. **Joseph of Arimathea** was rich (Matt. 27:57) and was waiting for the kingdom (Mark 15:43). (Arimathea was about 20 miles northwest of Jerusalem.) Though a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish council, he was “a good and upright man who had not consented to their decision” (Luke 23:50–51). After a crucifixion the Romans usually left the dead body to the beasts of prey. This lack of proper burial was the final humiliation in a crucifixion. But Jews removed exposed bodies (cf. comments on John 19:31–32).

Joseph got **permission** to bury Jesus’ **body**. He along with another influential man (**Nicodemus**; cf. 3:1; 7:51) made the necessary arrangements. **About 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes** was an extensive amount of spices, used in preparing the body for burial. Perhaps Nicodemus now understood the teaching of Jesus that He would be lifted up and that a man could look in faith to Him and live (cf. 3:14). Both men who had been secret disciples now became manifest.

19:40–42. **Because it was** almost **the Sabbath** (which began at sundown) the burial had to take place quickly. **Jewish burial customs** did not involve mummification or embalming, which took out the blood and body organs. Their normal process was to wash a body and cover it with cloth and aromatic oils or **spices**. The NIV translation of *othoniois* as **strips of linen** has some support (cf. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957, p. 558).

However, some Roman Catholic scholars argue for the translation “cloth wrappings” since Matthew refers to a linen cloth in which Jesus’ body was wrapped (Matt. 27:59, *sindōn*). Recent discussion on the Shroud of Turin has raised considerable controversy. The translation “strips of linen” would argue against the authenticity of the shroud. But at this time, because of the uncertainties of Jewish burial practices, the meaning of *othoniois*, and the Shroud of Turin, dogmatism should be avoided. Jesus’ body was placed in **a new tomb** in **a private garden**, not in a cemetery. Matthew wrote that this was Joseph’s “own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock” (Matt. 27:60). Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah, the suffering Servant, though despised and rejected by men, would be with the rich in His death (Isa. 53:9).

The burial of Jesus is part of the gospel (“He was buried,” 1 Cor. 15:4). Its significance lies in the fact that it was the completion of Jesus’ suffering and humiliation. It also pointed up the reality of His death and set the stage for His coming bodily resurrection. Also, in Jesus’ burial He identified with believers who will die and be buried.

Joseph and Nicodemus’ act of love and respect for the body of Jesus was for them dangerous, costly, and without any personal gain. The service of Christians for their living Lord should be equally courageous and sacrificial, for their labor is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58).

White, J. E. (1998). *John*. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (pp. 488-489). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

It Is Finished (19:28–37)

The actual death of Jesus was preceded with words fitting the narrative John had written: “It is finished” (19:30). What was finished? The mission of Jesus, the Son of God, to die a substitutionary death for sinful persons. As a result of His death on our behalf, our sin was atoned for, and eternal life through Jesus became attainable through trusting faith.

With these final words Jesus “bowed his head and gave up his spirit” (19:30). This rather unusual way of describing someone’s death intimates that Jesus died voluntarily as an act of the will. After the death of Jesus, a soldier pierced His side, “bringing a sudden flow of blood and water” (19:34). From a medical standpoint the mix of blood and water from the spear’s thrust was the result of piercing of the sac that surrounds the heart (the pericardium) as well as the heart itself. The author of the Gospel, the apostle John, then offered his testimony that he was a witness to this event and that even to the final moment every detail fulfilled the prophecies concerning the Messiah (19:35–37; see Exod. 12:46; Num. 9:12; Ps. 34:20; Zech. 12:10).

The Burial (19:38–42)

After the death of Jesus, most of the disciples were nowhere to be found, yet at that moment two individuals who had previously been afraid to make their allegiance known came boldly forward to care for the body of Christ. These two were Nicodemus (John 3) and Joseph of Arimathea, a rich member of the Sanhedrin who had not agreed to the condemnation of Jesus (Matt. 27:57; Luke 23:51). Jesus was laid in a tomb following a traditional Jewish preparation.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). John 19:17-42. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.