

The Gospel of John

The Conqueror of Death (Part 1)

John 19:31-37

INTRODUCTION:

This morning we are continuing in the Gospel of John. In the next few weeks we are going to look at how Jesus power over death during the events around His death, burial, and resurrection.

Stand and Read Scripture

John 19:31-37 (NASB)

³¹ Now then, since it was the day of preparation, to prevent the bodies from remaining on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews requested of Pilate that their legs be broken, and *the bodies* be taken away. ³² So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first man, and of the other who was crucified with Him; ³³ but after they came to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. ³⁴ Yet one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. 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. ³⁶ For these things took place so that the Scripture would be fulfilled: "Not a bone of Him shall be broken." ³⁷ And again another Scripture says, "They will look at Him whom they pierced."

Prayer

We see in this portion of Scripture of Christ's power over death. In verse 30, the prior verse to what we just read in our scripture text, Jesus says...

John 19:30b (NASB)

...*"It is finished!" And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.*

He left His own body at exact time in history to accomplish His Father's will. He willed His own death, and then He controlled the events that happened while His dead body was still hanging on the cross and even to His burial. *"And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true;"* says John in verse 35. John identifies himself as **"he"** *"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. "*

Again, the purpose of John in his entire gospel, every account, is that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and by believing have eternal life in His name. John, an eyewitness of the cross and its aftermath records this for us as true testimony. What it tells us, along with the resurrection, is that Jesus is the conqueror of death. He has brought about His own death, controlled the events after His death, controlled His own

burial, and then exerted the power to rise from the dead. **He is the divine death conqueror.** This is important for us to know, because the promise to every believer is that we will rise from the dead so that our **new** bodies, newly created, will be joined to our glorified souls in a form that suits us for perfect usefulness and joy in heaven.

Hebrews 2:14-15 (NASB)

¹⁴ Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, so that through death He might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and free those who through **fear of death** were subject to slavery all their lives.

I would think that the world in which we live would rush to understand the reality that Jesus is a death conqueror. Since, as I just read in Hebrews 2, the whole world lives in the fear of death. Our fear of death is like being in slavery. People try to deal with that slavery in strange ways. Some people have actually committed suicide rather than face unexpected death. They want to take death into their own hands and control it, rather than continue to live in fear, so they take their own lives.

And then there are those people who want to deny that there is any afterlife at all. That removes the sting of death. If you just go out of existence, what is there to fear?

But let me assure you that your existence does not end at death! You have an eternal soul. You will live **forever**. You **will** live forever! You will not only live forever in a spiritual form, but you will live forever in a body that will be raised from the grave to suit you for your eternal dwelling place. You will have a body suited for maximum enjoyment of heaven or your new body will have to pay the price for your sins, that Jesus died to pay, by being separated from God, our creator, and suffering eternally from His presence and glory. Your life is not finite; you will live forever in a resurrected form. When you understand death in that way all of the uncertainties of death take on a new meaning. It should cause us to seek God because there is something magnificent on the other side of death if we find Him.

It is not just the uncertainty of what comes after death that we fear, it is the fact that you are not in control of it. What comes after death is even more fearful to the world.

Hebrews 9:27-28 (NASB)

²⁷ And just as it is destined for people to die once, and after this *comes* judgment, ²⁸ so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without *reference to sin*, to those who eagerly await Him.

And **that** judgment includes a resurrection to eternal punishment for unbelievers, or eternal glory for believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The good news however is this, that Jesus has power over death, power to raise the dead to eternal glory. He is the death conqueror. Death is a surprise for us, but it was not a surprise for Jesus. The good news is He conquered death not only for Himself, but for all who put their trust in Him. He is the one who has the power of resurrection. Back in the fifth chapter of John, Jesus said that He is the one who will resurrect the dead – some to the resurrection of life and some to the resurrection of judgment. **He has the power to give life to the dead.** We have seen that in His ministry as He raised dead people.

Christ is the death conqueror who conquers death not only for Himself, but for us; and so we can say, as all believers do, with Paul...

Philippians 1:21 (NASB)

²¹ For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

It is gain, because Christ has conquered death; and even when we physically die, we are eternally alive in the spirit, and we will be ushered into an eternity with God in Heaven.

Now we see the power of Christ as the death conqueror in the text that I just read to you. We have already seen a glimpse the power of Christ over death in verse 30 when He literally brought about His own death. He left His own body by His own power, because His work was finished.

The demonstration of power was so obvious in His dying that even one of the thieves who began the day by mocking Jesus and abusing Him with words, began to recognize that Jesus had to be who He claimed to be, because the thief said, "**Remember me when You come into Your kingdom.**" That Jewish thief saw in His dying, evidence that He was the Messiah, God's anointed King, who would rise from the dead and establish a kingdom, and would raise His own people to dwell in that kingdom. And that thief asked to be one of them. And what did Jesus say? "**Today you will be with Me in paradise.**"

Some of the soldiers recognized who He was, and the centurion verbalized it: "**Truly, this man was the Son of God.**" They saw it in His dying. They experienced it during the three darks of darkness, and the earthquake, and the rocks splitting in front of them. So let's talk about that a little bit more of the context of verses 31-37 where Jesus demonstrates power over death in His dying. And then in the next couple of weeks, Lord willing, I want you to see how He demonstrates power over death after His death, in His burial, and in His resurrection.

