

The Moment After Death

(John 19:31-42)

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Introduction

The world is full of people who have a phobia, which is defined as an anxiety disorder over excessive fear of an object or situation.

According to one website the most common phobia is arachnophobia, the fear of spiders.

Followed closely by a fear of snakes, fear of heights, fear of flying, and fear of dogs.

In fact, the website went on to list the top 10 most common phobias, but missing from the list was thanatophobia.

Thanatophobia is an extreme fear of death dying, but the reason it doesn't make a top 10 list of phobias is that no one knows how many people have it.

In a sense, everyone grapples with death.

How will I die?

When will I die?

What will happen after I die?

And those questions are often the cause of that fear.

We are people who want control at any cost, but the reality is that the end of our lives is completely out of our control.

However that was not the case for Jesus.

As we have in John 19, he was fully in control in how He was arrested, how he was put on trial, how he was crucified, in how he died...

And today we will see that Jesus was fully in control in the moments after He died and in his burial.

Listen to John 10:17-18..

17 For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. 18 No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.”

We have read those words and I have preached those words to you, but that is an amazing statement.

Jesus is the only one who ever willed Himself to die and then willed Himself back to life.

No one in human history could ever say those words, and no one else in human history will ever those words.

If we say anything about our death, it is that we have no authority over it at all.

In fact, it has authority over us.

Now why does this matter?

It matters because it is further proof of the deity of Christ.

Remember, John wrote to convince his readers that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

And if there was any objection to Jesus as the Son of God, it may have come from the fact that He died such a cruel death.

Unbelievers still question how Jesus being the Son of God could die, but the reality is that the display of his authority in the manner that he died and was buried will be further proof of Who He is.

So, let's look at the authority that Jesus displayed in the moments after his death and then in his burial...

Let's begin with the moments right after death in verses
31-37..

We will call this...

I. Pierced but Not Broken (31-37)

As we arrive at verse 31, Jesus is dead.

John 19:30 says this..

30 Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.

It is 3 pm on a Friday outside of the city of Jerusalem.

It has been dark for the past 3 hours, starting at noon.

The physical darkness was a result of the spiritual darkness of the Son of God paying for the sins of all who would believe in Him.

But that is not all.

According to Matthew 28:51 an earthquake has just shaken the entire planet.

Tombs have been opened of believers, and they have been raised to life.

The temple veil separating the Holy place from the Holy of Holies has been torn in two from top to bottom.

But now as Jesus gives up His Spirit and dies, the darkness ends because the wrath is over.

Jesus has accomplished his mission.

He has paid the sin debt for those who believe in Him.

He has laid down his life for the sheep.

But he doesn't lay down His authority.

Even as his lifeless body hangs on the cross, his limitless authority is still operating..

Look at verse 31..

31 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. 32 So the soldiers came, and broke the legs of the first man and of the other who was crucified with Him; 33 but coming to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. 34 But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. 35 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. 36 For these things came to pass to fulfill the Scripture, "Not a bone of

Him shall be [p]broken.” 37 And again another Scripture says, “They shall look on Him whom they pierced.”

Every Friday was an important day to any Jew because it was day that preceded the Saturday Sabbath.

And Sabbath began at sundown on Friday and ran to sundown on Saturday, so Jews were always busy on Fridays getting work done in preparation for Saturday rest.

Well, to add to the business of this Friday, it was also Passover Friday.

At sundown, Passover meals would be eaten to begin the week long spring festival of the Jews.

So everything had to be finished by sundown on Friday because this Saturday would be a extra spacial Sabbath because it conceded with Passover.

But not only would all work have to be done, all forms of defilement would have to be gone by Saturday as well.

And that certainly included the 3 bodies hanging on crosses outside the city.

Listne to ***Deuteronomy 21:22-23.***

22 “If a man has committed a sin worthy of death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, 23 his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is [s]accursed of God), so that you do not defile your land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance.

So it very important to the Jews to get these bodies down.

Now, here’s the problem.

Crucifixion could take all day or even a few days, depending on the strength of the victim.

It was not meant to be an immediate death.

The purpose of the cross was agony for the victim, and some victims suffered for days by lifting themselves up to breath every so often.

And this could go for days for physically fit criminals.

So the way to hasten death is to break their leg bones, specifically their femurs.

That way, they couldn’t lift themselves to take a breath and they suffocated under their own weight.

So in verse 31, the Jews ask Pilate to have their legs broken so that they would die and could be taken down before Sabbath.

Now how ironic is this?

The Jews do not want to dishonor God by having a man hang on a cross on their Sabbath Passover.

But they had no problem ordering the Romans to murder that man by hanging him on the same cross.

Talk about missing the forest for the trees..

It is so sad when their law overshadows the God who gave the law.

But this is what religious people do.

They stress the letter of the law but ignore the spirit of the law.

Well, Pilate wants to appease them, so he orders the soldiers to go and break their legs to hasten their deaths.

