

November 7/8, 2020

## His Testimony Is True

*These Things are Written that You May Believe Series*

**John 19: 31-42**

Pastor Bryan Clark

We were really excited this week for the many that responded to trust Jesus last weekend and would count it a privilege to help you in any way that we can. So if you want to connect with us—maybe you'd like to be in a small group, maybe just have questions or wonder what your next steps might be—probably the easiest way to connect with us is at [Lincolnberean.org/celebrate](http://Lincolnberean.org/celebrate). If you're in the auditorium, you can also just stop at the *Connecting Point*, if you prefer that. But even if you don't live in our community, we'd love to hear from you and figure out how we can serve you.

The journey to the cross has been very intense. So, this morning we take a deep breath, kind of pause between the crucifixion and the resurrection. One question we might ask, since John keeps encouraging us to believe is, “How do we know that this is the truth?” Well, let's talk about that. If you have a Bible, turn with us to the Gospel of John, Chapter 19, and pick it up in verse 31:

**Then the Jews, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), 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 man and of the other who was crucified with Him; but coming to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. (\*NASB, John 19:31-34)**

So, it was customary that the Romans would leave the dead bodies on the cross, often for days. As a matter of fact, it was common they would just leave them and let the vultures and the wild animals consume them. It was one more way of Rome saying, “This is what happens when you break our laws.” However, around Jerusalem, the climate was a little bit different. As I've mentioned, part of the philosophy in the Roman Empire was to try to accommodate the religions of the various nations under their rule, in order to minimize conflict. So the Old Testament laws said that a dead body should not remain hanging overnight, so that's what these Jewish leaders are referring to. This is especially sensitive because this is Friday, the day of preparation before the Sabbath, which would begin at sundown. But it wasn't just any Sabbath; it was the Passover Sabbath, so it was especially sensitive. So the religious leaders go to Pilate and want the legs of Jesus and the other two broken, to speed up the death, so they can be removed from the cross.

This was not an unusual practice for the Romans. As a matter of fact, they had a mallet that was designed just for this purpose. On the cross, in order to breathe, you would have to basically push up with your legs off of that nail that's driven through the feet in order to breathe. So you can just imagine how excruciatingly painful that would be. But once the legs were broken, they could not push up, and they would die of asphyxiation fairly quickly. So that's what they're asking for and Pilate grants their request.

So can you imagine being on a cross, with all the suffering that goes with it, with all the trauma, and then seeing them come up with this mallet, knowing there's this one more violent act that is going to finish your torture on the cross? It was absolutely horrific! So the soldiers come and break the legs of the two insurrectionists—one on each side of Jesus—but do not break the legs of Jesus. Now, this is quite interesting. Their orders were to break His legs. It would have made the most sense just to go down the line and do this, but they didn't. They determine Jesus is already dead. Perhaps it's because He was scourged twice; perhaps because of all the other trauma; whatever, Jesus is dead. However, one of the soldiers apparently isn't completely convinced. If they were to remove someone from the cross that wasn't fully dead, it would cost them their lives. So perhaps because he's not completely convinced, he takes the spear, stabs it into Jesus' side, and outflows blood and water. Jesus is dead.

Now scholars wrestle with whether or not there is more symbolic meaning to the blood and water. My opinion would be there's a lot of speculation, but none of those theories really seem convincing to me. I think mostly what John is identifying is Jesus was human and Jesus was dead. During the time when John was writing, which is later in the first century, there were false teachers that were affirming the deity of Christ. And that was in part because there were so many eyewitnesses to the miracles of Jesus, it was very difficult to deny. What they were denying was the humanity of Jesus. There was this belief that it was possible for the Greek gods to come to earth to mix with humans, produce some sort of an offspring from that, that weren't really human, so they didn't have blood. So it's entirely possible when John tells us that Jesus said, "I am thirsty," and now he identifies the blood and water, it's a way of saying He was fully human, and He was fully dead. John then goes on, verse 35:

