



The Final Hours

John 19:23-36

- 1. The Scripture Fulfilled (verses 23-24)**
- 2. The Voice of Jesus (verses 25-30)**
- 3. The Scripture Fulfilled (verses 31-37)**

My message this morning is entitled “The Final Hours”, that is, the final hours of Jesus, as he was put to death upon a cross outside the city of Jerusalem.

In John 19, verses 23-37, we see the final hours of Jesus as he dies upon the cross. During these hours of suffering, as Jesus hangs upon the cross dying a slow and painful death. When you think about the suffering of the cross, think of it as something like drowning slowly. You are hanging there, unable to breathe, your muscles cramping and spasming. You push yourself up just enough to steal a small breath, and then you sink back down to the point of death again. Then, when all strength is gone, you spasm and air comes into body to sustain you for just a bit longer. For hours, you drown slowly. That is the crucifixion.

Now, when John shared with us of the crucifixion, John doesn't focus our attention upon the physical sufferings of Jesus. Instead, he focuses upon two things: the fulfillment of Scripture, and what Jesus says when upon the cross.

These things help us to see that the death of Jesus was no accident. In John 10, Jesus described himself as the “Good Shepherd.” He said, “The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11). He said, “I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again” (John 10:17-18).

We see this in the final hours of Jesus. Jesus is not losing his life. Jesus is willingly laying it down for us. The death of Jesus was not some Shakespearean tragedy, it was God's purpose being carried out.

We will see in John 19 that everything is happening according to God's sovereign plan. The soldiers divide his garments, as the Scripture had prophesied. None of the bones of Jesus were broken, as the Scripture had foretold. Rather, Jesus was pierced in the side, as Zechariah had predicted.

Furthermore, we don't see the death of a crazed man crying out for justice. Instead, Jesus speaks words of comfort and assurance in his dying hours. Right here is where we ought to find comfort in the death of Jesus: that God was at work in his death, orchestrating history to make sure that the Scriptures would be fulfilled, and that Jesus was in control of his life. He died not as a crazed man, but as one who shows his care for us, even when dying a painful and shameful death.

Consider how he conducted himself even at his arrest. When the soldiers came to the garden, it was Jesus who stepped forward and said, "Whom are you seeking?" When they said, "Jesus of Nazareth," he said, "I am he," and then gave himself up voluntarily, saying, "Let these men go." He was not taken. He laid down his life of his own accord.

So, let's read the text. As I do, listen for two things: how the Scripture was fulfilled when Jesus was on the cross, and what Jesus says when he was dying.

John 19:23-37

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, "They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." So the soldiers did these things, but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he

bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews 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, and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe. For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken.” And again another Scripture says, “They will look on him whom they have pierced.”

1. The Scripture Fulfilled (verses 23-24)

Verse 23 begins with a time reference:

John 19:23a

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus.

Normally when we think of crucifixion, we think of the death of the one crucified. But here, “crucified” simply means that the soldiers had nailed Jesus to the cross and lifted it up so that he would hang there to die.

While we might expect John to keep our eyes lifted up to Jesus upon the cross, he first directs our attention to what was happening at the feet of Jesus, on the ground. He focuses our attention upon the soldiers, who were dividing up his garments.

In the days of Jesus, clothes were expensive. Everything was spun, woven, and sewn by hand, without machines. So even the most simple piece of fabric had real monetary value. It makes sense that the soldiers would take care to claim these garments, many commentators note that this was a common practice for soldiers who carried out crucifixions, as it supplemented their pay.

But think about this: how did they have the garments of Jesus in their possession? Because crucifixion involved stripping the victim bare before nailing him to the cross. It is likely that Jesus was crucified naked. Such is a difficult thought. Most artists, in rendering the death of Jesus, will place a small cloth around his loins for

modesty's sake. But being naked upon the cross would have been deeply humiliating, which was one of the goals of the Romans in executing criminals by crucifixion. It's not only the pain of the cross that was terrible, it was also the shame of the cross.