BODY:

I. POWER OVER DEATH IN HIS DYING.

I would like to refer you back to John 10 where Jesus had just brought sight to a man that had been blind from birth. The man was so excited that he went all over the temple telling everyone that Jesus opened his eyes to see. The Pharisees told him to stop, but he refused so they put him out of the synagogue. Jesus caught wind that the Pharisees had put him out so he sought to find him.

John 9:35-38 (NASB)

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had put him out, and upon finding him, He said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶ He answered by saying, "And who is He, Sir, that I may believe in Him?" ³⁷ Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you." ³⁸ And he said, "I believe, Lord." And he worshiped Him.

Then Jesus went on to tell him the parable of the Good Shepherd explaining how he was voluntarily going to die and come back to life in order to bring salvation to man as the Pharisees listened in.

John 10:14-18 (NASB)

¹⁴ I am the good shepherd, and I know My own, and My own know Me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. ¹⁶ And I have other sheep that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will listen to My voice; and they will become one flock, *with* one shepherd. ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it back. ¹⁸ No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own. **I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it back.** This commandment I received from My Father.”

Jesus said He had the power to lay down His life and the power to take it up again. And that is exactly what He did! He controlled what happened as He was on the cross; He controlled the events after He died; He controlled His burial; and then He controlled His own resurrection.

When He said “**It is finished!**” on the cross, He shouted it at the top of His voice for all to hear through all the ages, that the work of redemption was finished. Salvation was accomplished. Satan was defeated. Jesus had full knowledge of that and of every detail that needed to be fulfilled.

John 19:28 (NASB)

²⁸ After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, in order that the Scripture would be fulfilled, *said, “I am thirsty.”

Once He had declared His thirst and been given a drink of sour wine He knew that the last prophecy had been fulfilled before He could die. Then He gave up His life by His own power.

The trial was illegal. It had been conducted in the middle of the night. He was sentenced somewhere around 6:00 a.m. He was crucified at 9:00 a.m. according to **Mark 15:25**. From noon to 3:00 there was darkness everywhere. This is the darkness of the outpouring of divine wrath. It is in those three hours that He absorbs the infinite punishment for all the sins of all the people who will ever be redeemed. It was in those three hours that God had forsaken Him and punished Him for the sins of His people. At 3:00 the darkness goes away and He dies around 3:00 – very quickly for someone who is crucified.

Crucified at 9:00 in the morning and dead six hours later. Some would linger for two or three days. He died because it was time to die. And He came to bear our sins in His own body on the cross; He came to suffer in our place; and when the suffering ended and the darkness disappeared at 3:00 it was time for Him to die. You have to understand that the judgment that Jesus received was God pouring wrath on Him for three hours for every sin ever committed by His ultimate children. And when the wrath was spent He gave up His life.

Now that is very important, because this is 3:00 in the afternoon on Friday. And now we begin to see why Jesus and God planned for a 3:00 death. Look at verse 31.

John 19:31 (NASB)

³¹ Now then, since it was the day of preparation, to prevent the bodies from remaining on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews requested of Pilate that their legs be broken, and *the bodies* be taken away.

The day of preparation simply means the day before a Sabbath, the day when Jewish people prepared for the Sabbath. They had to do a lot of preparation, because, mostly by

their own made up rules, the Sabbath was very restricted. They had to do all the preparations for the Sabbath the day before. And this was not just any Sabbath, this was a high day. Why? Because on this Sabbath was the annual Passover. It was a very important sacred day.

So this is Friday afternoon, the time is around 3:00. The next day is a high day, it's Passover day, it's a Sabbath. They do not want these bodies, especially the body of Jesus to remain on the cross, because they believe that would defile the Passover Sabbath.

Where did they get that idea? Back in Deuteronomy 21.

Deuteronomy 21:22-23 (NASB)

²² "Now if a person has committed a sin *carrying* a sentence of death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, ²³ his body is not to be left overnight on the tree, but you shall certainly bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is cursed of God), so that you do not defile your land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance.

Now a lot of people had been hung on a tree, a lot of people had been crucified on wooden crosses around Jerusalem; but we don't know that any of them had been hung on a tree, because the Jews wanted Him hung on a tree. They did not seem to make an issue over it if the Romans did it. But this is different. Jesus has been hung on a tree, from their perspective, by their own will, and so this then threatens to violate the mandate of Deuteronomy 21. So they want to get Him down, and with Him take down the other two thieves. "**We don't want our land defiled.**"

Really amazing, isn't it? This priority reeks with hypocrisy. They have just killed the Messiah, the Savior, the Son of God at the hands of the Romans. And while they are killing the Son of God they are trying to maintain their undefiled condition. They wanted to be sure to keep God's law while killing the one who both wrote it and fulfilled it.

