

SESSION 5

Jesus Died for Me



QUESTION 1:

When have you had to admit you aren't as good at something as you'd like to think you are?

THE POINT

Jesus's death on the cross made forgiveness possible for me.

THE PASSAGE

John 19:16-19,28-30,38-42

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

The church I grew up in had a choir, and occasionally one particular lady would sing a solo. The problem was she was not a good vocalist. Even as a kid, I thought someone should tell her not to sing because she was embarrassing herself and she didn't even know it. This was before the days of *American Idol*, and there was no Simon to tell her the truth about her singing.

We often fool ourselves into thinking we are better at something than we really are. If we enjoy doing something, we assume we are fairly good at it. This doesn't just apply to hobbies or jobs; we often apply this to the whole of life. We think we are better people than we are. We assume we are better behaved than most of the people we know. The problem is we aren't, and the Bible makes that clear: we are sinners. In fact, when we compare ourselves to Jesus, our best is completely inadequate. But through Jesus, we also have hope!

John 19:16-19

16 Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led him away.

17 And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha:

18 Where they crucified him, and two other with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst.

19 And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

I have three sons who periodically want to test their strength. One test they enjoy is arm wrestling with me. From time to time, I let them win. When they “defeat” me, they celebrate. For just a few moments they believe they are stronger than their dad. But then I ask for a rematch and immediately defeat them. In that moment, they realize I let them win.

The chief priests may have thought they had won when Pilate “delivered . . . him therefore unto them to be crucified.” The Pharisees had wanted to be rid of this man Jesus for some time, and now Pilate had made that possible. They could be rid of him forever. However, the fact that they “took Jesus, and led him away” doesn’t mean He was unwilling to go or that somehow these leaders had power over Him. In reality, He was arm wrestling with them like I do with my sons. Jesus willingly went with them, and He willingly let them think they had won.

Skulls are often used to represent death. They are one of the most recognizable parts of the body that remains after someone dies. It is no wonder that the place where the Romans often crucified people was known as “place of the skull.” While we are unsure the exact location of Golgotha in Jerusalem today, we do know that in the first century it would have been a highly trafficked

place where many people passed by. The Romans did this on purpose. Watching someone be crucified was a great deterrent for others tempted to challenge Caesar.

For Jesus's public execution, Pilate added a sign that hung on Jesus's cross differentiating Him from the two men also being crucified. The sign read "JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS." This designation dripped with irony. Pilate didn't believe this statement, and the Jewish leaders certainly hadn't acknowledged Jesus as their King. Pilate wrote it to mock Jesus and spite the Jews, but the irony was that it broadcast the truth: Jesus is King.

Since Jesus is the King, why did He willingly die? Why did He go to the cross? Jesus was not like the two convicted criminals hanging on either side. They had done wrong, but not Jesus. Jesus was not only innocent of the charges being cast on Him by the religious leaders, but He was also innocent of any sin. Jesus left the throne room of heaven and took on flesh and lived among humanity, yet never sinned—not once. He never disobeyed His Father, broke the law, or lived in any way other than perfection. I can't make it through a single day without having a dishonoring thought, word, or deed, yet Jesus lived His entire life in perfect submission to the will of the Father. No one else can say this. While it is true that all of us are sinners (Rom. 3:23), there was no sin in Jesus (Heb. 4:15). What makes the cross so important is that it is where our sin was paid for by the one who never sinned. "And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin" (1 John 3:5). Only someone who is innocent can take the punishment for someone who is guilty. Jesus took our guilt, our sin, and our shame upon Himself on that cross, and He could only do so because He was guiltless before the Father.

QUESTION 2:

Which detail about Jesus's crucifixion stands out to you as you read this passage?

John 19:28-30

28 After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst.

29 Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth.

30 When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

I had a period in my life when I ran a lot. During a five-year span, I ran four marathons. Running long distances take a lot of time and dedication. When I was running the Indianapolis marathon, I hit the proverbial wall at about mile nineteen. I wasn't sure I could make it one step further, but I was able to dig in and keep going. When I finally made it the finish line, all I wanted to do was sit down. I did not want to talk to anyone, drink anything, or even eat anything. All I wanted to do was sit. My body desperately needed to rest. I had finished the race. All that training and all those miles were now in the rearview mirror. I had completed the task with nothing left to do but rest.

When Jesus left heaven and took on flesh, He came with one end in mind: the cross. He knew the cross was the culmination of His earthly ministry. Jesus declared this in John 17:4: "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." Even as He endured the suffering and pain of the cross, He knew "that all things were now accomplished." He understood what was happening. He was about to die, and when He did, His blood would be the covering for our sin.

Even Jesus's thirst was a part of what the Father intended for His Son to finish. The psalmist wrote in Psalm 69:21, "They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." By declaring His thirst, Jesus was fulfilling what had

been prophesied about the Messiah. Not only are we reminded of Jesus's humanity during this simple request, but we are assured of His divinity in that He fulfilled the prophecies of Scripture, even in His death.