In verse 32, the soldiers break the legs of the 2 thieves beside Jesus, and one of them heads to heaven shortly after as Jesus had promised him.

But when these soldiers come to Jesus, they realize that he is already dead.

Now, some unbelievers through the years have said that Jesus was simply unconscious here and never died.

He was simply revived as he was taken down and laid in the coolness of the tomb.

But what they forget is that these soldiers were experts in death.

They specialized in crucifixions.

They were around death all the time.

Saw when verse 33 says that they saw he was already dead, it is completely true.

As a result, they do not need to break his legs.

Now why is Jesus already dead?

#1 - He knew that He had accomplished all HE needed to accomplish to secure forgiveness for His people.

#2 - He knew that Scripture said not a bone of his body would be broken.

Look down to verse 36 for a moment..

***36 For these things came to pass to fulfill the Scripture,
“Not a bone of Him shall be [p]broken.”***

Psalm 34:20 says this..

***20
He keeps all his bones,
Not one of them is broken.***

Along with that verse, there is also Exodus 12, which gave the instructions for the original Passover Lamb in Egypt.

Exodus 12:46-47

46 It is to be eaten in a single house; you are not to bring forth any of the flesh outside of the house, nor are you to break any bone of it. 47 All the congregation of Israel are to [an]celebrate this.

Clearly, Psalm 34:20 was a prophecy of the cross that predicted no broken bones for Jesus, since John quoted it here.

But that is not the only prophecy fulfilled in the moments after Jesus died..

Look at verse 37...

37 And again another Scripture says, “They shall look on Him whom they pierced.”

After the soldiers arrive and notice that Jesus is dead, they push a spear into his side..

But why?

Well, most likely, they are confused about his sudden death.

It is likely that no one who looked at healthy and strong as Jesus ever died this early into a crucifixion.

So the soldiers are a little confused.

It is likely that confusion caused them to thrust a spear into his side.

Maybe they were confirming his death, since such an action would surely draw a reaction from someone still alive.

However, Jesus was dead, so now physical reaction.

But there was an interesting thing that happened..

Blood and water came out.

Now, much has been said here, but let me offer you what I think this means.

Clearly, the text doesn't comment on this, but physiologically blood and water coming out of someone's side could mean a number of things.

But a possibility is the idea of a heart that has burst.

In that case, the blood flowing from a burst heart would mix with the clear fluid surrounding the heart, and blood and water would flow from the side as John describes.

I am not a doctor, but I was fascinated by this explanation, and if you would like to read more about this possibility of Jesus dying from a broken heart of sorts, I can give you some resources.

But it is quite likely that the blood and water from the heart of Christ was the result of a heart that burst.

Look, how would bearing the weight of sin for all believers of all time affect your heart? or my heart?

I cannot begin to imagine the physical anguish and agony of such a punishment, much less the spiritual anguish.

And all that took a toll on the body of Christ to the point that his heart ruptured.

So when he was pierced, a mixture of blood and water poured from his side.

As a result of that, the soldiers confirm what they already suspected.

Jesus is dead.

But the piercing accomplished more than that.

Ultimately, the piercing fulfilled Scripture.

In this passage, God is speaking of a day in the future where Israel realizes its sin in crucifying their Messiah..

Zechariah 12:10

10 “I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, [h]the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.

In the plan of God, these soldiers had to take that spear and pierce Jesus' side so that His word would be fulfilled.

Though the physical body of Christ was broken, God's word would not be.

So the soldiers pierce the side of Jesus' body to verify his death, but more importantly they pierce Jesus' body to demonstrate the sovereignty of God even in the moments after the death of Christ.

Now this brings to Jesus' burial in verse 38-42..

We will call this..

II. Buried But Not Done (38-42)

Verse 38..

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

Once it was clear that Jesus was dead, God continued to fulfill Scripture by sending Joseph of Arimathea to take away His body.

Now, John doesn't give us the Scripture here, but Isaiah wrote about Joseph in Isaiah 53:9..

9

***His grave was assigned with wicked men,
Yet He was with a rich man in His death,
Because He had done no violence,
Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.***

In one of the most important chapters in the OT, Isaiah is given a picture of the death of Messiah 700 years before Jesus is crucified.

And verse 9 even includes Jospheh of Arimathea, who according to Matthew's gospel was a very rich man.

In fact, Jospheh was a member of the Jewish ruling council.

Sadly as a result of his position in Judaism, Joseph had not made a public profession of Jesus as Messiah.

However, the murder of Jesus which was made possible by his fellow members of the council prompts Jospheh to go public.

So Mark tells us that Joseph gathered up the courage and goes before Pilate to ask for Jesus' body.

This is perfect, since Pilate is under pressure from the Jews to get it off the cross before sundown.

Pilate grants permission to Joseph and the prophecy of Jesus being with a rich man in his death is fulfilled.

However, Joseph has help in removing Jesus body from the cross as another prominent member of Judaism shows up.

