

Burial of Jesus

Matthew 27:57-66; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42

“We are dealing with facts, the great historical facts of the gospel. What is the gospel? Paul defines it for us. “For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.” (I Cor. 15:3-4) These are the central facts of the gospel.” J. Vernon McGee

The burial of Jesus is an integral part of the gospel of Jesus Christ! The tomb added strength to the fact that Jesus rose from the grave! Don't miss these points, a real and legitimate place of burial for the body of Christ **declares that Jesus really died!** Also, His rising was immediately known, this fact was strengthened with many **valid witnesses who knew where His body lay.** The whole event of Jesus' burial was wonderfully controlled and orchestrated by the wisdom of God.

I. Body Released

- **Time was Short** All four gospels give the detail that the Sabbath was near.

“And now when the even was come, because it (“that day” Luke 23:54) was the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, (“and the sabbath drew on.” Luke 23:54)” Mark 15:42

“because it was the preparation” – The book of Mark will carefully explain to his Roman readers why there was so much haste concerning the removal of Jesus from the cross. The six pm start of the Sabbath was coming. Jesus died at 3 pm and after the Jewish leadership asked Pilate to quicken the deaths of all those on the crosses, their bodies would be taken off and disposed of. Time to claim Jesus' body, prepare it for burial, and close it within the tomb was short indeed!

- **Joseph of Arimathaea** All four gospels give details concerning the character and loving acts of Joseph of Arimathaea.

“And, behold, there was a (“rich” Matthew 27:57) man named Joseph, a (“honorable” Mark 15:43) counsellor; and he was a good man, and a just (righteous): (“who also himself” Matthew 27:57 “being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews,” John 19:38) (The same had not consented to the counsel and deed of them;) he was of Arimathaea, a city of the Jews: who also himself waited for the kingdom of God.” Luke 23:50-51

This man is the central figure in the burial of Jesus. God used him to protect the precious body of Christ.

Let's look carefully at the facts we have concerning this man.

1) Found only in this event of the Bible.

2) Of Arimathaea, a city about 20 miles NW of Jerusalem. It was also the birthplace of Samuel.

3) Member of the Sanhedrin (Gk) – Jewish legislature/high court.

- “honorable” – Gk – noble bearing – his very presence commanded respect; his past actions and wisdom made him a distinct and prominent member
- The scriptures plainly tell us that he did not consent to the conviction of Jesus. Whether he was with the council during the trials, we do not know.

4) Very rich and influential – He would have been called an “chief ruler” probably not a religious ruler

5) Silent disciple of Jesus – John 12:42-43 The Pharisees had the power to excommunicate any that might not agree with their doctrines. This was a great disgrace and economic disaster for any Jew. Their whole way of life would be altered if excluded from the Temple and synagogues.

6) Good and just/righteous – These words are a description of his heart and attitude before God and man. “He was a man of unspotted reputation, not only just to all, but good to all that needed him” (Matthew Henry, p. 1656) He was honest and willing to consider what God was showing through the words and works of Jesus. While most Religious Leaders were seeking to protect their position before the people and Rome (John 11:48), Joseph of Arimathaea was evidently searching the scriptures for truth concerning Jesus of Nazareth. (John 5:39)

7) He waited for the kingdom of God. This phrase shows commitment to the truth of the Old Testament Scriptures and not just to the traditions of men. Few scholars of that day honestly sought the truth of God’s prophecies but instead promoted their sect’s teaching. Luke 2:25, 38

8) Feared the Jews – This would be the Jewish Leadership with the power to take everything he had and completely change his and his families lives! John 7:13; 9:22; 12:42

- **Bold Request**

“This man went (“in boldly (Gk – dared)” Mark 15:43) unto Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus (that he might take away the body of Jesus:” John 19:38)” Luke 23:52

Normally, the bodies of crucifixion victims were left to the elements and scavenger birds. When that was not possible, like in this setting, they would be taken down and thrown into a mass grave. If family members claimed the bodies, it was welcome because it saved time and energy of the soldiers. Evidently, no one came forward for Jesus’ body: no relative, no disciple, no grateful healed one, no friend, no one...instead a very unlikely VIP Sanhedrin member of Arimathaea named Joseph came.

