

The Crucifixion and Death of the Lord Jesus

John 19:28-37

John 19:28-37: - *"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." 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," ³⁷ and, as another Scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced."

Background Notes

In verse 28, the words "after this" or "later" referred to the three hours of darkness when the Lord was suffering under the judgment of God, suffering the penalty for our sins. After this, he said, *"I am thirsty."* This statement was made in fulfillment of two Messianic Psalms, Psalm 22 and Psalm 69. Psalm 22:15: *"My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death."* Psalm 69:21: *"They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst."*

The sour wine or vinegar that the Lord received is not to be confused with the wine and gall mixture that He was offered earlier: *"There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it"* (Matthew 27:34). The mixture of wine and gall was meant to relieve pain, and the Lord refused to drink it. The Lord suffered for our sins in full consciousness, with an unclouded mind.

Verse 31 refers to the day that the Lord died as the "Preparation Day." That is, it was the day before the Sabbath. Also in verse 31 we see that the Sabbath on the following day was called a "high day," or "special Sabbath," because it was the Sabbath of Passover. *"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."* (See also Mark 15:42.)

The Jewish leaders didn't want the bodies left on the cross overnight, because the bodies would "defile" or "desecrate" the land. According to the Jewish Law, *"If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse. You must not desecrate the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance"* (Deuteronomy 21:22-23). The Jewish religious leaders were meticulous when it came to keeping the letter of the Law. Little did they realize that the Messiah that they rejected had just fulfilled the Law when He took the curse of sin upon Himself.

The Jewish leaders asked Pilate to order the Lord's legs to be broken, because that was the Roman practice to hasten death by crucifixion. A crucified person could not lift himself up to breathe if his legs were broken, and thus he would quickly suffocate. However, the soldiers didn't break the Lord's legs because they saw that He was already dead. Instead, to be sure He was dead, one of the soldiers pierced His side with a Roman spear. Both of these actions by the Roman soldiers were in line with the Old Testament prophetic Scriptures.

Exodus 12:46 stated that the bones of the Passover lamb were not to be broken. Our Lord was the true Passover Lamb. The Lord Jesus died at the time the lambs were being sacrificed in preparation for Passover feast. Jesus was the Lamb of God. I Corinthians 5:7 says, *"Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed."*

The other Old Testament Scripture mentioned here is Zechariah 12:10 - *"And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son."*

The emphasis in the mention of this prophecy, is on the word *"pierced."* The Zechariah 12 prophecy will be fulfilled when the Lord returns, and the believing Jews of that day will look on their Messiah whom they once rejected. He is the One who was pierced, and that piercing took place at the crucifixion. Thus this Scripture was quoted here, even though it will not be fulfilled until the Lord returns.

One more background note: we believe that John apostle referred to himself in verse 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."* Here John was emphasizing that he was an eyewitness, and that his testimony was true. (Read also John 21:24 in this connection.)

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. False doctrine is refuted by the *"It is finished"* of John 19:30.

"When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."

What did the Lord mean when He said, *"It is finished"*? Notice that He didn't say, "I am finished." No – He cried out **"It is finished."** This was not a cry of relief, and it was not a cry of failure. It was a cry of **victory!** We know from the other Gospels that these words were spoken a loud, triumphant shout: ***"It is finished!"***

And after shouting those words, then the Lord bowed His head and died. The Lord gave up His spirit. It was voluntary. He didn't drop His head in involuntary death. No, He bowed His head, and He gave up His spirit.

In that day, the statement "It is finished" meant to "the debt is paid in full." This same statement in Greek has been found written across ancient receipts when they had been fully paid. In other words, the Lord had finished paying the penalty for sin - it was work, and it was finished.

The debt we owed was fully paid. Any theory of atonement or any interpretation of the cross of Christ does not include this truth - the truth that Jesus died to pay the penalty for sin - is false doctrine. Furthermore, any teaching that refuses to recognize that the work of Jesus Christ on the cross for sin is finished is false doctrine.

