



TALKS FOR GROWING CHRISTIANS TRANSCRIPT

John 19: 28-37: The Crucifixion and Death of the Lord 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." 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 we read the words "after this," or "later." The "after this" time period would be those three hours of darkness when the Lord was suffering under the judgment of God, suffering the payment for our sins. After this, he said, "I thirst." This was 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 took is not to be confused with the wine and gall mixture that He was offered earlier as a pain killer, that He refused. Matthew 27:34 tells us that the Lord refused the wine and gall mixture: *"There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it."* The Lord suffered for our sins in full consciousness, with unclouded mind.

The day that the Lord died is referred to as the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath. *"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 Jews didn't want the bodies left on the cross overnight, because they would "defile the land," according to the Jewish Law. Deuteronomy 21:22-23: *"If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, ²³ 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." The Jews were meticulous when it came to the Law. Little did they realize that the Messiah that they rejected had just taken the curse of sin upon Himself. 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.

The Jews asked Pilate for the Lord's legs to be broken because that was the practice by the Romans to hasten death by crucifixion. A person being crucified 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, 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 Scriptures.

In Exodus 12:46 we read that the bones of the passover lamb were not to be broken; our Lord was the true Passover Lamb. He died at the time when the lambs were being killed for the Passover; 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." This prophecy in Zechariah 12 will be fulfilled when the Lord returns, and the believing Jews of that day will look on their Messiah that they once rejected. He will be the one who was pierced, and that piercing took place at the crucifixion. Thus this Scripture is quoted here, even though it will not be fulfilled until the Lord returns.

One more background note! We believe that John was referring 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 is 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" -- but "**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 this was a loud cry: "It is finished!" And 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.

The statement "It is finished" means to "pay a debt in full." In fact, this same statement in Greek has been found written across ancient receipts that have been discovered. In other words, the Lord had finished the work of paying the penalty for sin -- that 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 doesn't 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 Christ's work 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 you have to work your way to heaven by good works -- that somehow we must help pay the penalty for our sins. That is false doctrine! The work of Christ to atone for sin is over. The penalty 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, once again, *"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, but that He only "appeared to be a man." 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 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."* Remember, John wrote in about 85AD, and by this time this early Christian heresy, Docetism, had developed.

The flow of blood and water here may indicate that the Roman spear pierced through the sac that surrounds the heart -- thus the water would be explained. We can't be sure. The important facts from this verse are that **our Lord was fully human and 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"? To spiritualize Scripture means to give a text a "spiritual picture" meaning.

Now there is certainly legitimate spiritualization of certain Scripture texts and passages. The Old Testament "types" are examples of spiritual pictures. From Hebrews 11, for example, we know that Abraham sacrificing Isaac in Genesis 22 is a type (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, it was a type (spiritual picture) of the resurrection of Christ. But what about the wood that Isaac carried to the place of sacrifice? Is that a spiritual picture of the cross? What about the thicket that held the ram? Is that a spiritual picture of the crown of thorns? We can't be sure. Maybe that would be pushing the spiritual picture too far.

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

Here in verse 34 we read of the blood and water that flowed from Christ's side. We have already seen that the main idea here is that Christ was really human, and He really died. However, is there any symbolism or spiritual meaning to the blood and water mentioned here? Down through 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. ⁷For there are three that testify: ⁸ the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement."* Again, maybe so, but that 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 divinely intended. 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 do need to be careful that we don't read too much spiritualization into Scripture. Unfortunately, that takes place all too often -- throughout the Bible and throughout the centuries since the Bible was written. Let's take a balanced approach to the spiritualization of Scripture!