

# John 19:28-42 - Death of Jesus

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## INTRODUCTION

The cross is the most recognizable symbol of Christianity.

From people wearing crosses on their necklace to large crosses that adorn a church.

We can easily recognize who is a follower of Christ by seeing this symbol.

But when we really think about the cross, how appropriate is it to carry a cross around your neck or hang it out the front of the church?

That's because the cross was something the Romans used to execute the worst of the criminals.

It was a slow painful death that symbolized the shame of the person hanging on it.

And because it was a symbol of such shame, Roman citizens were never crucified.

So is it right to hang such a shameful symbol around our necks and on our church buildings?

I mean would you carry around your neck the electric chair as a symbol of your faith?

What's more, glorifying the cross is one thing, but why do we even celebrate the death of a man?

Why do churches all around the world sing joyful songs of the death of the Christ?

In most cultures, death is a solemn event. It is not really celebrated like we would celebrate a birthday party.

But as Christians we consider Easter to be a time of celebration in remembering the death of the man Jesus.

It just doesn't make sense to rejoice and glorify the death of Jesus who we believe is our Saviour and our God.

**Celebrating the cross and the death of Jesus is not easy to understand for many people.**

But for us who understand the significance of the death of Jesus, remembering, even celebrating Good Friday comes naturally.

For as we will see from today's passage, the death of Jesus was not the death of a defeated man, but the death of victory.

So to understand why the death of Jesus signaled victory rather than defeat, we need to look at two things about the death of Jesus.

Firstly Jesus truly died unlike what some people have claimed.

Secondly, we need to see why Jesus had to die.

## JESUS TRULY DIED

Even from the time of the early church, there were people who denied that Jesus had died.

Some have argued that Jesus was simply unconscious and appeared to have died.

The problem for them is not that a man had died, but that a man came back to life.

For as Paul argues in 1 Corinthians 15, for a man to be resurrected, he had to die.

Which means for us that Jesus really truly had to die. Because if an unconscious man was raised up, he is not resurrected but resuscitated.

And that has serious implications for our faith in Jesus.

Because without the resurrection of Jesus, we have no hope for our own resurrection and no physical hope for the future.

That is why Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:19

*“If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.”*

For as Christians have done for 2000 years, we have sacrificed many things for Christ sake. Some have even laid their lives for him.

And if we have no hope for our resurrection, then we have sacrificed in vain because God had promised us not only life now but eternal physical life. Without resurrection from the dead, God’s promise is just empty words.

So we believe Jesus truly died.

And our belief is not based on wishful thinking, but on the testimonies of the eyewitnesses to his death.

Which is what John records in John 19:35

*“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.”*

And what did he witness?

From today’s passage we can see two things about the death of Jesus that John testifies about.

Firstly John saw Jesus physically die on the cross.

Secondly John saw Joseph and Nicodemus bury Jesus in a tomb.

And so we can have confidence in John’s testimony that Jesus died and was buried.

### **John watched Jesus die on the cross**

In verse 30 John writes that Jesus bowed his head and gave up his spirit to indicate that Jesus had finally died on the cross.

And to show that it wasn’t just his opinion, John also records how the Jewish leaders had gone to Pilate to ask for the bodies to be taken down from the cross.

However, death by crucifixion is a slow and agonizing death. Sometimes the death took days to come.

So when the Jewish leaders asked for the bodies to be taken down, they were really asking for the Romans to kill those who were hanging on the cross.

And so John records that the two men crucified with Jesus were killed by having their legs broken. This was so that they could not stand up in order to breathe. So their body weight would drag the whole body down and hence suffocate.

But when the soldiers came to Jesus they found he was already dead and so did not break his legs.

Now one thing we can say about soldiers is that they are peddlers of death. They either kill or are killed in battle. Which means they would know clearly when someone is dead or not.

So they would not have made any mistake that Jesus had indeed died.

But to make sure, they pierced the side of Jesus so that blood and water ran out.

Jesus had died on the cross.

### **John watched Jesus being buried**

Not only did John watch Jesus die, but also he would have seen Joseph and Nicodemus carry Jesus away to be buried.

We can know this from the Luke 23:55

*“The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it.”*

Now we already know that John was with the women identified in Luke.

Which means that John would have been in their company as well when they saw Joseph and Nicodemus carry Jesus away to be buried.

And since Joseph and Nicodemus are recorded as being disciples of Jesus as well, I’m pretty sure that John would have talked to them afterwards whether Jesus was truly dead or not.

For having handled the body of Jesus when they carried him to the tomb and wrapped him in linen and spices, Joseph and Nicodemus would have known for sure Jesus was dead.

**So according to John’s testimony, Jesus was dead and buried.**

Which makes what happened on Easter Sunday the greatest miracle of God.

For after three days Jesus was raised to life from the dead.

Jesus was not resuscitated, but resurrected.

Which leads us to our next point in understanding the significance of the death of Jesus.

## **IT IS FINISHED!**

Jesus died for a reason.

His death was not the death of a criminal.

Nor was he simply a martyr for a cause.

