

IN NOMINE JESU

GOD HAS SPARED HIS PEOPLE

Our sermon for Good Friday evening is taken from our inspired readings.

Hear again the Word of the Lord.

For these things happened that the scripture might be fulfilled, "His bones were not broken," and again (a) different scripture says, "They will look upon the One whom they pierced."¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

The words of this evening's text that were just repeated are significant in that they affirm the sin-sacrifice that Jesus made for His people. Two quotes from what we call the Old Testament conclude St. John's crucifixion narrative. The first one, *His bones were not broken*, is a quote lifted from the 34th Psalm. In that setting, the Lord through King David long ago, spoke of God's deliverance of His servants, and His removal of condemnation from them. That was fulfilled in David's greater Son, Jesus, as He bore the condemnation of God's servants in His flesh into death to bring them, you, deliverance.

There is a deeper, more ancient significance attached to the words *His bones were not broken*. That meaning comes from the requirements God gave to His people to follow as they celebrated His Passover. In particular, the condition that none of his bones were to be broken applied to the people's consumption of their household Passover Lamb. That one, sacrificed for sin, whose blood was painted upon the doorposts and lintels of the Israelites' houses to prevent the Angel of Death from

visiting them, the lamb of the sacrifice was to be eaten that night, and none was to be left until the next morning. But, in the command given to people who would normally only eat meat at special feasts, there was a prohibition. That is, the faithful Israelites were ordered by God to not break the legs of their sacrificial lambs. The rich marrow, a delicacy still in many cultures, rich in nutrients, was kept from the Passover meal. This seems to be a wasteful practice for a people not accustomed to having meat daily on their tables.

Yet, the command to not break the bones of the sacrificial lambs, in the everlasting Covenant rite established by God, makes perfect sense when the faithful learn its purpose. That is, the purpose of the Passover lambs was to show the people that the blood of those beasts foreshadowed the blood of the One who was treated as less than a beast. His blood, painted upon the dwelling places of the people of God – for you dwell now in these bodies of mortal flesh, and the blood of Christ enters those homes through the mouth – His blood means that the destroying Angel will pass over you on the Great and Terrible Day of the Lord yet to come. Do you grasp the reality that was given in the commands regarding the treatment of the Passover Lamb? We who have partaken of the flesh of the Lamb Whose bones were not broken are the people of God Whom He has spared. God's Word still declares:

¹ *John* 19:36-37.

For these things happened that the scripture might be fulfilled, "His bones were not broken," and again (a) different scripture says, "They will look upon the One whom they pierced."²

The second scripture quoted is used two other times directly in the Word of God. The first time is the text which St. John recalls for us. It lies in the third-to-last chapter of the second-to-last Book of our Old Testament. In Zechariah's Book, prophecies regarding the Messiah of God are brought together in what we might call the Reader's Digest version about the Christ who would save the Lord's people. The promise that those who pierce the Christ will gaze upon Him is connected to the time of God's outpouring His spirit of grace and supplication. The Day of great mourning in the city of Jerusalem is promised, each family will mourn by itself, including the House of David. That happened when Jesus died, when the House of David, in the person of His mother Mary, mourned with her sister, and her new guardian son. That Day of mourning was the Day that Jesus, the perfect, final sacrificial Lamb of God died. The life had poured forth from His body, the blood was shed, and the land itself felt the death.

The words, *they will look upon the One whom they pierced* are also recorded in the last Book of the New Testament. There they are connected to the Last Day, when all flesh shall behold the Lamb Who was slain returning on the clouds with power, might and glory. That prophecy is still in our future, to be fulfilled in God's time, perhaps tonight or tomorrow, or in ten thousand years. Yet, these words will come to

² John 19:36-37.

pass in time, for they have already come true in our past: *they will look upon the One whom they pierced.*

On that day that Jesus died, the Day of your salvation, all things promised of the suffering Christ were fulfilled. Even as His corpse hung lifeless, suspended from the cross, the Word of God about Him was coming to fruition. The Lamb had been slain, and the last words about His death were being brought to completion, the crucifixion was over. The devil has been bound. Victory is declared. We soldiers of the cross gaze upon the Victor's Trophy. God has spared His people.

Yet our theme text does not conclude the day's readings. In them we learn all that was left of the death of that Lamb was the fulfillment of the Scriptures regarding His place and mode of burial. We learned that the One who was the Last and Complete Sacrifice for sin was given a rich anointing in death. Jesus, who had not owned earthly property and whose few temporal possessions had been taken from Him before He was nailed to the cross, was given riches in death reserved for the greatest men of that era in history. The weight of the incense and oils used for His hasty burial was extravagant, reserved only for the likes of King Herod, and the great Jewish Rabbi Gamaliel the Elder (at least according to historical records).

In St. John's narrative, the Christ prophecy was fulfilled in the Lamb Whose unbroken corpse was laid in the virgin tomb, that it might not be left out until morning. Salvation has been won. For now, as did those people of ancient times who

waited through the Lord's Sabbath, we wait and rest in the Word of the Lord on this seventh day of the week. The sun has set, our Sabbath has been won.

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Good Friday Tenebrae Vespers

Psalm 22; Psalm 31; John 19:1-42

April 10, 2009

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

SOLI DEO GLORIA