



# **SUNDAY SCHOOL MINISTRY**

## **Discipleship Plan**

**Gospel of John**  
Part 10

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## Lesson 37: The Son of Man Offered Up to God Part 1

**Primary Verses:** “So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing His own cross, to the place called The Place of the Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. There they crucified Him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” Many of the Jews read this inscription, for it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek.” (John 19:16-20 ESV)

**Teaching Text:** John 19:1-22

**Supporting Texts:** Genesis 22:6, 1 Samuel 8:6-7, Isaiah 50:6-7, Daniel 2:21, John 5:18 and 25-26, John 8:58, and **Psalm 35 (especially verses 11-25)**

**The Pitiless Politics:** Human leadership east of Eden is no better than followership east of Eden: both are steeped in selfishness and occupied with petty vanity. However, the difference between them is the amount of authority/power invested in one over the other. In our teaching text, the Jewish religious leaders and Pontius Pilate are locked in an epic political struggle, but neither has any respect for the truth. While one side purposefully twists the facts, the other seems to deny that anyone can interpret facts to find objective truth. This tug-of-war would be troublesome in any case, but it is nearly inconceivable that the sinless Lamb of God is the One both caught and consenting to be victim to both parties, “for us and our salvation.”

**The Problematic Parallel:** Though he did not seem to know if truth itself existed, Pilate never uttered a more accurate sentence in his life in John 19:14. Despite almost certainly meaning to humiliate Him further, Pilate nevertheless verbalized God’s truth when presenting Jesus to the gathered Jews as their royal sovereign. The response of Abraham’s physical descendants in John 19:15 will not surprise anyone who has studied the Old Testament with even a moderate degree of seriousness. The LORD told the prophet, Samuel, long ago that His people had rejected Him as king in favor of mere mortals (1 Samuel 8:1-9). While the circumstances are different, we can see that the rebellious heart of Israel has not changed since the days of Samuel. By rejecting Jesus, the nation once again rejected God as their king.

**The Promising Preview:** Writers from the time of the Reformation have made much of the inscription above Jesus’ head on the cross. For example, David Chytraeus, a second-generation student of Martin Luther (through Philip Melancthon), expounded that Pilate’s writing unwittingly declared a summary of the doctrine of Christ—the promised King of Israel promised by the prophets, who was from Nazareth, the metaphorical “branch” (the Hebrew word for branch is “nazer”) who would bring forth a new humanity from the old Adamic stump. While some find this interpretation “too inventive,” it cannot be denied that faith in Jesus and the gospel mission itself has bridged multiple nationalities, cultures, and languages from the time of that inscription onward.

**Questions to Consider:** How did both Jewish and Gentile leadership fail in the trial and sentencing of Jesus? How did they strike at each other, and how did their desire to “one-up” the other obscure the Truth standing before them? Why did the Jewish crowd ultimately deny Jesus? Is there only one reason?

**Challenging the Class:** Did God accomplish His will through the evil intent of Pilate and the Jewish leadership? At the time that this lesson is being written, Russia is poised to invade Ukraine. Do you believe God can work His good and perfect will through national sin today?

## Lesson 38: The Son of Man Offered Up to God Part 2

**Primary Verses:** “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.” (John 19:16-20 ESV)

**Teaching Text:** John 19:23-42

**Supporting Texts:** Exodus 12:22 and 46, Numbers 9:12, Psalm 34:20, Psalm 69:6-21, Isaiah 53:9, Zechariah 12:10 and 13:1, 7; John 10:7-18, Romans 8:3-4, Hebrews 10:1-10, [Psalm 22](#)

“Christ, in His suffering, did not respect His own ease, but His great care was to fulfill all things that were enjoined and appointed for the redemption of His people, so He might so testify His love to them, which was not asleep in His trouble. This might by His example teach us to make it our great care in suffering to do our duty rather than how to get ease and deliverance.”—George Hutcheson

Many painless and painful errors have been made due to a failure to mark the difference between dividing two things and distinguishing two things. A well-known theologian once quipped, “If I make a distinction between your spirit and your body, I’ve done you no harm. If I divide your spirit from your body, I’ve just killed you!” At the cross of Christ, it is a challenge to distinguish between duty to people and His devotion to them. However, we *dare* not divide one from the other! In a covenantal structure, love and obligation are not opposites but two sides of the same coin.

