Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

One thing you can count on every Easter-time is a popular news story that questions some aspect of the Easter story. Some new ‘Gospel’ will have been found or some artefact will be carbon dated or some Bible ‘expert’ will be interviewed about why some part of the Bible’s account must be a mistake. But attempts to discredit the Easter account are nothing new:

* The first example of this is recorded in the Bible! In Matthew’s Gospel we are told that after Jesus died the chief priests and the Pharisees asked Pilate to make Jesus’ tomb secure, “*lest His disciples steal Him away and tell the people, ‘He has risen from the dead*.’” So the tombstone was sealed and a guard was posted. And when Jesus did rise from the dead, the chief priests bribed the guards to tell the people that the disciples came and stole Jesus’ body away. And Matthew says, “*This story has been spread among the Jews to this day*.”
* But another tactic of those who dispute the claims of Christianity is to say that Jesus did not actually die on the cross. And the three most common theories of those who believe this are 1) It was not Jesus of Nazareth on the cross, but someone else, 2) that Jesus wasn’t really human, so He didn’t die like we die, or 3) that Jesus just became unconscious so that later, when He woke up, it was turned into a death and resurrection story by the disciples. Your Muslim neighbour, for example, will believe one of these three things. The Quran says that Jesus was not killed or crucified, but that it was made to look like that was what happened. And the three explanations I just gave you are how Muslim commentators explain those words.

Well, as with anything that we did not see ourselves, the only way we can be certain about the crucifixion and the resurrection is from the testimony of eye-witnesses who were there and who saw what happened. And that is exactly what we have in the Gospels. And John, the author of this Gospel, knew that eye-witness testimony would be vital for those who were not there themselves. And that is his exact point in **v35**. We have talked about this already but throughout the Gospel John calls himself the disciple whom Jesus loved. So in **v26** we read that John was at the cross with Jesus’ mother and several other women, and they saw these things with their own eyes. So in **v35** John says that he has given us his eye-witness testimony that we may believe; he wants us to be convinced that Jesus truly died. But he wants us to believe this so that we are convinced that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, by whom we have eternal life. And that is the ultimate point here – not bare historical facts but historical facts as a basis for faith. John wants us to understand, to be convinced of, and to be assured that the Son of God died on the cross for you and me.

So in this portion of John’s account of the crucifixion, we see **how the final events also reveal Jesus to be the Christ**. And the way that John does this is by giving us a **description** of the final events in vv31-34 and then an **explanation** of the final events in vv35-37. So they will be our two points this morning – the description and the explanation.

