

God is in the Details
John 19:31-36

It is amazing to look how fleeting life is, and how quickly it comes to pass. They say the older you get the quicker time seems to move. But often death even takes people in their young years, or unexpectedly. We probably know people who have died in the prime of their lives. We look back in regret to time we could have spent with them or things we could have said or whatever. Sometimes death comes in old age, and it is protracted and elongated. Sometimes even very painful. And in all of this the Word of God is quite vivid and clear about death. Listen to 1 Peter 1:24, **“for ‘All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls.”** People have tried to stop the process of death, but cannot. There have been countless films about the fountain of youth. People have tried to find the secret of aging through medicine, and even if you can elongate life just a little — death is still waiting for you. It is something you cannot escape. It really is an appointment that is settled in heaven, and appointment that we all will keep.

We do not know when death will take place. It could be elongated or come quickly, but we realize that Jesus knew the time of his death, and even controlled when he would die. Listen to the words of Jesus a little earlier in John 10:17-18, **“For this reason the Father loves me, because 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. This charge I have received from my Father.”** And we have seen that in this text. Jesus’ didn’t die as a victim but as a victor, verse 30, **“When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, ‘It is finished,’ and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”** We see those two aspects of his death. He cried in victory — “It is finished,” not in defeat but victory. Sin’s penalty had been dealt with and the penalty expunged. And we also see he bow his head and he gave up the spirit. He determined the moment of death after he had fully drunk the cup of the Father’s wrath. There was never a death like Jesus.

And now we come to this paragraph today in verses 31-36, and the information almost seems incidental. It seems to provide the details of what is going on, and it seems to be leading us to the tomb and then to the resurrection, but there doesn’t seem to be that much here that we should pause and dwell in. But here the thing, these verses are certainly there to take us to the next section. But they are there to indicate that God is in the incidentals of life. He is in the very details or what we would call the minutiae of life. We often look and see God in the big things of life such as a job promotion or even a job loss. The gift of a new relationship or the loss of a relationship. It could be the birth of a baby or the loss of someone dear to us. We realize that God is in the all things of life. He has orchestrated the blessing and trials of life. And we would all say Amen to that.

But what about the small little details of life? The minor hassles and the little blessings that go unnoticed. It might be traffic heavy one day or light the next. It might be the timing of health or a nuisance cold the next. It might a great but normal day with your spouse, or one that is a little more trying the next. The big things that happen in our lives get our attention, but these little moments which are all God moments usually

escape us, but they make up our lives. And they are God moments because every aspect of our lives is not just under his authority, but under his governing hand. There are thousands and thousands of blessings that have happened in your life today. Most of them you haven't even realized, but they were necessary for life, given to you by our God. There are many things that have gone wrong, and u-turns just in one day, and they are all their for his glory and our good.

And those little incidental events of life, in fact more than we realize, are so significant. There are only a handful of big events that make up like but millions of these little moments that shape our character and our lives. Such as the events here in this paragraph. And as we see them we see that God's hand is not only over every detail of Christ's life for my redemption but also over every detail of our lives. The events and things of your life are all there for a reason under the planning and watchful eye of our great God. Do you recognized how he has been with you and all the things he had to do even to bring you out tonight? Our God is simply extraordinarily and comprehensively involved in our lives. I want us to see a couple ways we see his plans in our text, and hopefully be encouraged, hopefully seeing him in our lives.

1. We see God is over the hypocrisy and evil in us and others. V. 31.

Now think of hypocrisy is. It is basically acting or preaching and saying that you believe something while you do the opposite. Someone might say they love you, but belittle you. They might have an external profession of love and might even look loving to others but the reality is — they are not loving. Their profession does not match their actions or their words. Someone might say they are a devoted parent but have no care as far as their children's eternal destiny. They love that others think they are good parents, but are bothered very little that God knows their heart. They are uninvolved or even yawn at training them in the things of Christ. Someone might say they even love God but are on the golf course or doing some activity when the people of the Lord meet on Sunday. Sometimes even hiding these activities. They care more what others think than what is going on in their inner person and before God. We realize there is an inconsistency in what someone professes and how they live. Hypocrisy is trying to look externally one way but the inner reality does not match.

And there is a sense where even though we are hurt by the hypocrisy of others, all of us are guilty of hypocrisy. We love to profess before others God is everything to us, but there are areas in our lives where we live more for self than for Christ. There are times in our lives where we care more about what others think than God. We want a good reputation before them even though there is no desire for God in our hearts, at least in certain areas. And where are you living inconsistently before God? Where is God seeking to expose your hypocrisy? You might try and hide it but God loves you too much. He will expose it in one way or another. And the reason is he wants the highest for you and that is a changed heart — a heart of integrity and love — that loves God and truly loves others. He wants you the same inside and outside, what you profess externally matches the you inside of you.