Several Christian catechisms aim at conveying the work of salvation by asking this question, “**What did Christ undertake [agree to do] in the Covenant of Grace?**”. The answer, “**To keep the whole law for His people and to suffer the penalty for their sins.**” On this understanding of Christ’s mission, Jesus died to fulfill an obligation—not because He owed sinful men, but because in love, the Father had already called predestined believers to be adopted as His children in Him (Ephesians 1:3-7).

In the wisdom of God, it pleased Him to accomplish this through the cross that in Christ, none would boast of their own work but find a Shepherd for their souls, sufficient to lead them through the “dangers, toils, and snares” of this world, being familiar with them Himself, but equally able to lead believers to a heavenly glory far exceeding the difficulties of this world. Jesus fulfilled His duty in love, through love, and with love.

**Questions to Consider:** How committed were the soldiers that crucified Christ to the Law of Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophets? What motivated them to divide Jesus’ garments and cast lots for His tunic? What is the motivation behind Jesus saying, “I thirst” in John 19:28? What explains the unwillingness of the soldiers to break Jesus’ legs? Why did Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea desire Jesus’ body? Were any of these persons intentionally out to fulfill scripture? If not, how do these occurrences inform us of how God fulfills prophetic utterances?

**Challenging the Class:** If the cross symbolizes our faith, why be surprised by suffering? So many doubt God’s love whenever facing pains and trials, even when self-inflicted. How entirely different was Christ from such so-called Christians! If God is sovereign, then every difficulty we endure is stamped with His approval first. Why? To make us like the One Who became like us. If we seek Christlikeness, we should expect many sorrows and trust God’s ability to strengthen us during them.

## Lesson 39: Resurrection Logic

**Primary Verses:** “Jesus said to her, ‘Woman why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?’ supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, ‘Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Mary.’ She turned and said to Him in Aramaic, ‘Rabboni!’ (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, ‘Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’.” (John 20:15-18a ESV)

**Teaching Text:** John 20:1-18

**Supporting Texts:** Isaiah 25, Isaiah 53:10-12, 1 Corinthians 15:1-28, Hebrews 2

*“Each and every event that happened to our Savior is an outward sign of the mystery of our redemption. Just as Christ was born from His mother’s virginal womb, so too He rose again from the tomb that was never before touched. As He, the only-begotten Son of God was made the firstborn of His mother, so by His resurrection, He became the firstborn from the dead... Just as I cannot fully express His birth in words, neither can I wholly encompass His going forth from the tomb.”—John Chrysostom*

The quote above contains rarely discussed aspects of the doctrine of the resurrection. As beautiful as those facets may be, it is more crucial to comprehend the core of the resurrection. But the resurrection itself cannot be understood without knowledge of the cross. The failure to believe in the resurrection is essentially due to either ignorance of Jesus’ perfection as a human or disbelieving God’s logic regarding the relationship between sin and death. When skeptics and scoffers doubt the resurrection, they have it backward: the impossibility was **not** in Jesus’ rising but in His *remaining* dead physically.

“The soul that sins is the one that dies.” This is the oft-repeated refrain in Ezekiel 18 that provides the rationale for the first half of Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death.” Earlier in Romans, Paul explained that when one works, that one’s wages are not a gift but rather best understood as something owed (Romans 4:1-5). A Christmas bonus may come with a bow or ribbon on the envelope, but paychecks do not. Therefore, it is understood that death is the currency God pays for the one whose work is sin.

Jesus, however, never sinned. If He did, He could not have been “the Lamb of God” and comparable to “a lamb without spot or blemish (Exodus 12:5, Leviticus 22:20, John 1:29). Jesus carried our sins (1 Peter 2:24), He redeemed us from slavery to sin by His blood (1 Peter 1:18-19), He made Himself an offering for sin (2 Corinthians 5:21), and He took upon Himself the punishment for our sins (Isaiah 53:4-6). Though Jesus did these things for believers collectively, He never sinned individually (Hebrews 4:15). Therefore, death had no claim on Him and could not hold him (Acts 2:22-24).

