

John on Jesus - The Crucifixion, More Than The Eye Could See

August 18, 2013

Good morning Faith Church. Surprise, surprise, we are in the Gospel of John. This is our 41st message in this book. We are rapidly approaching the end. After this book, we have a short series called: Fingerprint - What makes Faith Church unique? We hope to give both the Spirit Lake and Spencer campuses a better understanding of the unique Faith Church vision. After that, Pastor Jordan and I will launch a series in Ephesians. This is where we are heading for the fall.

This morning, we are in John 19:17-42. Last week, we looked at Christ's arrest and betrayal. We learned that while the world looked out of control, God had it all in control. The greatest travesty of justice in the history of the world unfolded just the way God planned. John showed us detail after detail of how Christ's arrest and betrayal was foretold by God ahead of time in the Bible. Nothing was out of control. God planned the way it would unfold. This week, Christ dies on the cross. John continues his theme of detailing how everything unfolding according to God's plan. No matter how grim the future, life is not out of control.

So he delivered him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. John 19:16–18 (ESV)

While Jesus' crucifixion seems like an extraordinary event to us, in that day, crucifixions were commonplace. They didn't bother talking about them on the evening news because they happened so frequently. For example, when

Spartacus died in battle after rebelling against the Romans, 6,000 of his followers were crucified in one day. They were lined up on crosses like orange cones on the side of the road. The line of crosses stretched for 120 miles. At one time, when Rome was at war, it averaged 500 crucifixions a day for three months. As we look at Jesus' crucifixion, while it is horrific to us, realize crucifixion was common in the ancient world. While crucifixion in the ancient world happened as frequently as we eat pizza, since it doesn't happen today, let me familiarize you with it.

Crucifixion was invented by the Persians around 500 B.C. It was perfected into the most horrible form of death by the Romans. It was so brutal that Constantine outlawed it as a form of death in the fourth century. It was so brutal that Roman citizens guilty of the worst crimes were not allowed to face the agonizing death of crucifixion. Some of you know that in the Greek language there was even a new word invented to describe the level of agony that could only be experienced on the cross. That word came into our English language. It is called *excruciating pain*. Literally, the pain of the cross.

Last week, we learned about the flogging. That was affectionally called the "half-death" because so much of a man's skin was torn from his body. After Jesus' flogging, he was forced to carry a rough-hewn, splintered cross beam on his skinless back to his place of execution. The beam weighed more than 100 pounds. The distance he walked was probably a mile. It could have been longer. The Romans usually made those being executed take the most circuitous route, weaving their ways through the city maximizing their victims'

torture and public exposure. From the other Gospels, we know Jesus eventually collapsed under the weight of his crossbeam. A man named Simon of Cyrene was appointed to carry the beam the rest of the way.

Once at the spot of the crucifixion, five-seven inch, rough, metal spikes were driven either into the palms or the wrists. The palm was more painful but the wrist was more secure. I am sure the Romans drove the spikes through both at different times. To ensure the nail would not tear through the palms, they bound the hands with rope around the crossbeam.

Once the hands were nailed, the cross was raised so the body hung. Once the body was taut, the feet were crossed and bent slightly, then a spike was driven through the ankles leaving just enough room for the victim to press up and relieve a bit of the stretch on their chest as he gasped for air. Pressing up with the feet produced searing pain in the nerves of the feet not to mention the pain of spikes through the hands or wrists. Those crucified were naked. As a general rule, the cross was not high. A low cross allowed those passing by to watch the agony of death up close and personal. Sometimes the social hooligans of the town gathered around men on the cross and used them for target practice with rocks or they jabbed them with sticks in unspeakable ways. Birds would gather to peck at the flesh of the dying men like crows picking at a piece of roadkill.

Death was ultimately by asphyxiation. It was excruciatingly painful and tiring to press yourself up on the cross to get a breath of air. Men passed in and out of consciousness because their lungs were collapsed by the pressure of their

body. They lingered in horrific agony on the edge of death for hours or even days. Finally, they died, when out of agony and fatigue, they gave up trying to breath. This is what is behind these simple verses that report Jesus' death happened on the cross.

Christ's horrifying death between two thieves was exactly the way God the Father planned for his son to die for our sins. It is prophesied that Jesus would die between two thieves in Isaiah 53:12. This unspeakable physical horror was exactly what God planned in sending his son to die for us.

Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written." John 19:19–22 (ESV)

Jerusalem was alive during Passover. People from everywhere in the world were there. Pilate wanted Jesus' charge to be understood by the world. Even though the Jews repeatedly asked him to change it, he stood firm.

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, "They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." So the soldiers did these things... John 19:23–24 (ESV)

Typically four soldiers were assigned to a crucifixion. One of the perks of job was they could keep the clothing of the one they crucified. They couldn't decide what to do with one last piece so they gambled for it. That is a detail that was also prophesied in Scripture in Psalm 22:18. Everything happened to Jesus

exactly the way God the Father planned. Nothing was out of control, even when the world looked like it was falling apart.

