

Gospel of John - episode 42

Chapter 19 part 3

Welcome to our sharing on chapter 19 of John's Gospel. We now come to the death of Jesus, the most solemn, the most awesome moment in human history. "After this, Jesus knew that everything had now been completed, and to fulfil the scripture perfectly, he said, 'I am thirsty'. A jar full of vinegar stood there, so, putting a sponge soaked in the vinegar on a hyssop stick, they held it up to his mouth. After Jesus had taken the vinegar, he said, 'it is accomplished', and bowing his head, he gave up his spirit". This incredible moment is given in such simplicity. John wants us to hear that the scriptures are fulfilled. Why would the scriptures be fulfilled in Jesus saying 'I am thirsty?' In Psalm 22:15 thirst was one of the terrible torments of crucifixion. They hung the men (usually men) in the open, and left them without food or water to be scorched by a hot sun until they were completely dehydrated.

If they had been scourged (not part of crucifixion) they would lose body fluids continuously. The thirst was so terrible that their mouths would be completely dry. It must have been extremely painful for Jesus to speak from the Cross. But that is not John's point here. John is saying that the Roman soldiers reacted to Jesus. The dreadful thirst was such that even they couldn't endure seeing it, and they were not known for compassion, or mercy. They were very cruel as we saw in the scourging of Jesus. In the last stages of crucifixion, they often offered the dying man a taste of their own sour drink – sometimes drugged.

Psalm 22 says that they did not understand **Jesus' cry, 'I am thirsty'**. His cry was not for water, certainly not for vinegar and gall which would increase his pain. Jesus' cry was for souls. He was paying with his life for our redemption, so, it was a call to every person who would ever hear about it, most particularly to anyone who would study and pray this text. He is saying: **'I thirst for your soul. I've paid for your redemption.** Why don't you let me pour out the living waters upon you?' John made it clear throughout this Gospel that **Jesus wanted to drink the cup to its dregs**. He said that to Peter in Gethsemane. Jesus is not looking for any alleviation of suffering. He wants to pay the price. He will not permit that a soul could come before him in judgement and say, 'you didn't pay for me'. He paid for all of us. He paid for our salvation, so, his thirst is for our salvation.

There's a small detail here that is strange; the text tells us that the soldiers put something on a hyssop stick and gave it to Jesus. What were Roman soldiers doing with a hyssop stick? The normal thing for them would be to put a sponge on a lance, which they would have been carrying, and to put it up to his mouth. But John says that it was the hyssop stick. Here is the

reminder that this is **the Great Passover** and that this is **the Lamb of God who is dying**. The hyssop was used by priests to sprinkle the blood of the lamb on the people, so here is another reminder in case you would ever forget! John says it clearly in 1John 2:1-2, that it is the blood of Jesus that saves us from all sin, so this is a very important point. John doesn't tell us about the desolate cry of Jesus before he died. That is in the Synoptic Gospels. **John shows us the death of A Hero. This death is a triumph** - a triumph for Jesus personally, and a triumph of love over hate. It is also a triumph of Jesus' love for his beloved disciples because he requested in chapter 17 that they would go to Heaven where he will be, and he wants them with him forever, so, he is prepared to pay for all their sins. Sadly, Judas didn't allow Jesus to pay for him.

Jesus' death is also a triumph of light over darkness, and life over death. At the very end, John says that Jesus gave up his spirit. Now, in John's Gospel that doesn't mean he breathed his last. It means that the last gift he gave to us **was the Spirit of Jesus, the Third Person of the Most Blessed Trinity**. Jesus had to go back to the Father in order to send the Holy Spirit upon the earth. In saying that Jesus gave up his spirit, John reveals that this is all one movement. Jesus will go back to the Father, send the Holy Spirit to make the church come alive, and the mission will go on. But it happens on earth in several stages, because earth time and eternal "time" are very different! In eternity everything is instant.