You may know people who think and even teach that Christ's sacrifice was not sufficient to atone for sin. They teach and believe that we also have to work our way to Heaven by doing "good works." They believe that somehow *we must help pay the penalty* for our sins - and that is false doctrine!

The work of Christ to atone for sin is over. The debt is paid! **"It is finished!"** False doctrine is refuted by the *"it is finished"* of John 19:30.

2. False doctrine is refuted by the **"blood and water"** of John 19:34.

John 19:34: *"Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water."*

There was an early Christian heresy, known as Docetism. This heresy taught that Jesus Christ didn't actually become flesh and blood. It taught that He only "appeared" to be human. The Docetists denied the genuine humanity of our Lord. Therefore they denied the death of Christ, because He couldn't die if He wasn't truly human, and only "appeared to be a man."

Well, that false doctrine is refuted by verse 34. When the Roman soldier pierced the side of the Lord Jesus Christ, the blood and water that flowed out of the wound proved that Jesus Christ was **fully human**, and that He **really died**.

John may actually have had the Docetists in mind when He wrote verse 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."* The early Christian heresy of Docetism had already developed by the time John wrote his Gospel in about 85AD.

The flow of blood and water may indicate that the Roman spear pierced through the sac that surrounds the heart - thus the mention of "water" would be explained. We can't be sure. The important facts from this verse are that **our Lord was fully human**, and that **He really died**. False doctrine is refuted by the "blood and water" of John 19:34.

Practical Application

Let's take a balanced approach to the spiritualization of Scripture.

What do we mean by "spiritualization of Scripture"? Spiritualizing Scripture means to go beyond the literal, historical meaning of a text, and see a "spiritual picture" meaning in that text – in addition to the literal meaning.

Spiritualization of certain Scripture texts and passages is certainly legitimate. Sometimes the Bible itself tells us so! The Old Testament "types" are examples of spiritual pictures. From Hebrews 11 tells us that Abraham sacrificing Isaac in Genesis 22 was a *type* -a spiritual picture of God the Father sacrificing His beloved Son. In fact, we know from Hebrews 11:19 that when Isaac was restored to Abraham, this too was a *type* – a spiritual picture of the resurrection of Christ. But is the wood that Isaac carried to the place of sacrifice a spiritual picture of the cross? What about the thicket that held the ram? Is that a spiritual picture of the crown of thorns? Some people think so - but we can't be sure. That might be pushing the spiritual picture too far!

Let's be careful to take a **balanced approach to the spiritualization of Scripture**. We want to recognize the valuable spiritual pictures that God has intended for us throughout His Word, but we must be careful not to *over-spiritualize* as we seek out pictures.

Verse 34 mentioned the blood and water that flowed from the Lord's side. We have already discussed that the main idea here is that Jesus Christ was really human, and He really died. However, is there any symbolism or spiritual meaning to the blood and water mentioned here?

Throughout Church history, all kinds of suggestions have been made. Some people have suggested that the water and blood are symbolic of baptism and the Lord's Supper. I think that is *over-spiritualization*. Others have seen a link between the water and blood in John 19 with the water and blood of 1 John 5:6-8: *"This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement."* That may be related - but it may also be pushing spiritualization too far.

Still others have seen the blood as a symbol of atonement and the water a symbol of cleansing. As I see it, that particular spiritualization of "the water and blood" may indeed be a divinely intended picture. After all, in the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, blood and water stood for atonement and cleansing. Certainly the death of Christ is the basis of atonement for our sin, and it is the basis for cleansing from the defiling aspects of sin. So in the sacrificial system of the Old Testament we may indeed have a divinely intended symbolism in the blood and water that flood from Christ's side.

However, we must be careful not to read too much spiritualization into Scripture. Unfortunately, *over-spiritualization* takes place all too often, and some Christians even make a habit of looking for a picture in almost every text. They *over-spiritualize* passages throughout the Bible. Unfortunately, *over-spiritualization* has been practiced throughout the centuries since the Bible was written.

Let's be careful to interpret God's Word properly! Let's take a balanced approach to the spiritualization of Scripture!