

Lesson 26 Notes

John 19:31-42

Focus Verse

"These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: 'Not one of his bones will be broken,' and, as another scripture says, 'They will look on the one they have pierced.'" (John 19:36-37)

Outline

- The Reality of Jesus's Death – John 19:31-37
- The Royalty of Jesus's Burial – John 19:38-42

Engage

We often struggle as we read Scripture's account of Jesus's torturous agony on the cross. Our natural inclination is to scurry to the narrative of His victorious resurrection. However, the time between the cross and empty tomb presents precious moments to pause and reflect. **This week's lesson allows us to catch our breath and attempt to grasp the enormity of Jesus's sacrifice.** The depth of God's sovereignty and grace, the cost of Jesus's sacrifice, and God's profound love shine through these 12 verses.

Jesus's persecutors subjected humanity's Savior to utter indignity, piercing His injured body to validate His death. In notable contrast, Jesus's friends courageously secured, lovingly tended, and honorably anointed Jesus's battered body. With heavenly shouts of victory over death on the horizon, we come to this quiet Sabbath eve to reflect and worship. The scene surrounding Jesus's death positions us to ponder the incalculable value of His victory.

Jesus's burial prepares us for His glorious resurrection.

✦ The Reality of Jesus's Death – 19:31-37

By design, crucifixion on a Roman cross brought a slow and torturous death. The suffocation, exposure, and blood loss causing death could take up to two days or even much longer. Rather than bury the executed, the Romans often left bodies hanging publicly to communicate contempt over those they ruled and to warn against rebellion. The bodies of the executed were sometimes thrown to the ground for the vultures.

The sinless Son of God took sin's curse for us on a cruel cross. The Apostle Paul wrote, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us."¹ Jesus bore disgrace and

1. Curse for us: Galatians 3:10-13

shame He did not deserve, out of His great love for humanity. The details of Jesus's actual death present corroborating evidence that validates His resurrection.

The Leaders' Request – 19:31

The law of Moses forbade leaving a body "hanging on the pole" overnight.² God's curse would be upon anyone executed this way. To leave a body impaled, crucified, or hanging overnight desecrated the land. God's provision of this law foreshadowed His Son's death on a Roman cross.³

In Israel, sunset marked the end of one day and the beginning of the next.⁴ **The Passover Sabbath began at sundown on the day of Jesus's crucifixion.** The Jewish leaders anxiously and urgently wanted the crucified men to die quickly, but this was not out of compassion. They wanted the men's bodies removed before the holy day began.

To hasten the deaths of Jesus and the two men alongside Him, the Jewish leaders asked Pilate to order the soldiers to break the legs of the crucified men. This cruel practice left the men unable to push themselves up to breathe. In such a state, death by suffocation would quickly follow. **With the corpses out of sight, the leaders could celebrate Passover with a clear conscience.** Their concern for compliance with the external formalities overshadowed the callousness of their request.

The Soldiers' Task – 19:32-33

The Roman soldiers probably welcomed the order to break the prisoners' legs. The sooner the prisoners died, the earlier their gruesome duty ended. This responsibility could even be considered an act of mercy, hastening the death and ending the cruel suffering of the cross. These experienced executioners approached the three crosses, prepared to smash the legs of the condemned men. After breaking the legs of the two thieves, they approached the center cross. **To the soldiers' surprise, they discovered Jesus had already died, so they did not break His legs.**

Jesus's Pierced Side – 19:34

Seeking assurance of Jesus's death, the soldiers pierced Jesus's side with a spear. John records an extraordinary physical phenomenon when one of the soldiers pierced Jesus's side after His death. **A stream of blood and water flowed from the Savior's lifeless body.**

Several possible explanations for the blood and water have been suggested:

- This represents a rare but natural event resulting from a ruptured heart. The blood would mix with normally clear fluid surrounding the heart.
- This signifies a miracle—the supernatural preservation of Jesus's body to prevent decay. The flow of blood and water visibly revealed God's intervention.
- Many interpret the blood and water spiritually and symbolically.