**And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe. For these things came to pass to fulfill the Scripture, "NOT A BONE OF HIM SHALL BE BROKEN." And again another Scripture says, "THEY SHALL LOOK ON HIM WHOM THEY PIERCED." (Vs. 35-37)**

Now this is a very interesting part of the story, in that John is actually speaking to us as the readers, saying he wants us to know that he writes this as an eyewitness and that his testimony is true, in order that we might believe. So let's talk about that for a few minutes. It is an honest question to wrestle with, whether or not this is true. So let's start with the documents themselves. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are historical documents. Sometimes I hear people say, "Well, that's just what the Bible says." They're very dismissive, as if because those documents are in the Bible, then they aren't reliable. That's just not intellectually honest. They are legitimate, historical documents by any definition. Therefore, we apply the same test to them as we would any other historical documents.

So, the first question we wrestle with is, "How do we know what we have in our Bibles today accurately reflects what John wrote?" In other words, in more than 2000 years, what are the chances of editing and embellishing and exaggerating, so that what we have today isn't really what John wrote? So there are two primary things that the critics deal with. One is, "How many copies of the manuscript do we have?" We don't have original documents from the ancient world; they didn't last that long. They were copied, re-copied, re-copied and re-copied. So the more copies

there are, the more you can compare the copies and you start to figure out if things have been changed, or are they all the same? Let me give you an example: Julius Caesar, in about the same time period, wrote his famous *Gallic Wars*. Today we have 10 copies—and that document is considered to be reliable. Plato wrote his *Tetralogies* in about the same time period. Today we have 7 copies—and they're considered, then, to be reliable. For the New Testament Gospels, we have roughly 5000 copies! There is nothing from the ancient world that even comes close to the number of copies we have of the Gospels.

The second thing that they look at is, “What is the time gap between the original document and the oldest copy?” The shorter the time gap, the better. So again, for Julius Caesar's *Gallic Wars*, the gap is about 1000 years between the original and the oldest copy we have. For Plato's *Tetralogies*, it's roughly 900 years. For the Gospels, it's 250 years. According to one scholar, the evidence for the reliability of the Gospels is so great that roughly 97% of the textual critics today would say we can be morally certain they're absolutely reliable. As a matter of fact, this is a point that's really not even disputed. So, we have reason to believe the documents are extremely reliable.

So next we move back, then, to what John actually wrote as an eyewitness. How do we know John wasn't fabricating? How do we know John wasn't exaggerating? Well first of all, there are four separate historical documents, written by four different historians, all with their own perspective, but all in agreement with the story of the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Now there are some differences and distinctives. Experts would tell us that's exactly what you would expect to find if they were four independent historians. If it was a fabricated story, copied four times, there wouldn't be those distinctives and differences. It's also important to understand those documents were written well within the lifetime of the eyewitnesses to these events. If what John and the other three writers were writing were not true, there was no shortage of people to discredit the documents. So think of it this way: In the first century, there was no shortage of very powerful people that wanted to stop the movement of Christianity. If it was possible to discredit these documents—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—they certainly would have done so. What happened is the opposite. Christianity exploded from Jerusalem out, because the evidence that supported the documents was overwhelming, because the eyewitnesses were still alive.

One of the things about Matthew, Mark, Luke and John is that they are so specific. It's not written like some sort of a fable, where nobody can figure out what exactly happened when. They're very specific on people, on places, on times, on events. They have all the earmarks of eyewitness testimony to the events they are recording, which is what John is claiming.

Moving from there, knowing John is accurately writing what he's witnessing, we can be confident of that. So, then, maybe Jesus just *pretended* to be the Messiah. Maybe Jesus knew the Old Testament prophecies, and just fulfilled them on purpose so people would think He was the Messiah. One of the things Jesus claimed, that bore testimony to His claim to be God in the flesh, were His signs, were His miracles. This is something John has recorded a great deal of.