So think of what is going on in this verse because it is truly stunning, **“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.”** The day of preparation

marks this as clearly Friday. The Jewish Sabbath was on Saturday, and it was a day of preparation in that there was to be no work or labour the next day. They would prepare food or fulfil other responsibilities during the preparation. And we see the next day was the high day or high Sabbath which means, it was the Sabbath that followed Passover. And this Sabbath was especially sacred to the Jews.

And so the religious leaders do not want the high Sabbath to be desecrated in any way, so they ask Pilate that the legs of the men would be broken to hasten death, so that they would expire and be taken off the cross before the high Sabbath. Their concern is taken from Deuteronomy 21:22-23, **“And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.”** The land is holy, given by God. The sabbath is for God. Death is part of the curse, so they cannot defile the land by having these bodies wait and languish and maybe even expire on the cross during the high Sabbath, so they make this request from Pilate.

The Jews had no authority to take the bodies down. They are not asking out of mercy. They still want Jesus to die, but their concern is only ceremonial and public. But you can see the hypocrisy here in this passage. They are more concerned with somehow defiling the land, and also their testimony and standing before the people as they saw these bodies hanging on the tree, rather than seeing that they had put an innocent man to death just because they considered him a threat to their comfortable positions and their self-righteousness. What they were concerned about was what was simply external — what others thought. What they were concerned about was external ritual and not the state of their hearts. There is no thought of God in this request.

Yet God is in these details. One is often we say that you can fool some people and maybe you can fool all people but you cannot fool God. And that might be true up until a point, you certainly can't fool God, but God has a way of exposing hearts. He has a way exposing the secret sins of man. He has a way of exposing who we truly are. And you can see that so amazingly in this passage of Scripture. Maybe they are finally congratulating themselves they have gotten rid of Jesus, they had gone through the motions of a trial, forced Pilate's hand, and they got exactly what they wanted. And now to prove they are right and on God's side they do not want to desecrate the Sabbath.

But the amazing thing about the God they say they are serving, is that he knows all about their hypocrisy. He knows their hearts. They might have thought they had escaped because no one is questioning them, in fact people are wagging their heads at this so called Messiah who hung on the cross. But their actions are recoded right here in this passage. The last two thousand years their hypocrisy has been exposed. And even if we were able to hide our sins in this life and play a part of the hypocrite, there is a day where God will expose the secrets of every person's heart., There is a day where every thing will be brought in the light. Romans 2:16, **“on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.”**

And maybe you are playing a part. The word hypocrite could describe you. It was used in Greek drama. They would put a large face in front of them, maybe smiling

or sad, but the reality is the actor was not feeling that emotion but just playing the part. Are you playing a part? God knows, and maybe in his sovereign goodness he is exposing that hypocrisy for you to come clean — to look at the one in whom there is no guile or hypocrisy hanging on the cross. There really is hope for hypocrites at the cross. He really can change us to not play the part but really be lovers of Christ. There really is glorious power and provision not just in forgiving us but to change us. Take these religious leaders as an example — hypocrisy mocks the God of all grace. God will not be mocked. He will expose you, either in this life through his wonderful salvation and forgiveness in Christ, or in the life to come.

But there is another way that we see God in the details, not only do we see hypocrisy exposed but we see that Jesus not only has to die, but if he truly is the Messiah, if he truly is our Lord and Saviour then he has to go in the grave that very day. And the reason above many is what he prophesied. Listen to what Jesus says in Matthew 12:40, **“For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”** This might seem like an incidental detail, but again, there is nothing that God does that is incidental. And those seemingly small details have such a major influence on everything.

The old saying, **“for want of a nail the shoe was lost; for want of a shoe the horse was lost; for want of a horse, the rider was lost; for want of a rider, the battle was lost; for want of a battle the kingdom was lost.”** Right here if there is no request, Pilate would not have released the body. The bodies were kept on the cross and left to rot or be picked at by birds as a final warning to people not to mess with Rome. And yet Jesus knows what kind of death he will experience and also what will happen to him after his death. He prophesied it, but if it does not come to pass, Jesus is a false prophet, condemn and should be forgotten, and we have no hope because we are still in our sins. Praise God for small details. He is over the millions and billions of small details of your life that even allowing us to sit here. Think of the process of taking carbon dioxide and changing it into oxygen. It is happening all the time, but without it there is no life, no meeting together, no trust in Christ, and no praising of his name. There are so many details that should give us an eternity of just praising him.