The next event is **'the striking the rock'**. It's 19:31-36, "it was preparation day, and to prevent the bodies remaining on the cross during the Sabbath, since that Sabbath was a day of special solemnity, the Jews (chief priests) asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken away. Consequently, the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then the other one. When they came to Jesus, they found he was already dead, so, instead of breaking his legs one of the soldiers pierced his side with a lance. (you see, it was more normal to use a lance than a hyssop stick!) and immediately there came out blood and water. This is the evidence of one who saw it, trustworthy evidence, and he knows he speaks the truth, and he gives it to you so that you may believe as well". John is very anxious that we would not just read about this but that we would put our faith in Christ, so that we too, become disciples of Jesus and enter into this relationship with God that we studied in the final discourse.

19:36 says that "all this happened to fulfil the words of scripture not one bone of his will be broken

(Exodus 12:46) and again, as Zechariah 12:10 says that they will look upon the one they have pierced". Let's take a look at this. You would think it's all over, but it's not. Something else has to happen. There is another sign to be given for people who have eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to understand, so that they can penetrate this mystery even more. John keeps the

reverent silence that has been there during the crucifixion of Jesus. He hasn't allowed any raucous noise to interfere because this is **the most earth-shaking event** that has happened. So, he keeps that reverent silence also after the death of Jesus, but he tells us that since this was the Great Sabbath (because the Passover fell on a Sabbath) that they couldn't leave the bodies on the crosses. Everything had to be done in a hurry because after all, it was 03:00pm and the lambs were being killed in the temple. The feast had already begun and the Lamb of God had died at 03:00 in the afternoon. Certainly, Passover had begun, but they didn't realise the importance of what was happening on Calvary.

John wants us to realise is that this Sabbath is not just a very special Sabbath because the Passover falls on the Sabbath. It's a very special Sabbath because **Jesus enters into his Sabbath rest after the shocking labour of his Passion**, just as Genesis relates that God rested after the labour of Creation. That rest day was the first Sabbath. On this very solemn and sacred Sabbath all Israel will be still, nothing will move, or as the book of Exodus says, "never a dog will bark". So, the stillness John gave us on Calvary becomes even deeper as the earth and its inhabitants must now wait silently for God to act in a sovereign way for His Son. That Sabbath must have been one of the longest days ever experienced on this planet because if God doesn't move, it is all over. John omits the apocalyptic events which happened at the moment of Jesus' death of. The Synoptic Gospels deal with that.

John does want you to look at **this Sabbath Rest** though. It was a difficult time for the beloved disciples whom Mark 16:10 says "were in mourning and in tears" because guilt mixed with their shock and mourning. It was a terrible day for our blessed Mother who alone believed in the Resurrection. She had to carry all the disciples with her and have 'a church' for Jesus on the third day! She had to search for them, gather them to herself and build up their faith. Apart from Thomas she gathered them all in time for Easter day. It took eight days to find where he was. The mystics tell us that Thomas went back to Bethlehem and hid himself there. He could somehow understand the birth of Jesus, but his death was a complete mystery. He couldn't cope with it at all.

Let us come back to the present moment because something happens now that is extremely important. Roman soldiers made certain when crucifying a man that they never touched a vital organ, because that would hasten the death. Crucifixion was meant to be a slow death. History tells us that sometimes it took days for the poor victim to die. The terror and the agony was beyond belief. The Romans normally left the bodies on the cross as a warning to society not to dare rebel against Rome. But the idea of leaving the bodies on the cross was completely abominable to the Jews because Deuteronomy said "cursed be any man who hangs on a tree". They insisted on the bodies being taken down and buried immediately.

The burial was normally very quick and unceremonious. They would simply make a hole in the ground where the men were killed, and bury them together: no ceremony, no blessing, nothing, because, after all, they were a curse, and it was presumed that they were damned because of this type of execution. So, the Jewish leaders went to Pilate to request that the legs be broken. These men are hanging so the only way they can breathe is by pressing on their feet to get enough air in their lungs. Once the legs are broken they die quickly of suffocation. With one swift blow the soldiers broke the legs of the two men dying beside Jesus. This gave terrifying pain to the dying men, but quickened their death. “When they came to Jesus, they discovered he was already dead, so they did not break his legs”. This is where John, again, reminds us that Jesus is the Passover Lamb, because it is specifically stated in Exodus 12:46 that the Passover lamb was sacred. They could eat the flesh and use the blood, but they could not break a bone of the lamb, so, again, John underlines that mystery that Jesus truly is the Passover Lamb.