**Questions to Consider:** What did Mary Magdalene initially believe about the empty tomb? When Peter and John saw the empty tomb, what did they believe (read John 20:8-9 **carefully!**). How could Mary look at Jesus and not recognize Him? Is understanding the evidence for the resurrection sufficient for living faith? Why or why not? Why does John explain the meaning of the word “Rabboni”? How do Jesus’ words in John 20:17 announce a new kind of relationship between Jesus and the disciples?

**Challenging the Class:** It is hard to hand off what you don’t have a grasp of yourself to others. If you don’t understand the cross and the resurrection, how can you share the gospel? Isn’t it time you understood it?

## Lesson 40: The God-Man

**Primary Verses:** “Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.’ Thomas answered Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (John 20:26-29 ESV)

**Teaching Text:** John 20:19-31

**Supporting Texts:** John 20:1-18 and 1:1-14

Still engrossed in the details of the first resurrection Sunday, the teaching text relates to us episodes in the post-Resurrection life of Christ that harken back to John’s earliest words about Jesus. At the beginning of his gospel, John explained that the Word, once face-to-face and at the side of the Father also took on flesh. The One Who was, from the beginning “with God” and from the beginning “was God,” left His lofty position to “dwell among us.” Isn’t it shocking, then, that having completed His mission of salvation (which required a human body), Jesus does not shed that body but is glorified in it!

Jesus’ post-Resurrection appearances affirm His continuing forth in the flesh while asserting His glorified divinity. Some say that Jesus’ body was merely “spiritual,” after His resurrection. However, this concept fails to consider that a body can be physically tangible *while* being essentially being sourced in the Spirit (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 10:1-4). For sure, there are grand mysteries concerning the functionality, powers, and purposes of the spiritual body that Christ had after the resurrection (and the same questions apply to the bodies that believers inherit in the new heavens and earth). Nevertheless, our readings in the closing portion of John’s gospel cannot be understood without affirming both the physicality of Jesus’ post-Resurrection body and the continuing divine authority that He manifests in various ways to His apostles and to us who read these accounts today.

**Questions to Consider:** What impact did the empty tomb make on the apostles? Why was the door still locked? Does the Bible say how Jesus was able to come and stand among them? If Jesus was merely a spirit, how could we understand John 20:20? Would it make sense at all? According to 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, who is it that gives humans the Holy Spirit? How does John 20:21 control/limit our understanding of John 20:23? Was Thomas’ attitude sinful or not (John 20:25)? Can you defend your answer? Is there anything else known about Thomas before this incident that informs your opinion of him? What is implied by Jesus’ direct address/challenge to Thomas in John 20:27? How should we understand Thomas’ statement in v. 28? Is it a comment about the identity of Jesus or is it strictly a statement of surprise? How would the first readers of John’s gospel receive Jesus’ statement in v. 29? How do you receive it?

**Challenging the Class:** In many ways, the post-Resurrection appearances are marked by the sudden, shocking, but sweet reunion with a friend considered gone. Mary, the apostles, and Thomas all express excitement in the presence of their master at various times in different circumstances. Does your relationship with Jesus include moments of joy and lasting comfort in His presence? If not, why not?

# The Precious Power of the Blood

## Five Benefits Christ Purchased for You

Article by

David Mathis

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*There is pow'r, pow'r, wonder-working pow'r*

*In the precious blood of the Lamb.*

Happy memories flood my mind when I hear these words. We sang them often in church when I was young — bobbing up and down on our toes. The best church songs in the South were toe-bobbers. And my father seemed to love “Power in the Blood” most of all. I could tell he would sing louder than normal on this one, and I’d follow suit. I think the whole congregation sang with more gusto than usual, but I couldn’t hear them well with the two of us both raising our voices.

Christians of all stripes and leaning affirm there is indeed *power in the blood* of Jesus. Word- and Spirit-shaped souls feel that intuitively, but have you ever paused to ask *how*? Is the magic blood? If there is *power in his blood*, how do we explain the reality? What truths operate under the surface when we celebrate, in shorthand, this wonder-working pow’r?