The phrase "It is finished" is translated from the Greek word *tetelestai*. It was used in the perfect tense indicating that something was fully completed. This word would be used by a servant reporting back to his master after his task was completed or when a priest examined an animal that was about to be sacrificed and it was deemed perfect. Jesus said, "It is finished" to indicate the full completion of His work. His task had been completed and His sacrifice had been deemed perfect.¹

My teenage daughter recently got into a small fender bender on her way to church. Being a minor and not having her license for very long meant she would have to appear in traffic court. She was quite nervous as the day approached, but she was prepared to respond to the inquiry of the judge. When we arrived at the courtroom, the judge asked her a series of questions about the incident. After hearing what happened, the judge dismissed the ticket. The judge dismissed the legal demand upon my daughter to pay for her mistake. This is exactly what Jesus did for us on the cross. We owed a debt, a debt we had compiled for our sin. Jesus paid that debt by going to the cross where He took our debt upon Himself. By paying the penalty for our sin, He canceled the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross" (Col. 2:14).

QUESTION 3:

How have you been personally impacted by the death of Jesus?

ENGAGE

Certificate of Debt:

Name:

List your sin debt to the Lord Jesus. With as much specificity as you are comfortable writing down (you can use initials, dates, or code words for sins you are embarrassed to write down):

Debts:

If you have trusted in the Lord Jesus, He has paid the debt on your behalf. Across this entire certificate write in large letters: PAID IN FULL BY JESUS (Col. 2:14).

If you haven't yet trusted in Jesus, pray to God, asking for His help to understand why your sin gives you a debt before Him. Ask for Him to give you the faith you need to believe that Jesus could pay your debt.

John 19:38-42

38 And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus.

39 And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight.

40 Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury.

41 Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid.

42 There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand.

Key Words: Arimathea (v. 38)—Hometown of Joseph, who placed Jesus's body in his own new tomb. Arimathea may have been the birthplace of Samuel (a variant of "Ramathaim," 1 Sam. 1:1).

Myrrh and aloes (v. 39)—Myrrh was a resin imported from Arabia, and it had a fragrant aroma. Aloes were resins and oils from trees grown in China and India.

Jews' preparation day (v. 42)—Keeping the Sabbath day commandment required Jewish people to prepare for it on the previous day. It came to be known as the day of preparation.

Have you ever been an eyewitness to a significant historical event? I wasn't a direct eyewitness to one, but I was to its aftermath. On April 19, 1995, Timothy McVeigh exploded a truck in front of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City. I was a sophomore at Oklahoma Baptist University, only 35 miles away. The next day a group of students made the short drive to see the site. A fence had been erected and people had already begun to place flowers and notes on it. We could still smell the smoke in the air as the search and rescue workers dug through the rubble. We began to pray. Witnessing the aftermath of this tragedy was one of those unforgettable moments of life.

In John 19:38 we meet an eyewitness to the death and burial of Jesus: Joseph of Arimathea. Joseph was a "counsellor" (Luke 23:50), the highest council of Jewish leaders. It was this group of religious leaders who had pushed Pilate to crucify Jesus, yet here we find that one of them was secretly a follower. As a member of this group, it is not hard to image the pressure he was under. Joseph saw Jesus for who He truly is, but the circle of power he was in had rejected Jesus as the Messiah.

To stand up to this group would have had tremendous consequences. It is easy on this side of the cross and from the comfort of our own places of security to say that he should have said something or stood up to the power, but not even Peter, one of Jesus closest disciples, stood faithfully by Him in His death.

No matter why Joseph was silent during the proceedings that led to the crucifixion, he was determined to give Jesus a proper Jewish burial. If he had missed his chance to honor Jesus in His life, he wasn't going to miss the opportunity to do so in His death. Joseph was not alone in his desire to honor Jesus. Nicodemus, another member of the Sanhedrin and a secret follower of Christ, had similar aspirations. Together these two men wrapped the body of Jesus with spices (to cover the smell of a decaying body) and linen (to hold the spices close to the body).

QUESTION 4:

Why do some Christians wait so long to go public about their relationship with Christ?

While thousands of people saw Jesus alive, there were many who also saw Him dead. Jesus's death—His finished work on the cross—is vital to the gospel. If Jesus had not died, we would still be condemned in our sin; and if Jesus had not been raised, we would still be without hope. This is why the apostle John gave us the account of Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, who saw and knew that Jesus had died. This debunks the idea that Jesus had only passed out and revived in the cold tomb. These men bear witness that Jesus died, and as we shall see in the next session, others most assuredly saw Him afterwards fully alive!

For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

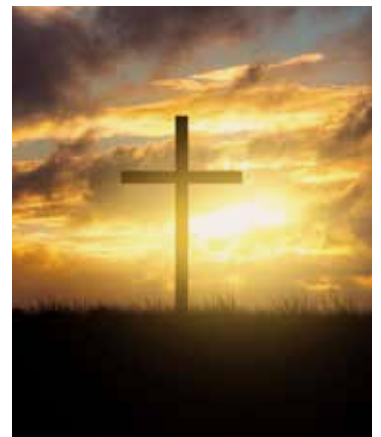
QUESTION 5:

How have you benefited from someone's testimony about Jesus?

LIVE IT OUT

What will you do as a result of this study?

- ▶ **A word of thanks.** Consider all Jesus has done for you. He left heaven for you, lived the sinless life that you could not live, and died on a cross for your sin. Take a moment to thank Jesus for His sacrifice. If you are not a believer, confess your sin, repent, and ask Jesus to transform your life through faith.
- ▶ **A word of comfort.** If you know someone in your church or community who has recently lost a loved one, write the person a letter. Be ready to offer encouragement, comfort, and support as needed.
- ▶ **A word of forgiveness.** Jesus died to forgive you of your sin. Is there anyone you need to forgive? Ask God to reveal any grudges or unforgiveness in your heart. Ask Him to help you forgive that person.



END NOTES

1. Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 384.