

The Lamb in a Garden Tomb

Thomas Robinson, July 18, 2010

John 19:30-42

³⁰ When he had received the drink, **Jesus** said, "***It is finished.***" With that, he bowed his head and **gave up his spirit.**

³¹ Now it was the day of **Preparation**, and the next day was to be a special **Sabbath**. Because the Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked **Pilate** to have the **legs broken** and the bodies taken down. ³² The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other.

³³ But when they came to **Jesus** and found that he was **already dead**, they did not break his legs. ³⁴ Instead, one of the soldiers **pierced Jesus' side with a spear**, bringing a sudden flow of **blood and water.**

³⁵ **The man who saw it has given testimony**, and his **testimony is true**. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so **that you also may believe.**

³⁶ These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled:

"Not one of his bones will be broken," [Exod 12:46; Psa 34:20]

³⁷ and, as another scripture says,

"They will look on the one they have pierced." [Zech 12:10, cf 12:10-13:1; Ps 22:16-17]

³⁸ Later, **Joseph of Arimathea** asked **Pilate** for **the body of Jesus**. Now Joseph was a **disciple of Jesus**, but **secretly** because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and **took the body away.**

³⁹ He was accompanied by **Nicodemus**, the man who earlier had **visited Jesus at night**. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds.

⁴⁰ Taking **Jesus' body**, the two of them **wrapped it**, with the spices, in **strips of linen**. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs.

⁴¹ At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a **garden**, and in the garden a **new tomb**, in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴² Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, **they laid Jesus there.**

John 1:29

²⁹ The next day he [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.*"

John 3:1-8, 13-16

¹ Now there was a man of the Pharisees named **Nicodemus**, a ruler of the Jews. ² This man **came to Jesus by night** and said to him, "*Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.*"

³ Jesus answered him, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.*" ⁴ Nicodemus said to him, "*How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?*"

⁵ Jesus answered, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.*" ⁶ *That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.* ⁷ *Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'* ⁸ *The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.*" ... ¹³ *No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.* ¹⁴ *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,* ¹⁵ *that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.* ¹⁶ *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*"

Turmoil at the foot of the Cross

When Jesus says, "It is finished" and dies, we might hope for a reverent silence.

Not so here. Friday. Thousands of Passover lambs were being sacrificed in the temple. Evening when Sabbath/Passover begins is near. Hanging corpses pollute everything (Dt 21:23). Leaders want the crucifixions over, the bodies removed. Crucifixion often took days to kill. Breaking the legs with a heavy mallet so that body weight would speed death was a mercy. Both insurrectionists were broken.

Jesus already appeared dead. A soldier does his job, ramming a spear up through Jesus' ribs, probably to his heart. Fluid and blood flow out. Jesus is definitely dead.

A Disciple's Witness for Faith

We watch as these events impact people. The Beloved Disciple stands nearby with Jesus' mother. He does not yet understand. But the process begins. A light comes on. This is why I am here, to bear witness, to see the physical facts, to see the reality that makes sense of those facts. This is likely the stimulus for this Gospel. The disciple sees what happens and gradually comes to understand it in the light of the great story of God and humanity Jesus told, illuminated by scripture.

Jesus' bones weren't broken. Jesus side was pierced. Many would see just chance occurrences. But when you look at the larger story that Jesus treasured you see connections. The Passover lamb. "Lamb of God..." The righteous sufferer (Ps 34). "Blood and water" from Jesus' wound. Both were important in Jesus' teaching. Zechariah points to grief and repentance flowing like a fountain from one pierced.

Joseph and Nicodemus, Secret no more

Suddenly two prominent Jewish leaders intervene. They were secret disciples, in the Sanhedrin, but they see the one lifted up, pierced and are drawn into the open. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, known from Jn 3, openly request the body of Jesus from Pilate. They then quickly, but lavishly prepare Jesus' body for entombment – in a new, unused tomb in a nearby garden. Seventy-five pounds of spices. Very expensive. Expressing love and admiration, but also death / decay. What might have been: king, healer, teacher! They are on their journeys of faith.

Joseph of Arimathea, known only here in scripture. Many medieval British legends: first missionary to England, Jesus' uncle took him to England, holy grail.

Out of Death – Birth from Above

Nicodemus is better known but still mysterious. His journey is in the background. He came to Jesus early in his ministry with praise for his deeds and teaching (Jn 3). Jesus interrupted and surprised him by asserting that he must be born again. He was generous in praise, devoted to God, well trained in scripture; surely Jesus should treat him as one needing only a little shaping. No. You must start over; everyone must start over, a new birth from above. A death to old religious ways.

Nicodemus heard but did not understand. Jesus spoke of the birth by water and Spirit. Of the Son of Man lifted up like the serpent in the wilderness, God's gift to the world expressing his love, offering eternal life. He tried to defend Jesus (Jn 7:51) but was ridiculed. Now he sees him lifted up, pierced. He is drawn to him in death.

That death becomes his death and new birth. So with the Beloved Disciple, so with Peter, so for us all. We pierced him, but if we die with him, he gives us eternal life.