## What Does the Blood Do?

The New Testament epistle to the Hebrews builds the bridge from the Old Testament sacrificial system (and its blood) to the new covenant and Jesus’s once-for-all sacrifice ([Hebrews 9:7](#), [12](#)). Throughout the Bible, blood represents life (for instance, [Genesis 9:4](#)), and the spilling or shedding of blood, in turn,

depicts death ([Leviticus 17:11, 14](#); [Deuteronomy 12:23](#)). Because the just penalty of human sin against God is death ([Romans 6:23](#)), the death of sanctioned animal sacrifices, through the presentation of their blood, stood in *temporarily* for the requirement of death for sinners. Yet the high priest had to return year after year, “repeatedly” ([Hebrews 9:7; 9:25](#)), because “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” ([Hebrews 10:4](#)). The repeated animal sacrifices were delaying the inevitable, waiting on God’s fullness of times. One day a final reckoning for sin must come.

Christians, of course, believe and celebrate that now in Christ, and under the terms of a new covenant, the reckoning has come. Jesus willingly “offered himself” ([Hebrews 9:14](#)) by “once for all” shedding “his own blood” ([Hebrews 9:12](#)), bringing to its intended completion the temporary covenant that came before (the old covenant) and inaugurating in its place an “eternal covenant,” ([Hebrews 13:30](#)), which we call the new covenant.

Hebrews celebrates some of the specific benefits Christians enjoy *because of Jesus’s blood* ([Hebrews 10:19; 13:12](#)), but it’s the apostle Paul, in particular, who celebrates the manifold grace that comes to us *because of his blood*. In one sense, we can connect to Jesus’s blood every divine grace that comes to us, but five times Paul makes the connection explicit, with both the mention of *blood* and a specific aspect of what Christ has secured for us with his death.

## Propitiation: To Remove God’s Righteous Wrath

[Romans 3:25](#) says Jesus is the one whom “God put forward as a *propitiation by his blood*, to be received by faith.” Because God is just, the sins of his people are no small obstacle. In his kindness and grace, he has chosen to love us, yet in his justice he cannot sweep our sins, which are acts of cosmic treason against him,



under the rug of the universe. So, in his love, he devises a way to satisfy justice and still triumph with mercy.

God himself, in the person of his own Son, takes on human flesh and blood and offers himself in the place of sinful people, to receive the just wrath of God and pay our penalty in his death, all that we might live. His blood, then, signifying the sacrificial giving of his life in the place of those deserving death (and “received by faith”), *propitiates* his righteous wrath, upholds divine justice, and opens the floodgates of his mercy.

## **Justification: To Extend God’s Full Acceptance**

Romans 5:9 says “we have now been justified by his blood.” *Justified* is courtroom language. The prosecution and defense each present their case, and the judge or jury makes a declaration: either *righteous* or *condemned*. The defendant is either *guilty as charged* or declared to be in right standing with the law — *justified*.

The reason those who are united to Jesus by faith are *justified* is owing, in part, to his sacrificial and substitutionary death. He willingly shed his own blood not for his own sins (he had none), but for ours. The spilling of his blood to cover our sins made possible our *sharing in his righteousness* by joining us to him through faith. Without his blood, our unrighteousness would remain unaddressed. We could not stand with him at the final judgment and receive with him his Father’s declaration, “Righteous.”

## **Redemption: To Purchase Our True Freedom**

Ephesians 1:7 says, “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses.” To redeem means to buy back or secure the freedom of someone in bondage. Because of our sins, we all were (or continue to be) in spiritual captivity. Our violations of God’s law mean we deserve his omnipotent, righteous wrath. But in Christ, by the shedding of his blood, which forgives our sins before God, he purchases our freedom from justice and from the power of Satan. “Having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands” (Colossians 2:13–14), through his self-offering at the cross, Jesus “disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame” (Colossians 2:15).

The decisive weapon the demons had against us was unforgiven sin, but when Jesus spilled his own blood in our place, to forgive our sins, he freed us from captivity. He redeemed us from Satan and the record of debt and legal demands against us.

## **Forgiveness: To Restore Our Best Relationship**

These precious themes, of course, overlap. We’ve already seen the importance of *forgiveness*, but Ephesians 2:13 puts it at the fore: “now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” At the heart of this “bringing near” is the restoration of humanity with the divine. On the individual level, it’s the *creation* in Christ of personal access to and a relationship with God that we, born into sin, never could have secured. On the corporate level, it’s the *restoration* in Christ of the relationship with God for which we were made.