And it is getting late in the afternoon, and Sabbath begins at sunset, so they are in a hurry. **And, oh, by the way, so is God, because Jesus must be in the ground on Friday**, because He said He would be three days in the grave. Friday is Day One, it has to be part of Friday. All day Saturday is Day Two. Sunday morning gets us into Day Three. So these Jews, without any knowledge at all of the purposes of God, seek Roman permission to speed up His death and get Him off the cross before Sabbath began that evening.

Now how would they speed up their death?

John 19:32-33 (NASB)

³² So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first man, and of the other who was crucified with Him; ³³ but after they came to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs.

The soldiers came prepared to do that. They smashed the legs of the first thief and of the other who were crucified with him, but they did not break the legs of Jesus. Why? Because the thieves were still alive but Jesus is dead. When the femurs were smashed, the victim on the cross could no longer push himself up or move himself up in order to catch a breath, and soon would die not only from the trauma and the pain and bleeding, but from asphyxiation. This was a fast death, as the body slumped and the lungs could no longer draw in air.

I want to remind you that the death of Jesus was the testimony of executioners. They kill people; that is their profession. There are at least four of them. There is a collective consensus that Jesus is dead.

It is so soon however that pierced His side with a spear just to be sure.

John 19:34 (NASB)

³⁴ Yet one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.

They opened His abdominal cavity and out poured blood and water. This was evidence that He was dead. There was no need to break His legs-He is already dead. He had to die before the soldiers came to break His legs. He knew that. He had to command His own death before that would happen.

Why? Go down to verse 36.

John 19:36 (NASB)

³⁶ For these things took place so that the Scripture would be fulfilled: "Not a bone of Him shall be broken."

After the death angel passed over Egypt and killed the firstborn of the Egyptians, Moses was told to commemorate the event with an annual Passover. They were to select a Passover lamb that was without blemish and without spot in order to have their sins atoned for for another year. It had to be a perfect lamb, and it explicitly says "a lamb without a broken bone."

Exodus 12:46 (NASB)

⁴⁶ It is to be eaten in a single house; you are not to bring any of the meat outside of the house, nor are you to break any bone of it.

This was a fulfillment of the prophecy found in Psalms.

Psalms 34:20 (NASB)

²⁰ He protects all his bones, Not one of them is broken.

Jesus is the perfect fulfillment of the Passover lamb. He became the final "Passover Lamb" for all who would believe.

John 19:37 (NASB)

³⁷ And again another Scripture says, "They will look at Him whom they pierced."

John is eager to tell us this is **his** eyewitness testimony that He is dead; and not only is He dead, but He has controlled His death to fulfill prophecy. Jesus is the death conqueror even in His dying.

Zechariah 12:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ "And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and of pleading, so that **they will look at Me whom they pierced**; and they will mourn for Him, like one mourning for an only son, **and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.**"

The Jews would have picked up on the last part of this verse. Remember the bitter weeping of the Egyptians when their firstborn sons were killed? The Jews in Jerusalem who become aware that they have actually crucified the true Messiah are going to do the same.

Jesus Christ died before His legs were to be broken in order to validate His identity as the Son of God, and to fulfill prophecy. If Satan had his way, His bones would have been smashed. But if they had done that the prophecy would not be fulfilled, and they would not have pierced Him either. Jesus controls His own death and what is going on after His death to fulfill prophecy.

CONCLUSION:

Why is this so important? Because this is exactly what Scripture says will happen. If it did not happen, then Jesus could not have been the Messiah. John wants to make sure that you get it. Look at **verse 35**:

John 19:35 (NASB)

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.

There was only one disciple at the cross, right, only one. There were four women, there was one man and it was John, and he says, "He who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true. I'm telling you the truth," – he knows that he's telling the truth – "**so that you also may believe.**"

"I want you to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and by believing, have life in His name. I want you to believe it not only by the life He lived and the message He preached, but even by the death He died and the prophecies that were fulfilled after He died."

"I'm telling you about Christ. I was there. I saw; I heard; and I touched." He died! That is the testimony of the executioners, that is the testimony of the spear, and that is the testimony of fulfilled Scripture."

I would like to refer you back to John 10 once again to where Jesus had just brought sight to the man that had been blind from birth. The man was so excited that he went all over the temple telling everyone that Jesus opened his eyes to see. Then Jesus sought for him and found him and this is what He asked him...

John 9:35b-38 (NASB)

...and upon finding him, He said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶ He answered by saying, "And who is He, Sir, that I may believe in Him?" ³⁷ Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you." ³⁸ And he said, "I believe, Lord." And he worshiped Him.

I pray that all of us can have this relationship with Christ while the opportunity is still available to us.

He is Lord!