1. So we begin with John’s **Description** of the final events of Jesus’ crucifixion.
   1. We are told in v31 that it was “**the day of Preparation**.”
      1. Jesus was crucified on a Friday. And according to how the Jews measure their days, the Sabbath began at 6pm on Friday and continued through to 6pm on Saturday. So Friday, up until 6pm, was the day of preparation; it was when you got everything ready so that you could rest from your labours on the Saturday Sabbath.
      2. We are also told that it was a “**high day**.” And what that refers to is that Saturday was not just the Sabbath but also the first day of the Passover festival. It’s not quite the same but one of my sons has his birthday on Feb 6, which is Waitangi Day, so the day is doubly special. And that’s what “high day” means – as the Sabbath and the first day of Passover, it was doubly special for the Jews.
      3. Well, it was soon after 3pm on Friday that Jesus said, “*It is finished*,” and gave up His spirit, as we read in v30. So Jesus was now dead. And as we saw when we looked at v30, this is a very significant detail. You see, it usually took 2-3 days for those crucified to die of their wounds. But death didn’t come to Jesus, Jesus entered into death; His work was done and He chose to die.
         1. Now, it’s a little bit of an aside but I think it is a point worth making in today’s climate: and the point is that we must not confuse what I have just said about Jesus with suicide or Euthanasia. What Jesus did was not suicide or euthanasia. First of all, He was on the cross and dying. But secondly and more importantly, He is God. So He sovereignly entered death and conquered death, on behalf of His people, so that we need not fear death. And none of that applies to anyone else. Those who seek to end their own life today are in no way mastering or conquering death, as the vast number of failed suicide attempts makes plain. We must wait for when God calls us home and we are not to hasten that moment.
      4. But back to our main point and v31. The Jews, by which is meant the Jewish leaders, did not know that Jesus had already died; they expected Him to still be alive. And the law of God, in **Deut. 21**, said that the body of a Jew executed for a capital crime was not to be left out over night; it had to be buried the same day or the land would become defiled. So, and I hope you can see the obvious irony in this ☺ eager to keep God’s law, the Jewish leaders “*asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away*.” It’s just like what we read back in **18:28**, which is where we are told that when Jesus was led into Pilate’s headquarters, the Jewish leaders “*did not enter … so they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover*.” It is flabbergasting to read, isn’t it– they have completely ignored their own rules about a fair trial in regards to Jesus and they have handed over the Messiah, the one who the Passover points to, to be crucified, but they are eager to be religiously clean so they can eat Passover. Wow! What hypocrites! But the sad fact, congregation, is that even as we shake our heads in disgust at these Jewish leaders, if we are honest, we too are capable of the same religious hypocrisy. We do this, for example, when we behave badly at home or work but we say all the right things at Bible study meetings or we waltz on up to the Lord’s Supper table without having repented. May God keep us from religious hypocrisy.
   2. Well, in their hypocritical eagerness to be religiously pure, the Jewish leaders asked Pilate if the legs of those crucified could be broken so that they would die quickly and be buried before 6pm. And so, in v32, we read about the soldiers going to do exactly that.
      1. And we know from history that they had a special tool called a **crucifragium** that was designed to break the legs of someone on a cross. In fact, only as recently as 1968 archaeologists discovered a tomb with a crucified skeleton in it that had the bones of both lower legs broken. And this was done because underneath the feet of the crucified person there was a wooden plinth that they could press on so they could take a gulp of air. But with your legs broken you could not press up and so you could not breathe and you died quickly of asphyxiation.
      2. So the soldiers did this to the criminals who were crucified next to Jesus. And those watching, like John, would have seen and heard the crunch of the legs breaking and the screams of the first criminal and the second criminal. But they also would have seen that when the soldiers came to Jesus it was plainly obvious, probably because of His slumped form, that “*He was already dead [so] they did not break His legs*.” And make no mistake, these hardened soldiers wouldn’t have hesitated for a moment to break Jesus’ legs if there was a hint of doubt, but they did not because He was dead.
      3. What one of them did, instead, was to pierce “*His side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water*.” And **the blood and water are extra proof that Jesus was dead**. You see, when a person dies, blood and water fill the pericardial sac around the heart. So the spear piercing that sac would explain the flow of blood and water. Thus, the soldiers not breaking His legs and the flow of blood are doubly conclusive proof that Jesus was dead. Even an article in the ‘Journal of the American Medical Association’ concluded that “interpretations based on the assumption that Jesus did not die on the cross appear at odds with modern medical knowledge.” And John and those with him saw all this and we have this eye-witness account. That Jesus died, therefore, is undeniable fact.
2. So that’s the **description** of the final events of the crucifixion. But to see why these events reveal that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, we need to look at John’s **explanation** of the final events of Jesus’ crucifixion in vv35-37. And there are three parts to the explanation:
   1. First, as we have already seen, John gave us his eye-witness testimony as proof that Jesus truly died. That’s why he says in v35 that he is “*telling the truth*.” We live in times when nothing is certain and what is claimed one day can be disproved the next day. Well, don’t ever believe anyone or any ‘proof’ that Jesus did not truly die or rise again, physically, from death. It is an essential fact and part of our salvation. In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul says that if Jesus was not resurrected then our faith is foolish and we are most to be pitied. And to be resurrected you must first be dead! We need a Saviour who died or the forgiveness of our sins and who rose again to show that He is God, that the Father accepted His sacrifice, and that He has conquered death and the grave. And we have that Saviour in Jesus!