What happens to Jesus is different to what happened to anyone else. John wants us to grasp the significance. The soldier has to certify to Pilate that Jesus is dead so he pierces Jesus’ heart with a lance. Immediately the last drops of blood and water flow out indicating that Jesus was certainly dead. Biblical commentaries usually omit that it was the Gentiles who made certain that Jesus of Nazareth died. Unconsciously they opened the heart of Jesus for the whole world. Certifying Jesus’ death is very important because in the years between the death of Jesus and the writing of the Gospel heresies emerged which asserted that Jesus never died, that somehow he escaped death. That was one of the very early heresies. So, John’s emphasis on the opening of the heart of Jesus and the last drops of blood and water flowing out **absolutely certifies Christ has died**. The next thing that will be certified is that **he was buried**. Both of those statements are essential to understand the Resurrection, because if he didn’t die, there’s no Resurrection.

Therefore, John emphasises the death and burial of Jesus. Having certified that Jesus is dead, John points out that **the Rock has been struck**. During the Exodus God’s people rebelled because they had no water to drink. God instructed Moses to strike a particular rock – which has been found by archaeologists. God said to Moses, **“I will be standing before you at the rock”**. Moses hesitated because he realised he was being instructed **to strike the Lord**. That is exactly what Israel did in the Passion! **She struck the Lord**, and it is from him that the rivers of living water flow out to humanity for all time.

Not only that, but in John 7:37 Jesus said, “come to me if you are thirsty, and out of your own heart will flow fountains of living water”. He promised that he would give the fountains of living water. John explains that **these fountains were the overflowing gift of the Spirit**. This shows the

significance of Jesus giving the gift of the Spirit in his dying breath. In 1 Corinthians 10:1-4 Saint Paul explains that when God's people travelled through the wilderness "they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and **that rock was Christ**". That is Paul's commentary on what I've just said about Moses striking the rock, so, the spiritual rock, the rock of our salvation, **is Jesus Christ**. He has been struck and from him flows the fountains of living water. I have more to say about this, but I'll give it to you in the next episode.

INTERVAL

Welcome to our sharing on John's Gospel. I want to continue contemplating Jesus' death and the events which took place at the time of his death. Jesus' heart has been struck which opened to give the last drops of his blood for our salvation. He has given everything. The lamb of God has been sacrificed; the Passover has been accomplished and redemption is won. John told us in chapter 2 that Jesus is the new temple. Jesus had said to the chief priests, "destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up". Well, if Jesus is the temple and the right hand side of the temple has been struck with the living waters of grace flowing from it, then you have the fulfilment of Ezekiel 47. There the prophet saw an image of the temple and that the living waters of grace would flow from the right hand side of the temple; initially the quantity would be small, but then it would become greater as it went out to the whole world.

That's exactly what happened in Christianity. It started small in Jerusalem (the mustard seed) and gradually flowed out to the rest of the world until the whole world knows about it. So, the scriptures are being fulfilled here. That's why John wants you to look and see that **Jesus is the Rock of our Salvation**. The Psalms have many references to God as 'the rock of our salvation'. John wants you to know that when you pray the Psalms now, the rock of our salvation **is Jesus** himself. Not only that, but the book of Revelation chapter 22 shows **the river of life** coming from Christ flowing through the new Jerusalem, with the saints like trees growing on either side, reaching their full potential with 12 crops of fruit a year, whose leaves are medicinal for the nations.

John says that what begins here in Jerusalem becomes a reality for the church. When he says that 'blood and water came forth', first of all, the blood of the lamb has been shed for us. The sacrifice is complete; the blood has poured down on the altar of Jesus' own body and the cross on which he was enthroned. The blood and the water also represent the two main sacraments of the church, which, of course are Baptism and the Holy Eucharist. The early church fathers have seen that connexion here. John tells us that more scriptures are being fulfilled. Zechariah 12:10 says that "they will look upon the one that they have pierced". That begins now but becomes a much greater reality when the church comes into being and we learn how to look at

Jesus on the cross, contemplate the reality of what is there, and draw all that living water for our own thirsty souls so that we can grow and reach the fullness of life. Of course, it is in our prayer communion with God that we pierce the heart of Jesus and let that living water flow to us, personally.