2. We see God is over even the cruelty of others. Vv.32-33.

As we look at these two verses, it is a reminder that God is not the author of evil but somehow has ordained the things the exact things to come to pass, even the rankest evil. And you think of the evil that is in the world today. Sometimes we even become hardened to the cruelty because we are exposed to it so often on various different media forums. And yet God has a purpose in every evil act that comes to pass. Even if we do not know the exact reason — God is sovereign. And we know that he was over the greatest evil act, even though everyone who did these things were completely culpable — responsible and will be held accountable. And so it is even in our lives. When people stand against us, oppose us, say all manner of evil, God is not only there but in some way and some how means it for our good and his glory.

And we can see that God is in the details in a couple of ways. One is in verse 32, **“So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had**

been crucified with him.” Many looked at breaking the legs not only to hasten death but as a way of being merciful. But it was anything but merciful. It was shocking and merciless. They would take a mallet go up to the shins and smash the bone. The pain coupled with the pain of crucifixion would shock the body so much that death would come almost instantaneous. Or the person would no longer be able to lift himself upright, so suffocation would ensue as liquids built up in his lungs.

But again I think it is amazing when you think about how long their deaths would have taken, and yet the words of Christ to one of the thieves who truly repented of his sins. Remember the whole scene? It is recorded in Luke 23:39-43, **“One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, ‘Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!’ But the other rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.’ And he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ And he said to him, ‘Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”** As one taunted Jesus the other repented and placed his trust in Jesus. And Jesus made a specific promise. And the promise was that the repentant thief would not only die that day, but would be with Jesus that very day in paradise — Jesus’s paradise. Not the next day or the day after that. He didn’t promise that he would be delivered from the pain of having his legs broken but ultimately he would expire that day and be with Jesus through the merits of Jesus.

Well, if he does not go through the excruciating pain of having his legs broken then the words of Jesus would again prove false, and Jesus would be a deceiver. But his words are always yes and amen. He truly is the way, the truth and the life. And certainly this teaches us that we do not always escape in this life the consequences of the sins we commit, but there truly is forgiveness with our Lord. We all have suffered in one way or another and maybe still suffer here the consequence of some things we have done. But there still is so much mercy in our God because it has not changed his glorious promises that we will be with Christ. God is in all these details!

And then we have verse 33, **“But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.”** Now what do we see here? And certainly there is not one bone that was broken according to the Scripture, and we will look at that next day, but what I want us to see here, which is so significant it is who is making that declaration and the observation that he is dead. It is the execution squad. It is these soldiers who have seen death after death. They know what death looks like. If there is any thought that Jesus is not dead, then they would have broken his legs. But there is no reason because he is dead. These are men that if they did not kill Jesus would be killed themselves.

And what is so significant about this witness? It is because it is so strong, and there were a couple of heresies that appeared early on in the church. One was that Jesus only appeared to be human but was fully and only divine. This comes from the teaching that anything physical is unclean and evil, therefore Jesus did not have a body. We see God created a physical world and pronounced it very good. Here a real and physical death has taken place. These soldiers truly know what death looks like. They are experts in it. But the other heresy that very quickly appeared and has

remained even among liberal scholars is called the swoon theory. The swoon theory says Jesus only appeared to be dead but really wasn't. In the cool of the tomb he was revived and then appeared to be resurrected from the grave, but really it is just that he never died. Folks, these are expert morticians. They really know what death looks like. These are not followers of Jesus. These are individuals who are hardened in cruelty and care nothing about the man on the middle cross. They don't break his legs for the simple reason there was no need.

And God is in these details, because the very substitutionary nature of Jesus death on the cross is validated by these soldiers who do not know even that God is using them to validate that Jesus really did suffer and die in our place that we would have life eternal. When you think of the glory of these texts, you cannot help but being amazed at the grace and goodness of God, that he is really over what look like seemingly trivial details. And we see a couple things in closing. One is we see that salvation from the first to the last has been planned and orchestrated by God. There is not even one small detail that is left to chance. God is over all and in all. He truly is the sovereign Lord of the cross. He truly is over everything that comes to pass to secure of salvation.

But not only that he is sovereign over every detail of our lives. He is orchestrating all things for our good and his glory that will end in us being with our Lord and Saviour. He truly has an origin to destiny plan for you and me. Whatever you have gone through today, whatever blessings (and the ones we are not even aware of far out number the ones we know about) God is over all of them. What trust and joy and security it should create in us. There really is nothing that can alter his plan for us. There really nothing that can pluck us out of the hand. Let's look to our God who is over the billions of details that make up our lives. Let us trust in him.