

John 19:34, 37
Good Friday
April 2, 2010

John 19:34; John 19:37 (New International Version)

³⁴Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. ³⁷and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced."

Everything seems so wrong with this day. An innocent man was sentenced to death. Guilty Barabbas, a rebel and murderer, went free. Most of Jesus' close followers left Him. An uninvolved passerby had to carry the cross out to Golgotha. A sinful world was slaying its Maker. Darkness prevailed at midday. There was an earthquake and dead people left their tombs. Even the name seems out of whack: Good Friday. How can you call a day like that good? It didn't look good. And now there was one more insult. They couldn't let the dead man alone. They pierced His side with a spear. Yet there has to be a reason for all of this. As we examine the moment after the death of Jesus we learn

THE SPEAR PIERCES THE TRUTH

I. Of Jesus' death v34

II. Of Scripture fulfilled v37

The act of piercing the Savior's side verified His death. A bit before this deed Jesus had spoken for the last time from the cross and died. The Passover Sabbath was at hand, beginning officially at 6 p.m. that day so the Jewish people desired that the bodies of the three men be down from their crosses. Crucifixion victims often hung for days before they finally succumbed to death. If the legs of these men were broken they could no longer support their hanging weight and it would hasten death. Lest anybody accuse them of showing mercy with this swifter death, the breaking of the legs would increase pain. When the soldiers came to Jesus, however, they didn't need to break His legs, for He was already dead. Either to make sure of the fact or to show disregard for Him, "Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear." I would assume it was the left side, aimed toward the heart. That would have been the man's desire and natural if he thrust with his right hand. What he inflicted was not a mere skin prick. It was a large gash, for remember when Jesus met Thomas a week after Easter He invited him to place his hand in His side. If Jesus had only been in a coma (which He wasn't—the account we heard clearly stated, "He breathed his last,") this attack would surely have done Him in.

When the soldier's slash pierced Jesus' side something amazing happened. It brought "a sudden flow of blood and water." People who have analyzed the matter suggest the spear thrust ruptured the pericardium, releasing some lymph fluid. OK, that's impressive, but what is it? It is the sac around the heart, containing clear serous liquid. Others object that dead bodies don't produce blood. However, let's remember that the death of Jesus was not normal since the Bible foretold His body would not see decay. The point is, we don't really know what it indicated. John may have mentioned this detail as a miracle. Even the deceased Jesus was doing a wonder.

There could be symbolic meaning to the sight. In his first epistle John wrote, "This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood." That reference and this event could tie in with the Old Testament. Blood was required for atonement, that is, paying for sins. Water was used in ablutions or ceremonial washings. Blood and water were the two parts of ritual cleansing. That's food for thought. John didn't explain his comment. The action simply reveals that the soldier was satisfied he had performed his duty and the Man on the middle cross had died. He did not need to break the legs of Jesus.

The spear pierces and reveals the truth that Jesus' work of atonement was accomplished. Jesus went to the cross to pay for the sins of the world. His death was the price demanded.

He had suffered the pains of hell on the cross. He endured what we deserved. We were born sinful, lost from the start. We commit sins constantly. Some of our misdeeds occur because we do not realize how all-encompassing God's will is, that it applies to our thoughts and words as well as our actions, addressing both bad acts to avoid and opportunities for good to seize. Others of our sins are done in weakness. We struggle against them but can't overcome them. We keep falling, whether it is into bad language or hateful thoughts toward someone who mistreated us or a host of other issues. We may sin because we are overstressed and tense with the hectic pace of life with its deadlines or with difficult relationships. Or we are irritable over the burdens that we bear. And we are ashamed to admit that some sins we do deliberately because we enjoy them, or want to make things difficult for another person. Whatever the sin, whatever the reason, Jesus paid for them all. His death was sufficient to remove all past sins and the ones we haven't even committed yet (not that we in any way encourage more sins). When the Savior declared from the cross, "It is finished," He was saying all was complete. He had paid the price in full.

Only with the job done could He commit His spirit into His Father's hands as He did, for remember, when He was bearing the world's unpaid debt, the Father had turned His back on His Son. Knowing that nothing fake was involved but that Jesus truly had died is essential for our assurance. We could never remove a single blot on our record by ourselves. Jesus' payment in full was affirmed on the following Sunday when He arose. The spear pierced the truth of Jesus' death and our forgiven state.

II.

John noted another valuable lesson from the soldier's spear thrust. It pierced the truth of Scripture fulfilled. There were many Old Testament prophecies and types that came to pass in Jesus' work for us. They all happened, down to small details. We heard some of them in Psalm 22 early in the service. John cited a portion of a statement originally made by Zechariah, "I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son." Enemies could look on the pierced Jesus, but not for long. His body was soon removed from the cross. No doubt the enemies gloated in their accomplishment. They enjoyed the ensuing weekend. Their happiness would not last long before the reports of His rising reached their ears. Maybe they convinced themselves that such news was made up, but that wishful thinking won't last forever either. In the opening chapter of Revelation we hear, "Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him' and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him." One day the Lord Jesus will return and there will be no denying it. Multitudes will see Him and mourn because they will know plainly who was victorious. Jesus was, and then He will judge them. What can they expect for their deeds? Only the fires of hell. That is reason for sadness.

But you can also look in repentance and faith to the forgiving Savior. Be cut to the heart like the crowd on Pentecost when Peter identified their crime of crucifying God's Son. "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ," Peter told them, "for the forgiveness of your sins." Even their guilt was forgiven. So is ours. Heed the same invitation. Look on the pierced Jesus. See that He has won forgiveness for you. Believe and be saved. This well-known Scripture will also be fulfilled for you: "Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Scripture is also continually fulfilled for you and me. God's Word contains many promises for eternity. It tells you that heaven is your home. When you depart this life, it is not to suffer, but like the repentant thief beside Jesus heard, "Today you will be with me in paradise." You and I will enjoy rest from our labors. We will have joy in God's presence. He will wipe every tear from our eyes. We will see His face and "be like him, for we shall see him as he is." We will join with all our fellow believers in serving and celebrating before God's throne. All will be fulfilled, as the pierce by the spear affirms.

The Word's promises for life now we can approach with the same certainty. God, who worked out the big picture and solved the impossible problem of our debt of sin, can handle the details of our everyday life. When He assures us that He will supply our needs, we can be positive

that He will do so. When He tells us not to worry, we can be at ease. Because He promises to answer prayer, readily go to Him with your concerns. Because the Word assures us that God's angels protect us, we know we can walk with confidence. No, you won't take foolish risks or deliberately place yourself in danger, but even when you do some stupid things, He keeps you under His care. When God does allow troubles to enter our days, He will bring a good result since He has promised that "In all things God works for the good of those who love him." Because He says, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you," you can know that you are never alone and on your own to face life's challenges. When He invites you to come and receive rest for your souls, you will readily go to the Word and come to God's house with eager anticipation of His blessing. These are truths that the spear pierces and brings to our attention.

Maybe the day was not so bad as we thought and noted at the beginning. Truly it was a Good Friday in its results for your life now and eternally, good intended for the whole world. God made good out of bad. He will do the same for your worst days. He will do it for your eternity as you will be with Him in heaven since the pierced Jesus removed your sins. Remember and cling to those truths when you look at the spear you receive today for your Lenten display.