Nicodemus was THE teacher in Israel joins Joseph at the cross to remove Jesus's body.

The two men who were too afraid to associate with Jesus when he was alive are now joined together in his death.

And the picture of two prominent Jewish leaders handling the body of Christ is astounding.

Not only was a dead body a source of great defilement.

It was the body of someone who had been the enemy of the Jews from the beginning.

Yet, these men were no longer Jews.

They now belonged to Christ and they were going to make sure that he had a proper burial.

I don't want to chase a rabbit too far or offer something that isn't in the text, but can you imagine handling the body of Christ.

Removing the nails from his hands and feet.

Taking off the crown of thorns.

Cleaning the blood from his body, and then wrapping it in linens as was the customary Jewish burial.

I can't imagine the thoughts that ran through Joseph's and Nicodemus' mind.

Hands that had healed thousands were now in their hands.

The face that has been glowed at the transfiguration was now lifeless before them.

The feet that had walked the roads of Israel preaching the good news of the gospel were now being wrapped by these Jewish leaders.

Now the Jews would wrap a layer and put spices.

Then wrap another layer and add more spices.

And the point was to conceal the smell of death.

Nicodemus brought a hundred pounds of spices, which is an extraordinary amount that was only used when a Jewish king died.

And so Jesus being the King of kings gets a royal burial from these 2 men.

And all of this was done in a matter of hours.

Jesus would need to be in the tomb on Friday before sundown to please the Jews, but more than that, Jesus would need to be in tomb on Friday because he said that he would rise after 3 days.

Having in the tomb on Friday before sundown would count as day 1.

Saturday would count as day 2, and he would rise on Sunday morning which would be day 3.

So these men work out of love for Christ, but they work under the sovereign hand of God fulfilling his plan and word.

And to make it easier on them, there was a grave nearby the cross that had never been used.

It belonged to Joseph who had purchased previously never knowing that it would be used for the burial of His Savior.

So these men labored in love for Christ and prepared Jesus' body and then placed it in the tomb.

What a picture of love and care, and I am sure a little regret for not having made a public profession of Christ while He was still alive.

Yet, these men are great examples of better late than never in terms of coming to Christ.

And they also provide a great picture of what it means to truly love Christ.

Now, where do apply these truths in our lives?

Conclusion

#1 - The Word of God is undefeated.

The assault on the truth of Scripture is outrageous today.

People twisting Scripture.

People denying Scripture.

People ignoring Scripture.

People mocking Scripture.

And this is not just unbelievers doing it, there are people calling themselves Christians doing it at an alarming rate in the church.

It is shocking.

It is upsetting.

It is aggravating.

But it is also growing.

I will simply say this.

If God said 700 years ago that Jesus would be pierced and with a rich man in his death, and then 700 years later those prophecies are fulfilled, why in the world would we dare question anything He said?

If God said that they would cast lots for his clothes and not break one of his bones, and both happen with exact accuracy, why do we question the accuracy of Scripture now?

It is the most irrational practice of the Christian to believe what the word says about salvation but to deny it in other places in the Bible.

Let me assure you church.

The Bible is entirely true.

It is entirely the Word of God.

It is entirely reliable and it is entirely sufficient.

And since that is the case, why are you reading and studying and obeying it more?

Why aren't you using it and defending it and sharing it more?

To be called a Bible thumper is a compliment.

#2 - The authority of Christ in undeniable.

If we have learned anything about the arrest and crucifixion of Christ, it is that Jesus is fully in control of it all.

Even after HE has bowed his head and given up His spirit, Christ is still fully in charge.

Though his life is gone, His power is not.

He is very much alive and in control even moments after His death.

This is is the authority of Christ.

Authoritative in how He came into the world.

Authoritative as a young man.

Authoritative in ministry.

Authoritative in his arrest.

Authoritative in his trials.

Authoritative in his crucifixion.

Authoritative in his death.

And now authoritative moments after his death.

And I can assure you that Jesus holds that same authority as we sit here this morning.

He is the King of kings, the Lord of lords, and the Authority of all authorities.

The question in life is not “does Jesus really have that much authority?”

I can assure you that He does.

So, the question in life is will you acknowledge and submit that authority?

Joseph and Nicodemus acknowledged that authority and submitted to it.

And so have many others.

What prevents you from submitting to it?

Are you concerned that your life will have to change?

Well it will.

Are you concerned what people may say?

Because they will.

I am not here to frighten you this morning but I am here to say this..

You will submit to the authority of Christ eventually.

Let me end where I began..

Do you have a fear of death?

If you are without Christ, you should because you will see the authority of Christ moments after you die.

The same authority that He showed over the moments after His death, Jesus will also demonstrate in the moments after your death.

My prayer is that you submit to Christ's authority today by coming to Him in repenting of sin and trusting alone in Him.

If you don't know what that means, feel free to talk to me after church this morning.

Let us pray.

