

### Exegesis

**Vs. 31** – In this next section (vs. 31-42), John confirms Jesus’ death and explains what they did with his body.<sup>1</sup> He tells us that “the Jews...besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.” To break the legs of someone crucified was called *crurifragium* (lat. “breaking of the shinbone”).<sup>2</sup> The way arms were secured on a cross made it difficult for people to breathe (*see notes 19:16b-18*). The only way to relieve the pressure on the ribcage, thereby allowing the lungs to function normally, was for the crucified to push themselves up with their legs.<sup>3</sup> However, if their legs were broken, the individual would essentially *suffocate* under their own weight. Thus, death by asphyxiation would hasten death. Otherwise, as mentioned before, a crucifixion often lasted hours, if not days. And even after the crucified died, it was common for Romans to leave the bodies until they were devoured by scavengers.<sup>4</sup>

The Jews wanted to speed up this process “because it was the preparation...[of] the sabbath day”—i.e., Friday. This was the day on which Israelites prepared to observe Shabbat, and from sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday, no work was allowed to be done. But the reason why “the bodies should not remain upon the cross” wasn’t because of the prohibition against work, but because “that sabbath day was a high day.” This particular Sabbath was a “high day” not only because it fell during Passover but also because this is when the “sheaf offering” would’ve been given (cf. Lev. 23:10-14).<sup>5</sup> And according to Deut. 21:22-23, the land would be “defiled” if a body hung on a tree for more than a day. Presumably, this principle would’ve applied throughout the year, but Passover made the religious leaders particularly concerned with ceremonial defilement (cf. 18:28). And as before, irony abounds.<sup>6</sup> The Jews were scrupulous about not transgressing God’s law yet had no inhibitions about murdering God’s Son.

**Vs. 32-34** – John tells us that “the soldiers” broke the legs of those who were crucified save for Jesus because they “saw that he was dead already.” Presumably, to confirm Jesus's death, “one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side and forthwith came there out blood and water.” At this point, commentators differ on how to interpret the flow of “blood and water.” Some say

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<sup>1</sup> Klink (2016), p. 812.

<sup>2</sup> Köstenberger (2008), p. 551.

<sup>3</sup> Morris (1995), p. 723.

<sup>4</sup> Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 353; Carson (1991), p. 623.

<sup>5</sup> Carson (1991), p. 622.

<sup>6</sup> Kruse (2017), p. 432, “The irony was that the Jewish leaders, rightly seeking to ensure no desecration of the land, were at the same time desecrating themselves by pursuing to death an innocent man, their true Messiah.”

the ordinances of the church are in view (blood=communion, water=baptism); others take them as emblematic of Jesus' salvific work (blood=sacrifice, water=Holy Spirit); still others see a reference to the Exodus (blood/water appear frequently throughout that event).<sup>7</sup> But considering that John does not draw these connections here, we mustn't allegorize. As he himself will point out in vs. 35, John was an eyewitness. As such, he's relayed events as he saw them. Not everything the apostle relays has some *figurative* dimension to it. So, while blood (cf. 6:53) and water (cf. 3:5) can be used symbolically, this is not the case here.<sup>8</sup> More evidence would have to be drawn from the immediate context for it to be so. Thus, it is best to interpret these details at *face value*.

John's statement about the "blood and water" highlights Jesus' *humanity*.<sup>9</sup> Like many of his contemporaries, he likely thought that the body consisted of these two primary substances.<sup>10</sup> To say that "blood and water" flowed from Jesus' body was the first-century way of claiming that the Lord possessed a *real* body. And while our understanding of human anatomy has advanced in the modern age, the emission of these fluids does, in fact, confirm this conclusion. For "blood and water" to flow from Jesus' "side" indicates he had fluid buildup around his organs, most likely around his lungs—i.e., pleural effusion. Such conditions develop for a variety of reasons; however, it is a common occurrence when the body experiences *severe physical trauma*.<sup>11</sup> Tests on cadavers have shown that as much as *two liters* of hemorrhagic fluid can build up between the lining of the ribcage and the lining of a lung.<sup>12</sup> If this area were sufficiently pierced, that liquid would flow from the body freely. The fact that the stream had two distinct substances indicates that enough time had passed for the hemorrhagic fluid to be fully separated into red blood cells and clear plasma.

That Jesus was not only divine but also human is, at best, overlooked or, worse, outright denied (e.g., Docetism).<sup>13</sup> The Son of God's body wasn't a false exterior, like some inconsequential shell containing the divine nature. As the hypostatic union asserts, the two natures were mysteriously and miraculously joined in one person: Jesus Christ. The Lord was fully God and

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<sup>7</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the varying interpretations, see Keener (2003), 2:1151-1154.

<sup>8</sup> Contra. Klink (2016), p. 814.

<sup>9</sup> Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 356-357; Köstenberger (2008), p. 552; Carson (1991), p. 623.

<sup>10</sup> Carson (1991), p. 624; Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 357.

<sup>11</sup> General Editors (2025) *Pericardial effusion*, *Mayo Clinic*. Available at: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/pericardial-effusion/symptoms-causes/syc-20353720> (Accessed: 08 January 2025).