When Jesus suffered upon the cross, it was more than physical suffering that he endured. He bore not only our pain, but also our shame. As Hebrews 12:2 says, he was the one who "for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame." He was "despised and rejected by men" (Isaiah 53:3), open and laid bare in the most shameful way possible. But listen to the promise of Romans 10:11: "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame."

Anyway, these soldiers at the base of the cross were dividing up the garments of Jesus. The "garments" describe the outer clothes he was wearing, a cloak perhaps, a belt, a head-covering, maybe even his sandals. But the "tunic" was his inner garment, worn next to the skin. It was this piece of clothing they didn't want to rip, so they cast lots for it. How they did this, we don't know, they drew straws, picked stones, or flipped a coin. But we do know why, because John tells us why: "This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, 'They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.'"

This is a quote from Psalm 22, which is often called "The Crucifixion Psalm," because it describes the crucifixion in remarkable detail. Jesus drew our attention to this Psalm when he cried out on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). These are the very first words of the Psalm. They describe the utter anguish of a man who feels that God has abandoned him, which, in fact, God did with Jesus upon the cross, when he was pouring out his wrath for our sin upon the body of Jesus.

The Psalm goes on to describe a crucifixion. "They have pierced my hands and feet" (Psalm 22:16), the Roman soldiers did this to Jesus as they nailed him to the cross. It describes how Jesus was mocked: "All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; 'He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!'" (Psalm 22:7-8). These words were said to Jesus as he was hanging upon the cross (Matthew 27:43). The irony is striking: if he had saved himself, he would not have saved the very people who nailed him to the cross.

Psalm 22 speaks of how his body was physically contorted: "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint" (Psalm 22:14), those who were crucified

would often experience dislocation of the shoulders as the body weight of the victim pulled down upon the arms. My son has dislocated his shoulder a couple of times, most recently only a few weeks ago. It is an extremely painful injury. That is what Psalm 22:14 describes: “all my bones are out of joint.”

Psalm 22 speaks about his body drying up in the hot sun: “my strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue sticks to my jaws” (Psalm 22:15), those crucified would experience intense dehydration. And ultimately, the Psalm speaks about how Jesus was poured out to death: “you lay me in the dust of death” (Psalm 22: 15).

But pertinent to our passage this morning is Psalm 22:18: “they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.” It was no accident that the Roman soldiers cast lots for the clothing of Jesus. The final hours of the life of Jesus went just as God had planned.

John 19:24b

So the soldiers did these things.

Let us find rest in this. Let us trust God with our lives, knowing that “for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). It may not always be what we would choose. Even Jesus, upon the cross, may not have wanted this in the moment, for he had prayed in Gethsemane, “If possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I will, but what you will.” God willed this, and he willed it for our good and for his glory.

2. The Voice of Jesus (verses 25-30)

In verses 25-30, Jesus will say three things. When you survey the four gospel accounts of the crucifixion, you see that Jesus said seven things while upon the cross. Books have been written about these seven sayings. I happen to have three of them on my bookshelf: A. W. Pink, *The Seven Sayings of the Savior on the Cross*; Adam Hamilton, *Final Words from the Cross*; and James Montgomery Boice and Philip Ryken, *The Heart of the Cross*, whose first section is entitled “Words from the Cross.” This morning we will look at only the three that Jesus says here in the gospel of John.

The first saying is a saying of Compassion (verses 25-26).

John 19:25-26

But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!"

When we think about the cross, our attention naturally focuses upon the physical suffering of Jesus. Yet his friends and family around him were suffering as well. Notice that John mentions four women standing at the cross. His mother, Mary, was certainly family. His mother's sister, his aunt, was family as well. Mary the wife of Clopas was a close friend. And Mary Magdalene was the woman from whom Jesus had cast out seven demons, one who had been radically transformed by him and who had followed him closely ever since.