...but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. John 19:25–27 (ESV)

When you study crucifixion, you learn the last thing on the mind of someone being crucified was caring about someone else. The typical victim was spewing verbal filth on everyone around them. They were screaming in agony. When you hit your finger with a hammer, you know what comes out of your mouth. Imagine what people said when spikes were driven through their hands and the flesh ripped from their backs. Jesus was different.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. Isaiah 53:7 (ESV)

You see, when you hit your finger with a hammer and profanity comes out of your mouth, that is because profanity is in your heart. Hitting your finger with a hammer is like popping a zit. It exposes the filth inside of your heart. Jesus was different. His heart was pure. That is why nothing rotten came out of his mouth even when enduring agony. When words did come out, they were words of caring for his mother. Everything was unfolding just the way God the Father said it would.

After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. John 19:28–30 (ESV)

I think this verse could be misunderstood. It almost sounds like Jesus had a checklist in his mind. He had a point to fulfill so he asked for a drink and there was no purpose to it. Not true. Jesus was about to speak. After a night without sleep, profuse bleeding because the skin was torn from his back, carrying a 100-pound beam over a mile on his shoulders in the heat of a summer day, hanging on the edge of death on a cross, I think he was so thirsty. He couldn't speak unless he took a drink.

Once again the details were all told ahead of time by God in the Old Testament.

They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink. Psalm 69:21 (ESV)

What is sour wine? It is not a Red Bull. It is like rotten grape juice. This is not something you bought at the corner gas station in a six pack. Occasionally my kids open a Gatorade and don't finish it. Sometimes they throw it under the back seat in the car and we find it a month later. There is fungus growing in it. It is rotten and disgusting. That is what was given to Jesus, sour wine. It was cheap and disgusting. It was just something to whet your lips.

Jesus needed this drink to say his final words, "It is finished." In Greek, it is actually one word, *tetelestai*. It means "paid in full." It was the word stamped across a bill or debt. Paid in full. Jesus completed the work he came to do. Jesus became sin for us. Jesus died for us. Jesus paid for all of our sin in full.

Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already

dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe. For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken.” And again another Scripture says, “They will look on him whom they have pierced.” John 19:31–37 (ESV)

Since it occasionally took days for victims to die, and the next day was a holiday, the Jews asked Pilate to break the shin bones and speed up the process. After all, when you are killing God, you don’t want his body hanging around during a religious holiday. They broke the legs of the other criminals but when they came to Jesus, he was already dead. John pointed out, that was exactly what God the Father said would happen.

He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken. Psalm 34:20 (ESV)

Last week we learned that Jesus was the one true Passover lamb. In John 1:29, John the Baptist called Jesus the lamb of God who was slain for the sin of the world. One of the things about the Passover lamb was the bones could not be broken. The apostle John told us this detail to show us that Jesus, the true Passover lamb, paralleled the Passover lamb.

In addition, a soldier took his spear and thrust it into Jesus’ side piercing his heart bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. This water was a side-effect of his death. The blood and serum separated. Once again, this was exactly the way God said it would take place.

...when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn. Zechariah 12:10 (ESV)

Everything about Jesus’ death happened the way God the Father planned for his son to die for us.

John inserted himself in the story. He was the one who witnessed this. In that day, like our own, people were saying the reason Jesus rose from the dead was because he never died. He just passed out and was refreshed in the cool of a tomb. John was there. He was the disciple Jesus entrusted his mother to. John said, “Trust me. He was dead. I swear it was true. I saw him die. I saw the spear shoved into his heart to make sure he was dead. I saw it.”

After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body. Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. 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. So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there. John 19:38–42 (ESV)

Typically the Romans left the bodies of the crucified on the cross. The flesh would be devoured by vultures. The Jews wanted the bodies down for two reasons. First, Deuteronomy 22 says not to leave the bodies of crucified men on the cross overnight. After all, if you are killing God, you have to do it biblically. In addition, the next day was a religious holiday. Kids watching out the window as human flesh is eaten by vultures during the religious holiday really ruins the festive spirit.

Two secret disciples of Jesus, who were high ranking Jews in the Sanhedrin, appeared on the scene. This is the first time we meet Joseph of Arimathea. He was from out of town. He was from Arimathea. He was secretly following Jesus. Nicodemus was the Bible genius from John 3 who couldn't figure out what it meant to be born again. Joe and Nick teamed together to get

Jesus' body down from the cross and give it a decent burial, which was exactly what God said would happen.

And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Isaiah 53:9 (ESV)

Things unfolded exactly the way God said they would. Almost every detail was prophesied beforehand. To the eye of an ordinary citizen, everything looked out of control. John wanted us to know, everything is under the control of God the Father not just in Christ's death but in your life today.

I would like to go a little deeper this morning. To the naked eye, Jesus' crucifixion looked ordinary. The other Gospels hint that there was much more happening on the cross than could be seen with the eye. They hint that there were incredible things taking place in the unseen spiritual world when Jesus suffered on the cross. Darkness covered the land. When Jesus died, the curtain of the temple supernaturally was torn in two from top to bottom. There was an earthquake and dead people came to life. Much more happened on that cross than could be seen with the eye. Let's explore this.

What was happening on the cross the naked eye couldn't see?