2. **Desecration:** Deuteronomy 21:22-23

3. **Plan for the cross:** Acts 2:23-24

4. **Marking of a day:** Genesis 1:5; Leviticus 23:32

The Significance of Blood and Water in Scripture

Blood

Humanity's sin results in separation from God, who is perfectly righteous, holy, and set apart from everything evil.¹ **In love and grace, God provided a substitute, His own Son, to pay the penalty our sin deserves.**

In the Old Testament, God declared to Israel, "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life."² The New Testament confirms, "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness [of sin]."³ The sacrificial system of the Old Testament pointed to Jesus, who died as the ultimate offering for sin.⁴ Animal sacrifices are no longer necessary.⁵ **Jesus's death provides reconciliation to God for all who trust in Him.**

At the Last Supper, Jesus lifted the cup and said, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."⁶ John, who wrote this Gospel, drank from that cup. Surely the significance of that night resonated deeply within his memory. John later wrote a message he longed for God's people to know: "The blood of Jesus ... purifies us from all sin."⁷ As an elderly apostle imprisoned on the Greek island of Patmos, John declared the truth that sustained him: **Jesus "loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood."**⁸

Water

Jesus said the water He gives to believers is "a spring ... welling up to eternal life."⁹ He promised, "Whoever believes in me, ... rivers of living water will flow from within them. By this he meant the Spirit."¹⁰ The water that flowed from Jesus's body may point to the new spiritual life that is given to all who believe and receive Jesus.¹¹ The Bible's final chapters repeat Jesus's promise. God invites all who thirst to receive "water without cost from the spring of the water of life."¹² The Spirit and the Church repeat the invitation: "Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life."¹³

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1. **Set apart from evil:** Habakkuk 1:13
 2. **Atonement:** Leviticus 17:11
 3. **Shedding of blood:** Hebrews 9:22
 4. **Sin offering:** Romans 3:25-26; 8:1-4
 5. **Animal sacrifices not necessary:** Hebrews 10:1, 4
 6. **Last Supper:** Matthew 26:28; Luke 22:20
 7. **Purification from sin:** 1 John 1:7
 8. **Freed from sin:** Revelation 1:5
 9. **Living water:** John 4:14
 10. **Spirit:** John 7:38-39
 11. **New life:** John 1:12-13
 12. **Water of life:** Revelation 21:6
 13. **Let the thirsty come:** Revelation 22:17

Whatever explanation accounts for this detail, John wanted his readers to grasp the essential historical fact that the Lord Jesus truly died physically. **Jesus Christ was pierced for our transgressions.** His lifeblood was poured out for us.⁵

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5. **Blood poured out:** Luke 22:20

A Corroborating Witness – 19:35

John—“the man who saw it”—presented himself as another personal witness to Jesus’s death. Throughout his Gospel, John clearly and consistently expressed his desire that people recognize who Jesus is and come to faith in Him.⁶ Here, John offered his own testimony to support his highest purpose—“so that you also may believe.”

Fulfilled Prophecy – 19:36-37

John also included the corroborating witness of the Old Testament Scriptures. **The Holy Spirit inspired John to recognize God’s sovereignty over the circumstances surrounding Jesus’s death.** Earlier, the soldiers had unconsciously fulfilled prophecy by casting lots for the Lord’s clothes.⁷ Similarly, God worked through the Roman soldiers to fulfill other prophecies about Jesus’s crucifixion.

The Roman soldiers likely knew nothing about God’s requirements for the Passover lamb. Yet their treatment of Jesus fulfilled another specific detail God had ordained. **Scripture dictated that none of the Passover lamb’s bones could be broken.**⁸ David recorded a similar prophecy regarding God’s preservation of a righteous man.⁹ Amazingly, God protected His Passover Lamb¹⁰ from any broken bones. Jesus gave up His spirit at exactly the right moment so He was unmistakably dead when the soldiers approached.¹¹

God again fulfilled prophecy when the soldier callously pierced Jesus’s side to verify His death. Hundreds of years earlier, Isaiah foretold, “He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.”¹² Centuries after Isaiah, and still four centuries before Jesus’s crucifixion, the prophet Zechariah’s words also pointed to Jesus as he wrote, “They will look on me, the one they have pierced.”¹³ Zechariah clearly identified the speaker of these words as “the LORD, who stretches out the heavens, who lays the foundation of the earth.”¹⁴

God’s work continues among the people He calls to Himself. In Zechariah’s prophecy, the Lord promised He would “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.”¹⁵ At Pentecost, God fulfilled more of Zechariah’s prophecy. Peter preached of Jesus’s death and resurrection, and many “were cut to the heart and said ... ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’” About 3,000 repented and were baptized that day.¹⁶