They all suffered as they watched the suffering of Jesus. Any parent will tell you that the suffering of a child is worse than suffering yourself. Unique is the suffering that comes when a child dies. My father's brother died of leukemia when he was about 30 years old. My father often told me of how his dad never really recovered from the grief of losing his son.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, was one of those at the foot of the cross, grieving the soon-to-be loss of her son. She was experiencing what Simeon had told her long ago, when she brought the baby Jesus to the temple for purification after his birth.

Luke 2:34-35

"Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

Through the life of Jesus, Mary had witnessed the fall and rising of many in Israel. But at this moment, as she watched the life drain out of her dying son, she was experiencing that sword piercing through her own soul. Jesus, as he looked down upon her, said to her, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he turned to the disciple John:

John 19:27

Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

At this point, Jesus was caring for his mother, ensuring that she would be cared for from that day forward.

We can only assume that Joseph had already passed away, for he would have been capable of caring for Mary. We can also assume that the brothers of Jesus would not care for Mary in the same way that John would. In John 7, we saw them mocking Jesus, for they had not yet believed in him (John 7:5). The care that John would give to Mary would be better for her than the care of her own sons.

This is often true of the church. We will often have more love and care for one another than even our closest family, because we are called to be family. Do you remember the scene when Jesus was teaching in a house, and his mother and brothers were trying to get through the crowds to see him?

Mark 3:32-35

“Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.” And he answered them, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.”

Jesus is putting some shoe-leather to this reality. He is entrusting his mother to his disciple.

The second saying is a saying of Humanity (verse 28).

John 19:28

After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), “I thirst.”

This saying speaks to the humanity of Jesus. Don't think of Jesus as some sort of Superman who was made of a different substance than we are. No. Jesus was a man, just like us. He got tired after a long day. Jesus felt hunger and thirst. Jesus cried when he skinned his knee, because it hurts when you skin your knee, especially when you clean it out so that it doesn't get infected. Here, Jesus is showing his humanity by saying, “I thirst.”

Yet, there was a deeper meaning behind this. Jesus said it “to fulfill the Scripture.” The Scripture referred to here is Psalm 69:21.

Psalm 69:19-21

You know my reproach, and my shame and my dishonor; my foes are all known to you. Reproaches have broken my heart, so that I am in despair. I looked for pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none. They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.

Indeed, this is what took place in verse 29:

John 19:29

A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth.

Notice that Jesus only took the sour wine when all had been accomplished. Verse 28 says that Jesus knew “that all was now finished.” It was only then that he took the sour wine. The other gospel accounts tell us that Jesus had refused the wine mixed with gall that was offered to him earlier in his crucifixion (Matthew 27:34). This was often given to those being crucified, as it served as a kind of anesthetic to help numb the pain. But Jesus in no way was numbed to the pain of the cross. He endured all of it for us. It was only when all was finished that he accepted this sour wine. The verses just before Psalm 69:21 show how full his suffering was, they speak about his shame and dishonor, his enemies and his broken heart, and how he died with no pity shown to him. In fulfilling the Scriptures by saying “I thirst,” Jesus was putting his capstone on all the suffering that he endured for us on the cross.

The third saying is a saying of Victory (verse 30).

John 19:30

When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

In saying “It is finished,” Jesus was saying, “My work is done! And I have won!” It is a little like watching a March Madness game when the outcome is so certain that the coach starts putting in the substitutes. The game is won, even though there are still things to do. For Jesus, there was still the grave, Hades, the resurrection, the teaching of his disciples, and the ascension. But when he said “It is finished,” his sacrificial work was done, and the victory was secured.