We couldn't see when Jesus became the ultimate sinner.

The Bible tells us that on the cross God made Jesus into the worst of everything we are. That does not mean Jesus sinned. Jesus was made to be the worst sinner. God made Jesus the most ugly, wicked, defiled, evil, corrupt, depraved hideous being in all creation. Jesus became a homosexual, alcoholic,

thief, pervert, glutton, drug addict and pedophile. Jesus became a proud, self-righteous old man. He became a nagging wife. He became all of our sins.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. Isaiah 53:6 (ESV)

I know how I feel when I sin. It really bothers me. It keeps me up all night. The more godly we become, the more sin hurts. Imagine for a moment what Jesus felt like on the cross. The one who had never experienced the shame of sin experienced the shame of all of our sins at once. He felt the shame of a murder, a rapist, a child molester, a pornographer, all at once. He took the sin of the past, present and future. Can you imagine the darkness Jesus felt in those moments?

We couldn't see when the Father abandoned his son.

One of the most painful emotions is abandonment or betrayal by someone we love. A wife who walks away from her husband in his hour of greatest need slices his heart in half. Jesus experienced the betrayal of Judas, a close friend and one of his inner 12. Jesus experienced the betrayal of Peter, who denied even knowing Jesus three times when Jesus was on trial.

Worse than abandonment by his friends was abandonment by God the Father. The Bible tells us that for all of eternity God the Father and God the Son with God the Holy Spirit were involved in a perfect passionate loving relationship. As some of you know, there is no more exquisite joy than a deep loving marriage relationship. A perfect marriage gives us as a small earthly sample of the incredible joy and love that continually flows between God the Father and God the Son. On the cross, when God the Father made his own son the ultimate of

sinner the world has ever known, Jesus did not just experience the ultimate in shame but in that hour of greatest brokenness, because Jesus became sin, God the Father turned his back on his own son. That never happened before. This was the ultimate act of abandonment.

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Matthew 27:46 (ESV)

Some of you have experienced the pain of giving people your heart and having them walking away. You experienced the gaping emptiness of abandonment. When you pray, you say, “Jesus, do you understand?” He says, “Yes, I know pain in a way you cannot know.” Anything we have experienced is nothing like what Jesus experienced in that moment. It was the ultimate experience of abandonment the world has ever seen.

When he had become the ultimate sinner filled with ultimate shame and experienced the ultimate in abandonment in his hour of need, he faced the ultimate in pain.

We couldn't see Jesus experiencing the ultimate in pain.

Having walked through the physical horrors of the crucifixion. The physical suffering was nothing compared to Jesus facing the wrath of God the Father for all of our sins at once. In Romans 3:25-26, the Bible tells us God the Father never forgave any sins in the Old Testament by animal sacrifice. Animal sacrifices were just a reminder that the only way to pay for sin was death. All through the Old Testament, from the first sins of Adam and Eve to the end of time, God the Father was storing up his anger against sin, like a steam furnace.

God the Father took all of his anger for all the sins in the past, present and future that we and others have committed and would commit, and he vented the full fury of his wrath, with laser-like focus, in one place on one person, his own beloved son. In those moments, Jesus experienced an eternity of hells, the ultimate in pain as he took the punishment we deserve for our sins. We could not see it on the cross, but that is what was happening.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures... 1 Corinthians 15:3 (ESV)

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God... 1 Peter 3:18 (ESV)

When we start to wrap our minds around this, it changes us. We are revolted by the gruesome nature of the crucifixion. What the naked eye could see is nothing compared to what the naked eye couldn't see in what happened to Jesus on the cross.

What looked like an ordinary death starts to look so different. It is something that never happened before or can ever happen again.

We couldn't see Jesus giving us the ultimate gift.

On the cross, Jesus gave us the ultimate gift.

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)

On the cross, when Jesus became sin, God took our sins away and put it on his son. He took all of his son's righteousness and purity and gave it to us. When God the Father looks at you, he sees Jesus, the son he loves. What do you see when you look in the mirror? Do you see a failure? Do you see somebody who made plenty of mistakes with your life and now has a bad

reputation you can't forget? Do you see a mother who failed her children? Do you see a dad who ignored his family? Do you see someone who is filled with mistakes?

When God looks at you, he sees the son he loves. You and I don't deserve this. We are screw ups. We are mess ups. God took all of our screwy choices and prideful rebellion and put it on Jesus. He took all of Jesus and put it on us.

When God the Father looks at us, he loves us with the same passion he has for his own son.

We couldn't see the ultimate act of love in the universe.

The cross is the ultimate act of love. The ultimate being in the universe, God, did the ultimate act of humiliation, he permanently fused himself with a human body. He became the ultimate sinner and experienced the ultimate in abandonment when his father turned his back on him. He experienced the ultimate in pain to give us the ultimate gift of forgiveness and righteousness we don't deserve. The cross was the ultimate act of love in the universe. This love will never be taken away from us.

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:38–39 (ESV)

How do we respond? With humility, thankfulness and worship. We do not deserve this love. Our hearts overflow with thankfulness and we can't help but respond in worship to our great God!



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