One other thing we look at is fulfilled prophecy. This has also been a main, major emphasis for John. So just to be clear on this, we're talking about things written in the Old Testament. We know for sure the Old Testament was closed and finished several hundred years before the time of Christ. There's no dispute on that. So, these things were written between 500 and 1500 years

before their fulfillment. John identifies, even in this passage, that the Old Testament prophesied that Jesus' legs would not be broken, and that a spear would pierce His side. So what is the chance that the Roman soldier, for some reason, would skip Jesus when breaking legs? And what is the chance that in a very unusual way, would pierce Jesus' side? That's the point John is making when he quotes those two texts. That's exactly what was predicted hundreds of years before. So the idea is prophecy fulfilled.

Dr. John Blanchard, a Christian scholar, says there are over 300 Old Testament prophecies perfectly fulfilled in Jesus. He identifies roughly 30 of them just in the 24 hours surrounding the death of Jesus. (I'm going to have a link at the end of the transcript if you want to pursue that further. It's a link to an article that will help you with that.) \*

So, what is the chance that Jesus did this on purpose? Most of the prophecies were things totally out of Jesus' control—like the soldiers, like the spear—a long list of things. Most of the things He had no control over, so that's really a silly argument. The only option left on the table would be *just by chance*. Lots of people came forth in the ancient world and claimed to be the Messiah. Maybe one of them finally came along and, just by chance, everything was fulfilled that was predicted. So, what's the chance; what's the possibility of that?

In the mid-part of the 20th century, a mathematician by the name of Peter Stoner, the Chairman of the Department of Math and Astronomy at Pasadena City College, with an expertise in probability, decided to try to figure that out. And so he took 8 of the prophecies, and he identifies what 8 they are, and factors the probability that Jesus could have fulfilled those just by chance. His conclusion was 1 to 10, to the 17th power—so that's 10 with 17 zeros after it. Those numbers get so big, they kind of lose their meaning so, with the help of my favorite math teacher, here's how we could do this. If you took 10 to the 17th power worth of silver dollars, and you poured them into the state of Nebraska, and covered the state of Nebraska border to border—East, West, North, South—they would be seven feet deep across the entire state. Imagine one of those has a red X on it, and it's buried somewhere in the state of Nebraska. You go out in a helicopter, wearing a blindfold, and at your choice, you jump into the pile; you reach into the pile, and you pull one out. The odds of it being the one with the X is one to 10 to the 17th power. That's just 8 of the prophecies. He goes on and identifies 48 of them, and the number comes out to 1 to 10 to the 157th power. It's a number so big, it's really hard to even talk about. The bottom line is the thought that Jesus just *happened* to fulfill all of the prophecies, is ridiculous. It's impossible! Therefore, we would say we have every reason to have confidence that the document we have in our Bible is reliable, that John is an eyewitness, that John is telling the truth, affirmed by the other eyewitnesses, and that Jesus was indeed the Messiah!

Now it is possible for someone to say, "I choose not to believe." That's everyone's choice. But it is not intellectually honest to say, "I choose not to believe because of the evidence." In the same way, I could say this morning, "I choose to believe the world is flat." I can choose that, but it's not intellectually honest to say, "...because of the evidence." So John assures us, "What I'm writing is true in order that we might believe." Verse 38:

**After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret *one* for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and**

**Pilot granted permission. So he came and took away His body. Nicodemus, who had first come to him by night, also came, bringing in a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds *weight*. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen wrappings 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. Therefore because of the Jewish day of preparation, since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.** (Vs. 38-42)

So, again, talking about John's specificity, he names Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, both members of the Sanhedrin, both members of the Council. Joseph of Arimathea is a new character to us in the Gospel of John. He is listed in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Putting the four Gospels together, we know he was on the Council; he was part of the Sanhedrin that condemned Jesus, but we also know he disagreed with the decision. We know he was wealthy, and we know, according to Mark, it took great courage to go to Pilate and ask for the body. Typically, the bodies would be removed and thrown in a pit and covered up. So, Joseph goes to ask for the body, and Pilate grants him.