Our sin and rebellion against God has put distance between us and him. In his old-covenant grace, he drew near to his covenant people called Israel. But now,

in the new covenant, he draws near not to a particular ethnic people, but to all who receive his Son in faith, no matter who they are or how far they had run. In fact, the phrase “brought near by the blood of Christ” gets at the heart of what each of these divine gifts in Jesus’s blood does for us: *it brings us to God*. There may be no better summary of what we’ve seen so far about the power of Jesus’s blood than 1 Peter 3:18: “Christ suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, *that he might bring us to God*.”

## **Pacification: To Make Peace with God Himself**

Finally, the God-centered aim of the effects of Jesus’s blood is confirmed in its peace-making between God and his people. In Christ, God reconciles his people “to himself . . . making peace by the blood of his cross” (Colossians 1:19–20).

That he shed his blood *on the cross* has been implicit in each instance, but here Paul makes it plain. It is “the blood of his cross” that makes peace between God and man. He made peace with an instrument of intentional and horrific torture and execution.

Jesus did not shed his blood by accident. This was no random death. Tragic as it was, it was deliberate and voluntary. He was executed unjustly, and his blood was spilled on purpose at the cross, both by sinful men and the holy God-man. They took his life, and he gave it. In doing so, he absorbed the righteous wrath of God, granted us his full legal acceptance, purchased our true freedom, restored our most important relationship, and made peace for us with God himself. This is how, as Paul says elsewhere, he secured “the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).

# Precious Blood

Following the trial of blood in Paul's letters, we begin to see an ocean of grace in that last line of the familiar chorus: *There is pow'r, pow'r, wonder-working pow'r / In the precious blood of the Lamb*. Precious, indeed.

That pairing of *precious* with Jesus's blood comes from the apostle Peter: You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with *the precious blood of Christ*, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. (1 Peter 1:18-19)

It is fitting to sing of his blood and, in doing so, celebrate all the riches represented by it. When we add *precious* in that final line, we're not just adding two additional syllables to make the cadence work with the tune. His blood is truly *precious* to us. Infinitely valuable. Because Christ himself, and God himself in him, is precious to us. And because the blood of Christ, more precious than any other means, fulfills our deepest aches and longings in God, not just temporarily but finally and forever.

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# Behold Your Mother

## How Jesus Honored Her at the Cross

Article by

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*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!”* ([John 19:26–27](#))

Has anyone ever done more for mothers than Jesus?

Not only did he, as God, come and dwell among us, as man, to live and die to make wives and mothers coheirs with their husbands of the grace of life ([1 Peter 3:7](#)). Not only did he pour out his Spirit to empower Christian mothers as they fulfill the highest calling in the world.

Not only did he treat women differently than the rabbis of his generation, who wouldn’t speak to women in public. To his disciples’ amazement ([John 4:27](#)), he talked with the Samaritan woman, with Mary Magdalene, with the Syrophenician woman, with his dearly loved friends Mary and Martha, setting in motion a healing of sins against women. As John Piper has said, “Wherever Christianity has become deeply rooted, the treatment of women has improved manifestly.”

Yet to those glories, Jesus added this particular honor *to mothers* even as he hung from nails in agony, staked to the cross. In the very midst of being publicly tortured to death, he paused to honor his mother.

## He Beholds Her

First, he saw her. What horror did he see on the face of his mother as she looked upon her crucified son? And not only did he behold her, but he gave his attention to her, and his words — in one of only seven recorded sayings from the cross — made provision for her after his death. And not just any provision, but he entrusted her to “the disciple whom he loved.”

“In the very midst of being publicly tortured to death, Jesus paused to honor his mother.”

Have more sanctifying words ever been uttered over the institution of motherhood than these from the tree at Calvary? The God who himself took on our human flesh, and took up residence in a woman’s womb for nine months, nursed at her breasts, heard the Scriptures from her mouth, and learned the fundamentals of human life under her care — the very life of Christ testifies to the sanctity of motherhood.

And then, here at his death, he goes even further.

## Even Through Agony

The pain at the cross in his own physical body alone would have been enough to occupy his full consciousness without excuse. It would have been no sin to bear the agony in silence. Then, more than that, came the utter anguish of his soul as he drew near to the precipice of sensing separation from his eternal Father. Such suffering of soul was the soul of his sufferings, with attendant sweat drops, like blood, in the garden.