What did Jesus finish? He fulfilled the law perfectly. He fulfilled all prophecy,

from his birth in Bethlehem as Micah 5:2 predicted, to his being born of a virgin as Isaiah 7:14 foretold, to his being despised and rejected of men as Isaiah 53 described. He lived perfectly. He obeyed God completely. He bore all of our sins upon the cross. He paid the price for our guilt. He satisfied the wrath of God. He broke the power of sin. He removed the curse from us. He offered the last sacrifice that was ever needed. He opened the way between man and God. The veil of the temple was torn in half from top to bottom at the moment of his death, meaning that we can now enter the Holy of Holies. The door has been unlocked, and it will never be locked again. He redeemed us fully. He accomplished all that the Father had given him to do. His mission was complete. He defeated Satan. He laid the foundation of our forgiveness. He finished the basis of our justification. He secured eternal life for those who believe. He established our hope of glory. He inaugurated the New Covenant.

He finished it all! His cry, "It is finished," was a cry of victory. We don't need to add anything more to the work of Christ. He earned our salvation by dying for us upon the cross. We simply need to believe and trust in Jesus, that his work in life and death accomplished all that we need for our salvation and for the life that he promised. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). We don't need to walk around under a cloud of guilt. We are free and forgiven. Some say they believe in Jesus, but they still feel they need to be a really good person, or do this or that to earn God's favor. But Jesus says, "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Rest in the finished work of Jesus.

This is why the book of John was written, that you would believe. Notice that John says Jesus did "many other signs" not written in this book. He also said other things upon the cross not recorded here, performed other miracles not written down, and gave other teachings not included. But what John wrote, he wrote with a single purpose in mind.

John 20:30-31

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Church family, believe in the finished work of Jesus.

What is most remarkable about what follows is that Jesus was dead. When he said

“I thirst,” he could consciously choose to fulfill that prophecy. But after his spirit departed, he had no ability to direct events. It was the sovereign hand of God alone that ensured every remaining Scripture was fulfilled, down to the very last detail.

3. The Scripture Fulfilled (verses 31-37)

John 19:31-32

Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews 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, and of the other who had been crucified with him.

Even in his death, the Scriptures were fulfilled.

The Jews were concerned about purity. They did not want dying bodies left upon the crosses at sundown. It was at sundown when the actual Passover would begin, the sacred meal in which they would eat the lamb and celebrate the exodus from Egypt. And so they asked Pilate to hasten the deaths. This was a brutal practice, but a common one. Can you imagine soldiers approaching those who were being crucified and taking clubs to whack away at their legs? You could hear the crack. But once the legs were broken, there was no way to push up to breathe, and within minutes the victim would suffocate and die. But this didn't happen to Jesus.

But this didn't happen to Jesus.

John 19:33-34

But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.

One can symbolically appreciate these words: the blood is representative of the sacrifice of Jesus, whose blood atones for our sin, “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (Hebrews 9:22). The water is representative of the cleansing work of Jesus on our behalf. Ezekiel 36 speaks of the new covenant, promises: “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean” (Ezekiel 36: 25). “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1: 18).

John then bears personal witness to this:

John 19:35

He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe.

This is an eyewitness account. John was there. He saw it. He recorded it so that you would believe. This isn't a fairy tale. He is saying, "I saw it with my own eyes, and I am telling you it is true." And it is the rational thing to do to believe in Jesus. Jesus cannot have raised from the dead and transformed these men unless he actually raised from the dead. So much of Scripture is verified and confirmed in the events of his life and death. Believe it. Will you believe?

John 19:36-37

For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken." And again another Scripture says, "They will look on him whom they have pierced."

The fact that none of Jesus's bones were broken fulfilled not one but two Scriptures. Psalm 22:17 speaks prophetically of the crucified one: "I can count all my bones." Psalm 34:20 promises of the righteous one: "He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken." Both found their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus.

The piercing of his side fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah 12:10: "They will look on him whom they have pierced." The one who was pierced for our transgressions would one day be looked upon, with faith, with mourning, and with the recognition that he is the one who bore our sin.

Everything in the final hours of Jesus happened exactly as God had planned. The death of Jesus was no accident. It was the fulfillment of Scripture, carried out by the sovereign hand of God. He is our perfect sacrifice. Believe in him.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on March 22, 2026 by
Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.
