

LifeWay Family Bible Series for March 20: Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice for our sins_30705

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Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice for our sins

John 19:28-37; Hebrews 9:1-10:39

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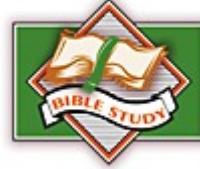
First Baptist Church, Bedford

Jesus once said, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends” (John 15:13). That remark can be heard echoing in every aspect of Jesus' passion.

Hebrews 9:13-14

The ancient Hebrews followed a strict code of religion. As Moses received the word of the Lord after their exodus out of Egypt, the people were in need of religious structure that would bring civility and faith back into their lifestyles. After years of a bitter existence in Egypt and the debacle out in the wilderness when they worshipped the golden calf instead of God, the Hebrews needed something spiritually tangible to grasp. The book of

Leviticus offered the ancient Hebrews an opportunity for renewal, as a sacrificial system of religion was established.



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When ancient Jews came to the Temple to worship, they were offered many opportunities to ask God for forgiveness. From offering animal sacrifices to monetary gifts, the ancient Jews could receive penance from about any sin they had committed. And, if they had forgotten one during the year, one day of the year the priest would enter into the Holy of Holies and sprinkle the blood of a young bull as an offering to God for the sins of the people. That day is known as Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

The author of Hebrews builds a case on this sacrificial system. He recognizes the importance of sacrifice when it comes to seeking forgiveness from God. Without a sacrifice on the part of the one searching for forgiveness, then forgiveness becomes an unjust means for penance.

Yet, the author of Hebrews also recognizes the sacrificial system which the ancient Jews were practicing had become corrupt and meaningless. From those seeking forgiveness from their sins to the priests who were rendering it, the entire system for divine justice had been made unjust. When humanity touches even the holiest of structures, there always is the

tendency that sin will infiltrate the structure. The time for God's messiah had arrived.

The author of Hebrews makes it clear Jesus was the ultimate sacrifice on the world's behalf. Jesus came to the Temple during the week of the Passover to offer his own sacrifice, but it was no goat or heifer. His sacrifice was not for some obscure sin that required an offering of a dove or denari. His sacrifice was for us all. The sacrifice our Lord offered to God was his very self, not bought and sold in a system of corruption, but offered on the wooden pillars of history's greatest tragedy and triumph.

John 19:17-18

Jesus had been arrested by the cover of darkness and tried in the shadows of secrecy. Yet, now, he was going to be executed for the world to see. John records that Jesus carried his own cross as the Roman soldiers led him to that notorious hill, Golgotha, the Place of the Skull.

For everything that had taken place in private, our Lord's execution would be the most public display of humility a man could know. Between two thieves, Jesus was nailed to a wooden cross and hoisted into the air. There is something divinely poetic that the Son of Man was being executed between two petty thieves. In the midst of the commonality of sin, Jesus was dying for the sake of all common sinners.

John 19:19-25

As a side note, John tells the story of conflict between Pilate and the Jewish leaders. Pilate had a wooden sign constructed that read: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." It was written in Hebrew, Latin and Greek—the three languages of the ancient Middle East.

The Jewish leaders might have been worried that the people close to the

city might see this debacle and turn this Jesus into a martyr for their particular cause. Political tensions were high during those days, even to the point of continued insurgency in the land. The Jewish leaders were feeling the pressure of Rome and if another Jewish insurgency rose up against Roman authority, the plight of the Jewish faith might be increased.

In addition, John makes it a point to write about the evil underneath the cross. The Roman guards took Jesus' clothing and gambled for it. Without any regard for Jesus or those standing close by, his mother included, the soldiers stripped Jesus naked, as they nailed him to the cross and waited out his death.

John seems to go to great lengths to reveal the shallowness of the Jewish leaders and the mockery of the Roman officials. Unbeknownst to them, something greater was happening before them. Both had no idea of the larger issue at stake. Their treachery was great, but the love of our Lord was even greater.

John 19:25-27

Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene were on the hill that day. As they watched in horror, Jesus turned his attention to his mother. He instructed the disciple whom Jesus loved to be the caretaker of his mother. Even in his gravest hour, death knocking on the door, Jesus still was showing concern for others.

John 19:28-30

On the heels of these events, John turned his attention back to the agony and passion of our Lord. Jesus hung from his flesh and bones for some time and his death quickly approached. He asked for a drink. The soldiers offered him some sour wine, fulfilling the Scriptures in Psalm 69:21. It was

important for John to show his readers that Jesus was dying, according to the ancient Scriptures' prophetic voice.

After drinking the sour wine, Jesus said, "It is finished," lowered his head and died. There has been much debate over the last words Jesus voiced. Yet, the simplest of explanations seems to hold true. Nothing is more profound than Jesus offering his exclamation point upon his mission. Jesus had come to earth with a purpose and mission in mind. His purpose was his love for humanity and his mission to be a sacrifice for their sins. As he breathed his last, he had accomplished everything he had set out to do in his earthly ministry.

John 19:31-37

The day of preparation was quickly approaching, and the Jews did not want the bodies of the executed hanging around for such a holy day. The Roman soldiers went to the two thieves and broke their legs, hastening their deaths. When they came to Jesus, they saw he already was dead. There was no need to break his legs. Once again, the voice of the ancient Scriptures can be heard as John reminds his readers that no bones of his body shall be broken.

Then another voice from the past paints a haunting picture. Imagine Jesus upon the cross. His anguish was great—the arrest, the beating, the scourging, the execution and the agony of his death. With the sun's descent in the background, those who had committed this horrid act gaze up at their work. Hanging before them, the Son of Man had died for all. Again, no one involved in this treachery had any idea what was happening.

John 19:38-42

After his death, those who followed him in the shadows came out to help.

Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for Jesus body. Nicodemus, who came to him by the cover of darkness, also helped prepare his body for burial. They prepared the body, found a tomb in the garden and buried Jesus.

For everyone involved in this story, as far as they knew, this was the end. And the words of Jesus linger in the air, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends” (John 15:13). Yet no one in the story could ever imagine what was coming on Sunday.

Discussion question

- ◆ What does sacrifice mean to you?
- ◆ What is the greatest sacrifice you ever made?
- ◆ Why did Jesus sacrifice his life for our sake?
- ◆ How can we sacrifice for the sake of Jesus?

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