His death was the completion of a plan that God had made even before Creation. The rescue of his people from sin.

And this is what John testifies to in the death of Jesus.

Have a look at verse 28:

*“Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.”*

As we have been seeing over the last several weeks, Jesus deliberately went to the cross.

Even when he could have saved himself, he chose to go all the way to the cross and die.

And even in the final moments, life was not taken from him, he handed his life over to God as John records in verse 30:

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

After having been handed over by Judas, by the high priest and by Pilate to be crucified. It is Jesus who hands his life over to God to fulfill his purpose for coming into the world.

And in death Jesus fulfills two things:

Firstly he fulfills Scripture by his obedience and death.

Secondly he offers his life as a sacrifice for the atonement of sin.

## **Jesus’ Death Fulfills Scripture**

Three times John records that Jesus died to fulfill Scripture.

Verse 28 as we have already read.

Verse 36 where it says:

*“These things happened so that the Scripture would be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken.””*

And verse 37 which says:

*“and as another scripture says, “They will look on the one they have pierced.”*

Jesus’ death was expected.

The whole Old Testament testified and prophesied that the Messiah, the King would die.

And so Jesus reveals God’s glory and faithfulness by obediently dying on the cross.

Which means when we see the cross, we are not seeing an unfortunate symbol of our king’s death.

But rather it is the fulfillment of God’s deliberate plan to kill his Son.

Not because God is sadistic, but because of his great love for us.

The eternal plan of God to send his Son to die for us on the cross completely expresses how much God loves us.

That is why the cross is a reminder and a symbol of God’s love for us.

The cross reminds us that we were in God’s plans before creation and because of his love he did not spare his own Son.

### **Jesus Death was a Sacrifice of Atonement**

But the cross is more than just a demonstration of God’s love for us.

In the cross, God did not just say, “see how much I love you?” and then leave us to our sins.

In the cross God demonstrates his love for us by dealing with our sins through the death of his Son.

Which means the death of Jesus was a sacrifice offered to rescue us from God’s anger.

And this is perfectly demonstrated in today’s passage where Jesus’ death is linked to the Passover Lamb, which was the great symbol of God’s rescue of his people from slavery in Egypt.

### **Hyssop Plant**

The first reference to the Passover lamb can be found in verse 29, where we read that the soldiers offered a sponge soaked with wine vinegar on a hyssop plant.

Back in Exodus 12:22 when God’s final plague was coming on Egypt, this is what God instructs the people to do:

*“Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe. Not one of you shall go out the door of his house until morning. When the LORD goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down.”*

The blood of the lamb was placed on the doorframe using the hyssop plant. A lamb had to be killed and his blood painted on the doorframe for God’s judgment to pass over.

And so the hyssop plant we see in John points us back to the first Passover event in Egypt.

### **Unbroken Bones**

Secondly in verse 32 we read that Jesus’ leg was not broken because he had already died.

And John records in verse 36 that Jesus’ leg was not broken to fulfill the Scripture which says:

*“Not one of his bones will be broken”*

This is a reference to Psalm 34:19-20 where it says:

*“A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all; he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken.”*

This Psalm speaks of God protecting the righteous man. And Jesus was indeed a righteous man.

But I think the reference to Jesus' legs not being broken has stronger ties back to the Passover lamb.

Have a look at Numbers 9:11-12

*"They are to celebrate it on the fourteenth day of the second month at twilight. They are to eat the lamb, together with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. They must not leave any of it till morning or break any of its bones. When they celebrate the Passover, they must follow all the regulations."*

The Passover lamb was to be eaten in the one night and none of its bones are to be broken.

Jesus died and his body was not left hanging till morning but taken down soon after his death.

And because of his quick death, none of his bones were broken.

The Passover reference is clear.

Jesus died as our Passover lamb so that God's judgment for our sins would pass over us.

## CONCLUSION

This is why we celebrate Easter.

This is why we have the cross as a symbol of our faith.

For the cross is God's declaration of his love for us.

And the blood Jesus spilt on that cross rescued us from the punishment that our sins deserved.

We celebrate Easter because Jesus, our King, died as our Passover Lamb.

And because he died we have passed over from death to life.

Which means the cross is not a symbol of defeat.

It does not represent the victory of the Jewish leaders or Pilate.

It certainly does not represent the victory of Satan.

But rather, the cross is where Jesus defeated sin and death once and for all.

And all that is left for us to do now is to come before the cross and put our trust in his death.

If you still haven't put your faith in Jesus and submitted to him as your king, let me invite you to do so now.

If you are convicted in your heart that Jesus died for your sins, then do something about it now. Come and speak with me or one of the elders after the service.

For the death of Jesus has implication not just for this life but also for our eternal life.

And if you have already committed your life to Jesus, then rejoice!

Today is not a day for sorrow but rejoicing. Today does not represent defeat but victory.

Jesus died fulfilling God's plan to rescue you and me. He died so that we can live.

Why do we need to feel sorry or shame for his death?

He died so that you and I can live.

So give thanks to God and praise him for his great gift of our Passover lamb.