Beyond this unspeakable agony came the taunts and jeers. The snake's venom spewed from the mouths of his own kinsmen — not just his own nation, but their leaders: chief priests and elders, scribes and Pharisees.

“He saved others; he cannot save himself . . . . Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. . . .” And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way. (Matthew 27:42-44)

And yet in the midst of such unequaled duress and rejection — as his own people stand against him unjustly and as he prepares to meet his own Father, not this time as a beloved Son wrapped in filial affection, but as sin itself crushed by omnipotent, holy wrath — he has the wherewithal to consider her. To honor his mother.

## He Honors Her

More than thirty years before, the angel Gabriel had greeted her, “O favored one, the Lord is with you!” (Luke 1:28). He had indeed been with her these three decades, and what a striking fulfillment now, even as he died. Still, he was with her. Especially in the last three years, she had thought the great angelic promises were being realized:

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end. (Luke 1:32-33)

Long ago, she had asked, in faith, “How will this be?” Now, did her eyes look to heaven and ask again, *How will this be?* How will he reign over Jacob's house forever, with no end to his kingdom, as he dies here under the hand of Caesar?

“The very life of Christ testifies to the sanctity of motherhood.”

How often had she remembered the words “nothing will be impossible with God” ([Luke 1:37](#))? Did she have it in her to recall this even as her firstborn son was publicly crucified before her very eyes? Would it come to her mind as she tried to sleep that night, or as she lingered in horror and grief all day Saturday, which must have seemed like the longest day in history?

## He Echoes Her

She had said to the angel, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” ([Luke 1:38](#)). And so, like mother, like son. In the garden, Mary’s son found his own way of echoing the words of his mother and expressing her submission: “not my will, but yours, be done” ([Luke 22:42](#)).

Her legacy of glad submission and heartfelt obedience had become his. First, at age 12, “he went down with [his parents] and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them” ([Luke 2:51](#)). Then, as a man, “he learned obedience through what he suffered” ([Hebrews 5:8](#)). Now, she watched as “he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” ([Philippians 2:8](#)). Soon she would learn that “by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous” ([Romans 5:19](#)). But not yet.

Standing there at the cross, did she remember the words of Simeon that must have haunted her for all her son’s life? “A sword will pierce through your own soul also” ([Luke 2:35](#)). *A sword will pierce me “also” — meaning, my son will be pierced?*



## He Cares for Her

Under God, she had raised the man who was God. And even now in his greatest agony, even as he writhes in this dehumanizing, extended execution, his soul does not curve inward to nurse his pain, but opens outward to the one who nursed him.

Here the greatest victim ever of other people's sin retreats not to himself and his suffering. He does not sulk or pout. He is not consumed with his own trauma, but looks beyond himself to make provision for this woman. *His mother*. The woman who so humbly and diligently and ordinarily served the very Son of heaven in the earthiest of ways, from his conception and birth, to his utter humiliation and execution. God became human through her — not just through her womb, but through decades of guidance, nurture, and prayer.

So, in the moments before he breathes his last, Jesus turns to his beloved disciple to ensure his mother will have his tangible care even after he is gone. Never was Jesus more human, and never was he more divine, than at this moment, in this place, at this time, when he spoke three simple words: "Behold, your mother!"

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# Joseph and Nicodemus Bury Jesus

John 19:38–42  
JOHN 19:38–42

“Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. . . . Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes. . . . So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews” (vv. 38–40).

Our study of John’s gospel resumes today as we pick up our exposition in John 19:38. We are in the middle of considering the most significant events in all of human history—the death and resurrection of Jesus—and our text for this study describes the burial of Jesus.

Once it was clear that Jesus was dead, Joseph of Arimathea approached Pontius Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus so that he could give it a proper burial (v. 38). Ancient Jews had tremendous respect for the human body, so much so that they were sure to bury the bodies of Jews even in cases where they had been convicted of a crime. Normally, in cases of sedition, the Romans left the bodies of crucified criminals on the cross for the vultures to take care of. However, leaving a body hanging on a tree overnight was a violation of the Mosaic law (Deut. 21:22–23), so the Romans would allow the Jews to follow their traditions and bury even those who had been found guilty of rebellion against Rome. Normally, the Jews would bury criminals in a common grave outside the city gates, but the body of Jesus got a different treatment. Some commentators believe that Pilate’s willingness to give the body to Joseph (and Nicodemus; v. 39) is a further indication that Pilate believed Jesus was innocent, since he allowed Jesus not to be buried with other criminals.