God’s prophetic words about His Son’s atoning death apply to both Jews and Gentiles who personally receive Jesus as the Messiah and Savior. All who understand Jesus’s suffering on their behalf experience both profound joy and grateful grief. **As Zechariah foretold, through**

6. John’s consistent aim: John 20:31

7. Casting lots: Psalm 22:18; John 19:23-24

8. Unbroken bones: Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12

9. Righteous man: Psalm 34:19-20

10. Passover Lamb: 1 Corinthians 5:7

11. Jesus’s control of timing: John 10:18; 19:30

12. Pierced for our transgressions: Isaiah 53:5

13. The one pierced: Zechariah 12:10

14. Stretches out the heavens: Zechariah 12:1

15. Mourning: Zechariah 12:10

16. Baptized: Acts 2:37-38, 41

Jesus's blood God opened a "fountain" to cleanse us "from sin and impurity."¹⁷ In addition, God promises a day when the people of Israel will mourn that they pierced the Lord God, the Messiah that God sent. For all who repent and believe, Jesus's blood will wash away their sins and set them free.

Jesus will return in His glorified body—the same body that was pierced for us on the cross. On that day, every person will see Him. Those who have received His sacrifice for sin will rejoice. Revelation 1:7 promises: "'Look, he is coming with the clouds,' and 'every eye will see him, even those who pierced him'; and all peoples on earth 'will mourn because of him.'"

✦ The Royalty of Jesus's Burial – 19:38-42

Three bodies were taken down from their crosses. A new day would soon begin. However, this Passover celebration in Jerusalem incorporated so much more than an ordinary change of day. The beginning of God's promised Sabbath rest,¹⁸ the completion of the old covenant, and the blessings of a new and better covenant awaited redeemed humanity.¹⁹ **Our crucified Lord was buried between these two eras.**

The Bold Request – 19:38-39a

Jesus's enemies could no longer touch Him. **Jesus remained in the company of His friends until He ascended to heaven.**

Joseph – 19:38

One friend, a man named Joseph, came from the Judean town of Arimathea. **Joseph, known as a "good and upright man," served as a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish leadership council.**²⁰ Because no one defended Jesus at His trial, Joseph may not have been aware of the hastily called trial until it was too late. If he was present, fear silenced him.

*For all who repent
and believe, Jesus's
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set them free.*

Joseph was "waiting for the kingdom of God,"²¹ indicating his faith in God's promise to send the Messiah. **Joseph saw Jesus as God's promised Messiah and became a secret disciple of the Lord.** However, fear kept him from following Jesus openly. John wrote that "many even among the leaders" believed in Jesus but "would not openly acknowledge their faith ... for they loved human praise more than praise from God."²²

While others fled, Joseph dared to go publicly to Pilate. There was no turning back. According to the law of Moses, touching a body would render him ceremonially unclean. Joseph would have to postpone celebrating Passover.²³ There would be no way to keep his act of tender devotion to Jesus private. Joseph risked not only his position with the Sanhedrin but also excommunication from the synagogue.²⁴

17. **Cleansed:** Zechariah 13:1

18. **Sabbath rest:** Hebrews 4:1-11

19. **New covenant:** Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27; Luke 22:20

20. **Joseph's background:** Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50-51

21. **Waiting for the kingdom:** Luke 23:51

22. **Love of praise:** John 12:42-43

23. **Postponed celebration:** Numbers 9:6-13

24. **Joseph's risks:** John 9:22; 12:42

The Deadly Cost of Our Sin

The Doctrine of Humanity: Fall and Judgment

Though we struggle to consider the battered body of our sinless Savior on the cross and in the grave, His death remains necessary. Every member of humanity deserves death as the just penalty for sin. Jesus's willingness to take our place and suffer the Father's wrath makes His crucifixion an act of amazing grace and an expression of unfathomable love.

God created humanity for a pure and eternal relationship with Him. Genesis 3 records that our original parents, Adam and Eve, wanted to be like God. They disobeyed God's will and sinned against their Creator. The damage inflicted by their choice to sin impacts all of us. Everyone born since has inherited Adam and Eve's sinful nature.¹ Rather than seek God and His righteousness, we all naturally rebel against God² and hide from Him.³

Sin requires judgment, and the just penalty for sin is death.⁴ Because sin infects our internal nature, we are born destined for death. God provided the solution that makes it possible for us to escape the judgment we rightfully deserve. His Son died in our place as the perfect sacrifice that satisfied God's wrath and conquered sin and death.⁵

To refuse God's gift of salvation through His Son means bearing the judgment for our own sin, in this life and for all eternity. When we do not believe in Jesus Christ and accept His blood to cover our sin, we will experience eternal death and will be forever separated from God and all believers.