The final event in this great mystery is the burial of Jesus. It's amazing that so much attention is given to his burial because usually a crucified man was buried unceremoniously in a hole where he died and considered a lost soul. Something strange happens now: "Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a **secret one** because he was afraid of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him remove the body of Jesus". Now, this man was a prince and a member of the Sanhedrin! Only now we discover that not all the members of the Sanhedrin were enemies of Jesus. **They didn't all cry for his death.** Those who believed in Jesus (Joseph of A and Nicodemus, for example) show themselves after Jesus' death when the rest of the Sanhedrin thought they had got rid of the Nazarene! Of course, as members of the great Sanhedrin they had access to Pilate, who would agree to anything they asked now just to get rid of them! Pilate wouldn't know there was any difference between Joseph, Nicodemus and the rest, except that they were nicer people.

So, Pilate gave his permission. Anything they want to do now he will allow because he is in trouble. So, they came and they took the body of Jesus away. "Nicodemus came also, the same one who had first come to Jesus by night (back in chapter 3) and he brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes weighing about 100 pounds". (So, he does this **at his own expense**). "They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with spices in linen cloths. (These were the famous shrouds of history, following the Jewish burial custom). At the place where he had been crucified, there was a garden, and in this garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been buried. Since it was the Jewish day of preparation and the tomb was near at hand, they laid Jesus there".

Now, everything is given very simply, but there's more to it than meets the eye, as you now know. In Zechariah 12:10 the prophecy said that God would pour out a spirit of prayer and grace on Jerusalem when they looked upon the one that they had pierced; that the people's eyes would be opened and they would recognise the one that they had pierced. Well, the evidence shows that this happened to these two prominent men from the Sanhedrin, Joseph and Nicodemus, neither of whom appeared prominently in the Gospel up to now. The extraordinary thing is that the death of Jesus made these men fearless suddenly. They show no fear whatsoever of the rest of the Sanhedrin, Pilate, or of their own reputations. Already grace is flowing from the heart of Jesus transforming people, because the change in these men is extraordinary. They used their considerable authority as members of the Sanhedrin to get permission from Pilate **to bury Jesus as a king**, not to bury him as a criminal, for Jesus was

proven innocent even by Pilate himself! Since the Kingship of Jesus was recognised during the proceedings he must have a kingly burial.

John says that there was a tomb nearby that had never been used. We know from the writings of the mystics that this tomb was owned by Joseph of Arimathea. It had been prepared for himself so it had never been used. This tomb is now given the greatest possible use **as the last king of the dynasty of David is laid in it. The lamb of God**, who has given his life to take away our sins, is laid in the tomb. **The son of God** only needs **to borrow the tomb for three days!** He won't stay there. That, of course, is not in the mind of either Joseph or Nicodemus. All they wanted was to show Jesus the greatest reverence because even if everything said about Jesus wasn't true, he was definitely the greatest prophet in Israel, and he deserved the burial of a king.

So, John keeps the attention on Jesus the whole way through. The **last binding of Jesus** comes now. Jesus is now bound with linen cloths, and then bound in the tomb. As far as the Sanhedrin and the unbelieving world is concerned that is the end of Jesus of Nazareth. **That is the end of anyone who is entombed.** But, of course, it's not the end of Jesus of Nazareth! It is the end of the Old Testament, and the covenant of Moses. But those who killed him don't seem to realise that this also coincides with **the beginning of A New Era.** It is ironic that the Sanhedrin don't know that it's the end of their power. Yes, after the death of Jesus the Sanhedrin carries on for another 40 years, but it's like Ivy growing on a wall when you have cut the roots.

The consequences of their actions will come in time. The Romans will come and destroy them and the Sanhedrin will cease to exist. I told you at the beginning of this mystery that everybody would lose out. At this point the Sanhedrin, once they have Jesus entombed, think that that is the end of the story, not just for them or for anybody else, but that is not the case. Jesus was buried quickly because the great Sabbath had already begun, and they must all get home as fast as possible. So, they put a large number of spices on the Body to keep it sweet smelling for as long as possible. What they don't realise - simply because they haven't taken Jesus revelation on board - is that Jesus will be there only for three days.

let's just look at the three days for a moment. They say that Jesus rose on the third day, but he was buried on Friday afternoon, probably around 04:00pm. He died at 03:00pm, so, given time to remove the Body from the Cross and place it in the sepulchre, the earliest would have been about 04:00pm. So, from 04:00pm on a Friday to the rising sun on Easter morning, how do you get 3 days? Yes, it's Friday, Saturday and Sunday, but, 3 full days? You certainly don't if your day is a 24 hour day. The Jewish people at the time followed a different calendar to us. The book of Genesis chapter one enumerates the days of creation. It reads: "and evening came, and morning came the first day.... and evening came, and morning came the second day etc".