<sup>12</sup> Carson (1991), p. 623.

<sup>13</sup> Elwell, Walter A., "Docetism," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Second Edition, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), p. 349, explains that Jesus' dual nature was under attack in the Johannine community (cf. 1 Jn. 4:2; 2 Jn. 7) by a group called "the Gnostics" who espoused Docetic thinking. Islamic have incorporated this heresy by claiming that Jesus didn't actually die, that it only *seemed* like he did to onlookers.

fully human *at the same time*. As John himself puts it in the prologue: “The Word became *flesh* [emphasis added]” (1:14; cf. 1 Jn. 4:1-4; 5:6-9; 2 Jn. 7). Jesus grew tired (cf. 4:6), hungered (cf. Mar. 11:12), slept (cf. Matt. 8:23-27), and all the other things experienced by mortals. Christ’s crucifixion wasn’t mere theatrics. Before he allowed death to take him, the body of the Godman was broken, bruised, and bled.

**Vs. 35-37** – But once again, John does not want us to dwell on the horrors of Jesus’ death. He says, “And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true, and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe.” Considering the similarities to 21:24, the “he” being referenced here is John.<sup>14</sup> The other possibility would be the soldier who pierced Jesus’ side, but this is unlikely since the “he” referenced here “saw” the act; he did not perform it. Thus, the Beloved Apostle hasn’t been relaying a *secondhand* account; he’s witnessed these things *firsthand* (cf. 13:24; 18:15; 21:24). By saying that “his record is true, and he knoweth that he saith true,” the disciple is *doubly* and *emphatically* affirming the validity of his own statements.<sup>15</sup> In other words, the things he’s said should not be judged as hearsay, rumor, or the ravings of a madman but as the *substantive* claims of a *credible* eyewitness. As John the Baptist testified to Jesus’ *identity*, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (1:29), so John the Beloved testifies to Jesus’ *victory*. The Lord did not come to condemn the world but “that the world might be saved through him” (3:17), and he succeeded.

But why does John pause the narrative to establish the credibility of his statements? So that “ye might believe.” This is the *first time* John has directly addressed his audience.<sup>16</sup> The facts presented here are intended to bolster the *faith* of his readership. How so? By seeing that “these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced.” This is the *third* time John has referenced scriptural fulfillment during the crucifixion (cf. vs. 24, 28). This time, however, rather than mention *one* verse, John references *two*.

The quote, “A bone of him shall not be broken,” comes from one of two places in the OT. If the Passover is in view (cf. 1 Cor. 5:7; 1 Pet. 1:19), John could be referencing Ex. 12:46 (cf. Num. 9:12). There, instruction is given for how to prepare the paschal lambs, and, among other things, the bones of the lambs weren’t allowed to be broken. The other possibility is that these words are a direct quote from Psa. 34:19-20. David says, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all. He keepeth all his bones: not one of

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<sup>14</sup> Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 354.

<sup>15</sup> Klink (2016), p. 815-816.

<sup>16</sup> Köstenberger (2008), p. 553.

them is broken.” In other words, David knew that the Lord would take such good care of him that, metaphorically speaking, not one of his bones would break. Of the two possibilities, the latter is preferred since, as we saw with vs. 24, what was for David a *poetic expression* of his difficulties was for Christ a *literal description* of his death. But both allusions are possible.<sup>17</sup>

The words, "they shall look on him whom they pierced," is a direct quote from Zech. 12:10 (cf. Rev. 1:7). In the context, Yahweh is speaking, and he says, "I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, 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." The context of Zech. 12 is eschatological; it is a prophecy regarding the defeat of Jerusalem's enemies during the end times. When that occurs, the Jews will "look on him whom they pierced," and they will "mourn for him...as one weeps over a firstborn." In other words, Israel will finally acknowledge its Savior. The same one who will deliver them from their enemies during the apocalypse is the same one whom they pierced during the crucifixion. The piercing of Jesus' side was further evidence of his divinity and messiahship (cf. 20:13; Isa. 53:5).<sup>18</sup>

The Jews considered that Friday a "high day." Not too long after this, the Christians will start referring to that same day as "Good Friday." Though the things Jesus experienced on that day were definitely not good, they paved the way for the good of all humanity. For on that day, the penalty of sin was paid, and salvation was won for all who put their faith in Jesus Christ.

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<sup>17</sup> Carson (1991), p. 627.

<sup>18</sup> Köstenberger (2008), p. 554.

## VIDEO DESCRIPTION

### **Deep Dive: The Gospel of John | Week 91 | John 19:31-37**

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

According to John, the day Jesus was crucified was a Friday, and that particular Friday was considered a “high day” by the Jews (Jn. 19:31). Not too long after this, Christians started referring to that same day as “*Good Friday*.” Though the things Jesus experienced on that day were definitely not good, they paved the way for the good of all humanity. For on that day, the penalty of sin was paid, and salvation was won for all who put their faith in Jesus Christ.

**Pastor's manuscript can be found here:**

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