We do not know much about Joseph of Arimathea except that he was a wealthy disciple of Jesus who sat on the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of first-century Judaism (Matt. 27:57; Mark 15:43). John 19:38 tells us that he was a disciple in secret, and of course we know that Nicodemus’ devotion to Jesus was likely not public knowledge either, since he came to Jesus at night (3:1). We might be tempted to look down on Joseph and Nicodemus for their

reticence to identify publicly with Jesus, yet it is worth noting that taking the body of Jesus for burial was a public declaration of their allegiance to our Lord. What is important is that they did not stay in hiding but finally showed their devotion to Christ.

Following the burial practices of the Jews, Joseph and Nicodemus wrapped the body of Jesus in linen strips and spices that would mask the smell of decomposing flesh. Though Jesus had suffered much humiliation, the honor shown in His burial marks the beginning of a shift to a more exalted state for our Lord. He was laid in a new tomb, a special place reserved in God's providence for Him (19:40–42).

## Coram Deo

It is sin to hide our allegiance to Christ (Matt. 10:32–33), but it is not unforgivable. The key is that we repent of being ashamed or afraid of our identification with Christ and publicly declare that we are His disciples. This is what Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus did when they took Jesus' body for burial. If we have been ashamed of Jesus, let us repent today and ask the Lord to give us the courage to be known as disciples of Christ.

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# Jesus Appears to His Disciples

John 20:19–22  
JOHN 20:19–22

“When [Jesus] had said this, he breathed on [the disciples] and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’ ” (v. 22).

Once Mary Magdalene realized that Jesus had risen from the dead, she went to tell the other disciples, who, except for John, did not know that the empty tomb meant His resurrection (John 20:1–18). Yet, it does not seem that the disciples initially believed her. At the very least, they did not grasp the significance of what she said. After all, John tells us that the disciples, on the day of Christ’s resurrection, were hiding in a room with the doors locked because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities (v. 19). Humanly speaking, this is understandable. The authorities had put Jesus to death, so the disciples believed they were in danger as well. But they should have had no fear, because Jesus had conquered death. They would become courageous preachers of the cross, but it would take the Holy Spirit’s arrival at Pentecost to give them boldness (Acts 2).

Speaking of Pentecost, today’s passage tells us that before the actual pouring out of the Spirit on the disciples in Jerusalem fifty days after the resurrection of Jesus, our Lord breathed on them, saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (v. 22). This is sometimes called the Johannine Pentecost, and on a surface-level reading it seems to introduce a second giving of the Spirit. However, a more careful reading indicates otherwise. What we have here is an “acted parable,” a visible action of Jesus that reveals a coming event. This follows the example of several Old Testament prophecies (Jer. 19; Ezek. 4). In Greek, the word *pneuma* means both “spirit” and “breath,” so our Lord’s action and speech showed that He would soon pour out His Spirit on His disciples. Note that the church has seen in this action evidence that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. Augustine of Hippo comments, “By breathing on them [the Son] signified that the Holy Spirit was the Spirit, not of the Father alone, but likewise His own.”

Before this acted parable, Jesus proved to the disciples that He had risen from the dead by showing them His hands and side, proving that He was indeed the One who had been pierced on the cross (John 20:20; see 19:31–

37). He also commissioned the disciples to go into the world, telling them that He was sending them just as the Father had sent Him. Jesus was not of the world and came into the world to bring salvation (John 1:1–18). The disciples—and ultimately all Christians—were once of the world, are taken out of the world by God’s grace, and then are sent back into the world to proclaim the gospel of salvation, pointing people to Christ (John 17:14–21).

## Coram Deo

John Calvin comments that Jesus pledged the Spirit to His disciples in order to equip them for pastoral ministry. He writes, “Those whom Christ calls to the pastoral office he likewise adorns with the necessary gifts, that they may be qualified for discharging the office.” This is true of the pastoral office, but it is also true that Jesus gives the Holy Spirit to all Christians in order to equip them for ministry. God always equips those whom He calls (1 Cor. 12).

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