When we believe in Jesus Christ, we are born again and made alive in God.⁶ After our life on earth, we will receive a renewed body patterned after Jesus's resurrected and ascended body.⁷ God has provided the righteousness He requires by sending His Son to save us.

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1. **Inherited sinful nature:** Romans 3:23; 5:12
 2. **Rebellion against God:** Deuteronomy 9:24; Romans 3:10-12; 8:7-8
 3. **Hide from God:** Genesis 3:8
 4. **Death penalty:** Genesis 3:19
 5. **Overcome sin and death:** Romans 3:9-20; 5:12-14; 6:23
 6. **Made alive:** 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:5; Colossians 2:13
 7. **New bodies:** 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 49-57; Philippians 3:21; 1 John 3:1-3

Nicodemus – 19:39a

Nicodemus, another member of the Sanhedrin, joined Joseph. Earlier in Jesus's ministry, Nicodemus approached Jesus late at night.²⁵ He had also defended Jesus in the council.²⁶ Did Joseph and Nicodemus share quiet, guarded conversations about Jesus? Had Joseph heard about Jesus's earlier statement to Nicodemus that "no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again"?²⁷ We cannot fully understand how these two prominent Jewish leaders kept their growing faith to themselves. But now they came together in shared grief to offer Jesus the burial He deserved.

25. **Nicodemus's visit:** John 3:1-15

26. **Nicodemus's defense of Jesus:** John 7:50-52

27. **Born again:** John 3:3

The Majestic Anointing – 19:39b-40

Joseph and Nicodemus carried Jesus's lifeless body to a nearby garden and to Joseph's own new tomb.²⁸ Other Gospel accounts record that a few faithful women followed at a distance, forming their own small funeral procession for the Savior of the world.²⁹

We can only imagine the grief and pain involved in preparing Jesus's body for burial after such a brutal death. A thorny crown scarred Jesus's head. Nails pierced His hands and feet. A spear had been cruelly thrust into His side. These two "secret" disciples now took a bold stand as they attended to Jesus's wounded body with tenderness and care.

The two men followed Jewish burial customs. Joseph brought linen strips to wrap the body.³⁰ Both men, wealthy by the world's standards,³¹ honored Jesus with extravagant gifts. They gave the Lord in death what they failed to give him in His life—their best. Nicodemus brought a costly gift of about 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes. Joseph offered the unused tomb he had purchased for his own burial. These lavish gifts represented a burial fit for a king.³² These two men risked temporal loss as they performed this humble, difficult task out of love for the Lord. **Jesus's death was cruel, but His burial was regal.**

The Prepared Tomb – 19:41-42

As with Jesus's death, the circumstances of Jesus's burial also fulfilled prophecy. Isaiah prophesied: "He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death."³³

John included details that offer important insights into Jesus's burial. **Joseph and Nicodemus buried Jesus in a garden tomb.** God placed the first man and woman in the garden of Eden,³⁴ also the place where sin entered the world.³⁵ Jesus prayed and was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane.³⁶ Jesus victoriously rose from the dead and left behind the empty tomb, also situated in a garden. One day, those saved from sin will thrive in the presence of the Lord God in a garden in the New Jerusalem.³⁷

John emphasized Jesus's burial in "a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid." Typically, family members shared a tomb.³⁸ This points to another prophecy. David foretold how the Messiah's body "would never see decay."³⁹

The place of Jesus's burial was located near the place of His death. This location offered practical benefits. As sundown drew near, Joseph and Nicodemus hurried to complete the burial preparations. Convenient proximity expedited their work, as the law prohibited work on the Sabbath. God also timed the day of Jesus's death near the soon-coming day of His glorious resurrection. Sorrow and sadness loomed large, but great joy awaited nearby.