* 1. But the second part of the explanation of these events, as stated in vv36-37, is that they fulfill scripture. The quote in v36 is from our earlier reading in **Psalm 34:20** where we read, “*He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken*,” and the quote in v37 is from **Zechariah 12:10** where we read, “*And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn*.” And there are a few things we can say about this fulfillment of Scripture:
     1. The first is this: What were the soldiers sent to do? Break legs. Would they have done this if they had any doubts about Jesus being dead? Yes. No skin of their noses. Did they do this with Jesus? No. So this fulfilment of prophecy is remarkable. But also, were they told to pierce the sides with a spear? No. But one of them, for no apparent reason, did this to Jesus. So this fulfilment of Scripture is also remarkable. The odds of both of these things happening, humanly speaking, were tiny. But God brings both things about to demonstrate that Jesus is the Son of God and that the Bible is reliable. And that means that whatever the Bible says about the Second Coming of Jesus, though it might seem impossible or unlikely, will take place.
     2. But we also need to say a little bit more about these two passages that were fulfilled on the cross.
        1. The first was that not one of His bones will be broken. Why is that significant? Does someone want to tell us what that is about? The Passover lamb. Around 1600 years before the cross, when the people of Israel left Egypt, the angel of the Lord was going to travel through the land and kill the firstborn son in every house as a judgment on Egypt’s wickedness. And the only way to escape was to kill a lamb and put its blood on the doorposts so that the angel would *pass over* that house. And that event became an annual feast for the Jews called Passover. And for the feast they had to kill a lamb and eat it. But God said, in **Exodus 12:46**, “*You shall not break any of its bones*.” And we read in v31 that this was a “high day” because the next day was a Sabbath and the first day of the Passover feast. So every Jewish family was going to eat a lamb and be careful not to break any of its bones, as they celebrated deliverance from Egypt and looked forward to Messiah and deliverance from sin. And back in John 1:29 we read that when John the Baptist saw Jesus He called Him “*the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*!” And **1 Corinthians 5:7** says, “*For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed*.”And **Revelation** is full of references to Jesus as the Lamb of God. So what we read here in John is not just an account of a man who truly died but an account of the Son of God who died to take away our sins.
        2. But the second passage is about Jesus being pierced. And what’s interesting about that fulfilment of Scripture is that it was God saying that His people would pierce Him, God. So Jesus is God! But just a few verses on from that one in Zechariah it says, “*On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness*.” So the blood of Jesus truly is the fountain that cleanses our sin. And we shall sing of this in a few moments. The point is that if you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, there is cleansing for all your sin; whatever you have done can be washed and purified by the blood of Jesus. Whether this is new news for you today or something you have known for a long time, there is power in the blood of Jesus to forgive all your sins! Do you know this? Are you convinced that this is true? Are you assured that this is true for you?
  2. But wait, there’s more! For the third part of the explanation of these events has to do with **the significance of the water and blood** that flowed from Jesus’ side.
     1. And there has been all sorts of speculation about the symbolism of the blood and water. And we have to be careful not to give something a symbolism that the Bible does give it. As we have seen, the primary reason John told us about the blood and water is to prove that Jesus died. But there are two significant sermons of Jesus that John has already told us about that explain the symbolism of the blood and water:
        1. The first is in **John 4** where Jesus met the Samaritan woman by the well and asked her to draw some water for Him. He said to her, *"If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water …?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life*."”
        2. And then in **John 7**, during another Jewish feast, Jesus said, “*"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified*.”
     2. So the blood is a symbol of cleansing or removing all our sin and guilt and the water is a symbol of the Holy Spirit who purifies us from all unrighteousness. And the blood and water together are a symbol of eternal life. If you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that He died and rose for you, your sins are forgiven, the Holy Spirit lives in you and is at work in you to purify you, and you have eternal life.

Do you believe this about Jesus? I hope you do. And I hope you do because the words of v37 don’t only point us *back* to Zechariah 12, they also point us forward to **Rev. 1:7**. There we read, “*Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all tribes of the earth will wailon account of him*.”

And while that obviously refers to the soldier who pierced Jesus’ side, and to the Jewish leaders who are primarily responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus, **Isaiah 53:5** says, “*He was pierced for our transgressions*.” You pierced Jesus and I pierced Jesus, because it is our sin that brought Him to the cruel cross. And we will be among those who wail on account of Him unless we have believed in Him and repented of our sins in this life.

May that be the case for all of us. Amen.