We also then are reintroduced to Nicodemus. We met Nicodemus in chapter 3, the famous “*Born Again*” story. We meet him again in chapter 7, and now in chapter 19. We know that Nicodemus was also on the Council, part of the Sanhedrin—the Council that condemned Jesus— but also disagreed with the decision and was a secret follower of Jesus.

Now stop and think about this. These two men had everything to lose, and nothing to gain. From their perspective, Jesus was dead; the movement was over. So at great risk, with nothing to gain and everything to lose, they come forward. Nicodemus came to Jesus by night because he didn't want to be seen talking to Jesus. But now he comes in the light. He brings with him aloe and myrrh, a common mixture for burial. The text says a hundred pounds, which means 100 Roman pounds—would be 75 of our pounds—which is an extraordinary amount of aloe and myrrh—very expensive, the kind of the amount reserved for kings and the most wealthy. Jesus' body is wrapped. The terminology could refer to strips or one solid cloth. Jesus is wrapped and prepared for burial because it's almost sundown. The tomb is nearby, so they can quickly get Jesus into the tomb. Now one of the things that's very interesting is how much care John takes to identify this is a tomb right outside the city, right by where Jesus was crucified, that belonged to Joseph, meaning a very obvious public tomb. He's not lost in a cemetery somewhere. He's not hauled up into the hills to some secret burial place. All of this sets up what he's going to talk about next week, in the resurrection.

So Jesus is taken to a **new tomb**. The language that nobody had been placed there before is odd to us. You know, a tomb for us is used once. But in the first century, a tomb like this was typically a cave in the limestone. When John says **garden**, just like the Garden of Gethsemane, he's not talking about a flower garden. He's talking about probably an olive tree grove, just like Gethsemane. Somewhere in there, there is this cave. Inside the cave, they carve out a table or a slab where the body is laid and prepared. In the back, then, of this tomb, they carve out kind of a cubby that's the length of a body and maybe 12 inches deep. Once the body is wrapped, it is laid up in that cubby. They roll a stone in front of the tomb, and it remains there until the body has decomposed. Then they go back in, they take the bones, they put them in what was called a bone

box that was in the tomb, and the tomb was ready for the next person. It was common that entire families, even extended families, all used the same tomb. The point John is making is this is not a secret tomb. This is not a burial place clear up in the hills somewhere. This is right outside town. It's in an obvious place. Nobody's going to lose track of where it is, and there are no other bones in there. There's going to be no question who came out of the tomb. All these details set up for what he wants to talk about in the next chapter.

It's interesting how, when Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 describes the Gospel in the briefest of terms, it's the terminology that ends up in the *Apostles' Creed*. "He was crucified, buried, and rose again." John is going to great lengths to say He died, and He was buried, which sets up what's to come—one of the greatest moments in human history! As a matter of fact, it's a moment so significant that whether we're talking about you, or someone you deeply loved, the only chance for life after death depends upon what we're going to talk about next week.

As we wrap this up this morning, for those of us that believe, we can have every confidence that the story is true—from the reliability of the document, to John's eyewitness testimony, to the evidence that Jesus was indeed the long-awaited Messiah. For those that are still seeking, I would encourage you to investigate the claims I have made this morning. These are historical events. They can be investigated. They can be determined to be true or not true. What I would ask of you though is: Don't go home and spend ten minutes on the internet and say, "There!" I guarantee you; you can go home and get on the internet and in five minutes find convincing evidence that the earth is flat. You can find anything on the internet. If you're serious about this, have the intellectual honesty to actually investigate these claims. There are plenty of resources to do that, and you decide, in order that you might believe.