28. **Joseph's tomb:** Matthew 27:60

29. **Women followed:** Mark 15:47; Luke 23:55

30. **Burial linen:** Mark 15:46

31. **Costly gifts:** Matthew 27:57

32. **King's burial:** 2 Chronicles 16:14

33. **Rich in His death:** Isaiah 53:9

34. **Eden:** Genesis 2:10-15

35. **Sin entered in a garden:** Genesis 3:5

36. **Garden of Gethsemane:** Matthew 26:36; Mark 14:32; John 18:1

37. **God's garden in New Jerusalem:** Revelation 22:1-6

38. **Shared tomb:** Genesis 23:19; 25:9-11

39. **Never see decay:** Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:25-31

After wrapping the body, Joseph and Nicodemus laid Jesus's anointed body on a shelf in the tomb. A heavy stone was rolled over the entrance, and they left. In the quiet of dusk, on this Day of Preparation preceding the Passover, God set the stage for the burst of victory to come. **Jesus's burial prepares us for His glorious resurrection.**

✦ Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Our Lord Jesus Christ truly died on the cross. Scripture and God-appointed witnesses leave no doubt. Jesus did not merely lose consciousness or pretend to die. Jesus's executioners and John, the author of this Gospel, witnessed and confirmed His physical death. Joseph and Nicodemus fulfilled prophecy as they lavishly prepared Jesus's body for burial in Joseph's new, undefiled tomb. **The evidence of Jesus's cruel death, royal burial, and victorious resurrection prove God's love and power to accomplish His plan for His people.**

The details of Jesus's death point to the cruelty of Jesus's enemies, the kindness of His friends, and God's sovereignty. Human plots and divine plans converged when Jesus died as the ultimate Passover Lamb. Religious leaders wanted Jesus to die. Governmental officials made it happen. Soldiers drove the nails and pierced Jesus's side but did not break His legs. God ordained it all.⁴⁰ His grace resonates through every detail of Jesus's death and burial. **Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, took our place and died the death we deserve.**

Apply It

Jesus lived His perfect life for you. He satisfied the Law's requirements for you. Jesus was mistreated for you, suffered for you, died for you, and was buried for you. **To participate in Christ's life means also participating in His death and burial.**⁴¹ Have you trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation? If you are a believer, Jesus has paid the penalty and has broken sin's power over you. In glory, He will free you from sin's presence forever. With this in mind, we join Paul's proclamation of freedom: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."⁴²

If you are a believer, Jesus has paid the penalty and has broken sin's power over you. In glory, He will free you from sin's presence forever.

Nicodemus and Joseph came out of hiding to offer Jesus a respectful burial. What does it take to bring your commitment to Christ into the open? Many times, we prefer to confine our faith to "safe" spaces where we can avoid disdain or criticism. For Nicodemus and Joseph, it took Jesus's cruel death at the hands of His enemies for them to realize that aligning with Jesus was worth it. What does it take for you to be willing to stand up and stand out for the cause of Christ? In what ways are you attempting to be a secret disciple of Jesus? **The Savior who willingly bore open shame on your behalf deserves your uncompromising loyalty.**

40. God-ordained circumstances: Acts 2:23

41. New life through death: Romans 6:3-4

42. Crucified with Christ: Galatians 2:20

A deep look at Jesus's death and burial calls believers to ponder their identification with Christ. Those who trust Christ for salvation recognize that He suffered and died in their place. Not only that, by God's grace, a believer's sins are removed from His sight—buried with Christ.⁴³ Too often, Christians feel imprisoned by past sins—their own or injustices committed against them. If you are a believer, how might you be enslaved by your past? This is as senseless as digging up a rotting corpse. If you are united with Christ, your former life was buried with Him in His tomb. God has raised you to live a transformed life.⁴⁴ How might you experience the new life God intends for you?

Through this study, we have looked at God's amazing gift through Jesus's sacrificial death. This story offers more than sad or interesting facts. The cross of Christ represents the pinnacle of human history and a decision point facing every human. God brought you here. You can look at Christ and live—*truly live*—in this life and for eternity. Or you can choose not to believe and remain outside God's forgiveness. Neutrality is not an option. Those who refuse His sacrifice will mourn forever. If you have never trusted Jesus for salvation, perhaps today is the day you move from death to life. **By faith, believe that Jesus's precious blood powerfully cleanses the darkest corners of your heart and frees you to experience a vibrant relationship with God.** Jesus died so we might live. What will you do with Jesus?

43. **Buried with Christ:** Colossians 2:12-14

44. **New life in Christ:** Romans 6; Colossians 2:1-14