Following this lunar calendar which has a 12 hour day, here is how Jesus spent 3 days in the tomb: from sundown on Friday to sunup on Saturday is day 1. From sunup on Saturday to sundown on Saturday is day 2. From sundown on Saturday to sun up on Sunday is day 3.

We now begin chapter 20. You must take a deep breath before you go from 19 to 20 because, as I said to you when going from chapter 17 into 18, there's a huge shock here. There is an even greater shock moving from the torture and the dreadful death of Jesus and everything that happened on the Friday to the incredible events of Sunday. The shock is partly due to the fact that the Gospels are silent during those 3 fateful days. We know what happened from the mystics: our blessed mother interceded for the Resurrection, and that she gathered the disciples around her trying to comfort and console them. But it must have been the longest day on earth for them all. We also know that the women organised by Mary of Magdalen prepared spices to go and anoint the Body of Jesus. When the women go to the tomb on what we call Sunday - it was the first day of the Jewish working week - they were not expecting a Resurrection. They were just hoping to properly anoint the Body of Jesus. So, the shock for all of them was very great. From the terrible darkness that covered Jerusalem on the Friday - which brutalised and killed the Messiah, King of the Jews - we come into a completely new world. The Sanhedrin are unaware that the scriptures are being fulfilled. They are look at everything from the lower level of unbelief, just like the cosmos, so, they have no understanding of the mysteries that are taking place. They don't know that for the first time since the fall of Adam, a man has entered Paradise. They don't know that that **he has opened Heaven for us**. They don't realise that **the Sabbath of God's Reign**, **the great Sabbath** has begun. They don't know that there will be a descent of the Third Person of the Most Blessed Trinity. They should have known for they were scripture scholars, but they were so closed to Jesus that there's no way that they would accept his revelation.

They also don't know that **God's Will has been done on earth as it is in Heaven**. It has been done not just humanly, but divinely. Because of this the heavens are now open to us. The veil between Heaven and earth has been broken; it has been pulled apart. St. Matthew says that at the moment of Jesus' death **the veil of the temple was rent** in two without a human hand. That signified the end of the old covenant - **that God had left the temple**. The holy of holies was empty therefore anything the Sanhedrin did was now obsolete. However, they don't appear to have any idea that this was what was going on. The letter to the Hebrews in chapter 9, you get a very good description of what happened to Jesus between the Friday and the Sunday. I'm going to let you read that for yourself. He entered into the Sanctuary in Heaven taking his own precious blood with him. It was that precious blood that he offered on the **Altar in Heaven** for the salvation of the world. The great first Mass has been celebrated.

The Book of Revelation chapters 4-5 shows these events described in Hebrews 9. There you see that Jesus' sacrifice has been accepted in heaven, that **a new covenant has been ratified**. All this was done silently, lovingly, humbly, almost secretly, **but in full view of everybody**, hidden in plain sight, we say, but only hidden because people are blind. What seemed to have been a victory for darkness was in fact a victory for light.

The most puzzled presence at Calvary had to be Satan himself! He was the one who engineered everything using the sinfulness of all the people involved, but he was the protagonist. He was the enemy, and he saw a man who had **received all the evil that hell could throw at him**, not only survive, but triumph. Every time Satan raised the standard with more injustice and torture, Jesus rose to it and triumphed. He had to ask himself 'why is this man cooperating? Why isn't he rebelling, cursing and swearing like the others? Why haven't I succeeded in making him sin?' because Satan is the instigator of sin and rebellion, but Jesus told us in John 14:31 that Satan had no power over him! Jesus kept his great secret from Satan – that he was **the Light of God, Light of the world**. It was too late when Satan realised that the darkness did not and could not overcome the light - as we read in the Prologue.

Thank you for listening. God bless you.