*Our Father, we celebrate today the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. We remember His broken body. We remember His shed blood, and we walk out these doors with every confidence that what we believe is true. But the result of that is we should live our lives as people filled with hope. May that be true of us. In Jesus name, Amen.*

<https://www.christianity.com/god/fulfillment-of-prophecy/why-the-cross-pt-5-the-prophecies-11647987.html>

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Fall 2020 // WEEK 9

Life Group Questions

That You May Believe, John // November 7/8, 2020

His Testimony is True // John 19:31-42

## Introduction

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Last week we came to a zenith in the story – the death of Jesus on the cross for the sins of the world. This week we see Him buried.

Take some time to read all of chapter 19, then focus on verses 31-42 as you seek to answer the following questions.

## Warm Up *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

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Here are some suggestions to get your conversation started:

1. Have you ever purchased anything from a telemarketer or infomercial? If so, what was it? If not, why not?
  
2. "Life is not measured by the number of breaths you take, but by the moments that take your breath away." When have you had such a moment?

## Getting Started

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Transition into group discussion.

- 1) Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:
    - a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
    - b. For openness to what you're learning together
    - c. For friendships to deepen and grow
  - 2) Invite someone (or a couple of people) to read John 19:31-42 to the group.
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## Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

Please complete these questions before your group meets.

- 1) As you listened to the sermon this week, what is something that the Holy Spirit was bringing to your mind?
  
- 2) In verses 31-37, it is remarkable that the Roman soldier didn't carry out the command to break the legs of Jesus, rather they chose to pierce His side to prove that He had died. Look up the following cross references:  
Exodus 12:46, Numbers 9:12, Psalm 34:20, Zechariah 12:10
  - a. **How do these cross-references relate to the story of the crucifixion? What do they tell you about God's involvement?**
  
  - b. **How does fulfilled prophecy lend credibility to who Jesus is and what He did?**
  
  - c. **How does the idea of God's sovereignty (even in the midst of great evil), bring you comfort in your own life?**
  
- 3) The ruling council would probably have had Jesus' body put in a common grave outside the city walls. Yet in verses 38-42, Jesus is buried in a new, unused tomb of prestige in a garden using 75 pounds of burial spices (an excessive amount). Gardens were generally the setting for the entombment of Israel's kings. Jerusalem had burial places for criminals and slaves. But Jesus is buried in splendor, in beauty, in an unused tomb, as if it had been carved for Him alone.
  - a. **How has your view of Jesus as a king changed over the course of the past few chapters in John?**
  
  - b. **Is there anything in your life that you are struggling to submit to Jesus' kingship right now?** (We know we have asked this question before, but it is always a good idea to take stock of our lives. Sometimes things slip in and take the place of Jesus as king...)



4) In verses 38-39 we are introduced to Joseph of Arimathea and we meet Nicodemus for the third time. From John 3, we know that Nicodemus is a member of the ruling council and in Mark 16:1 we're told that about Joseph as well. We also know that they are both secret disciples of Jesus. However, their actions in burying Jesus would have associated them publicly as followers.

- a. **What do you think caused Joseph and Nicodemus to finally identify themselves with Jesus?**
  
- b. **Read John 12:42-43. How does this passage connect with Joseph & Nicodemus' actions?**
  
- c. **Are there situations or relationships in your life where you need to be more public about your relationship with Jesus? What might it look like to respectfully live that out?**

### **Prayer** *(Suggested time: 20 min)*

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Take some time to praise God together from the scriptures. Give about 5 minutes for each person to look up a passage that is meaningful to them. Once everyone has a passage picked out, have someone read their passage. Then allow time for others to respond in prayer based on what was read. Then have the next person read their passage. If you are new to the Bible, here are a few suggestions of passages in which to find a couple of verses: **John 15:1-17, Psalm 23, Isaiah 40:18-31, Colossians 1:15-20**

If you would like to learn more about opportunities to witness or participate in God's kingdom in Lincoln and around the world, contact [outreach@lincolnberean.org](mailto:outreach@lincolnberean.org) or checkout this Facebook Group: [www.facebook.com/groups/lincolnbereanlocal](https://www.facebook.com/groups/lincolnbereanlocal)