The very thing that caused the disciples to scatter drew into the open others, who, up to this time, would have been called secret disciples. Here we see secret disciples become public at Jesus’ death and following disciples hide at His death! What a contrast! The request for Jesus’ body was daring. Both Jews and Romans would be suspicious of the motive of this request. When Joseph identified with Jesus, he was splitting ways with his colleagues and acknowledging a respect for a condemned insurrectionist. This act showed great courage, he would have put himself into a suspicious light from every direction.

What caused this change of attitude? It is obvious the **trial and crucifixion** changed Joseph! Whether seeing or hearing of Jesus’ trials with the jealous Sanhedrin breaking every Jewish law I believe it could have been one of the last straws to his silence. Knowing also the Jewish leaders insisted for crucifixion, intimidating and threatening Pilate would have added to Joseph’s discuss. Whatever it was, Joseph decided he had been quiet long enough and with courage dared to go to Pilate and ask for the body of Jesus.

- **Pilate Marvels**

“And Pilate marveled (surprised) if he were already dead: and calling unto him the centurion, he asked him whether he had been any while dead. And when he knew it of the centurion, he gave (“commanded.” Matthew 27:58) the body to Joseph.” Mark 15:44-45

Pilate was surprised that in only six hours Jesus was already dead. It seems by the text; he called the centurion to the Praetorium to give a personal report in confirmation of Jesus’ death. When it was confirmed, Pilate commanded that the body be given to Joseph. The action of releasing the body of Christ officially pronounced the fact that Jesus was dead!

II. Body Prepared All four gospels tell of the preparation of Jesus' body before burial. But only John tells of the presence of Nicodemus.

“He (*Joseph*) came therefore, and took (“it down” Luke 23:53) the body of Jesus. And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. (“And he (*Joseph*) bought fine linen,” Mark 15:46) Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound (bound) it in (“clean” Matthew 27:59) linen clothes (strips) with the spices, as the manner (custom) of the Jews is to bury.” John 19:38-39

“Nicodemus” – I think we can say much of the same about Nicodemus as we did Joseph. These two Jewish VIP's were willing to walk away from the comfortable and respected life they enjoyed and side with Jesus, “a man despised and acquainted with grief.” But unlike Joseph of Arimathaea, we have read about Nicodemus twice before in the Gospels.

This is what we know about the man Nicodemus:

- 1) In John 3, he privately met with Jesus. It was at that time Christ graciously explained the plan of God, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)
- 2) “ruler of the Jews”- This means that Nicodemus was also a Sanhedrin member like Joseph, these two men not only knew each other, but were colleagues.
- 3) “master of Israel” (Jesus referred to Nicodemus with this title) – Unlike Joseph, Nicodemus was a high-ranking Pharisee. He was an expert teacher of the Old Testament and laws.

When looking at John 3 and his discussion with Jesus, one can see he had a good and honest heart desiring to know and understand truth. It was in a meeting of Religious Leaders we find Nicodemus, the second time, challenging the others to a fair treatment of Jesus and His teachings. (John 7:50-51) Though he bravely stood up to the others, it seems he never completely cut ties with them – **until now!** It is too bad that it was not until the death of Christ that Nicodemus showed to the world his devotion and faith in Jesus.

Don't miss these Details:

1. Joseph of Arimathaea negotiated the body from Pilate
2. With his own hands, Joseph helped to remove Jesus' body from the cross.
3. Joseph bought and prepared linen strips for the burial.
4. Nicodemus brought the spices. (65 pounds) Myrrh – gummy substance; Aloes – perfumed; ointments – fragrant oils
5. It was late into the day – “the sabbath drew on” Luke 23:54 Time was of the essence.
6. Only the loving hands of believers handled Jesus.
7. These men were the only ones who prepared the body of Jesus for burial. “taken the body” – Matt. 27:59 This certainly was a very gory, sad, and disturbing job. It is very safe to say these two men had never been exposed to any task like this before. This was an obvious act of love and devotion.
8. The fact that these two VIP Jewish Leaders handled and prepared the body of Jesus made them unclean to observe the high sabbath.

“manner of the Jews is to bury.” – The acquaintances and followers of Jesus neither had the money or courage to bury Jesus. God raised up these two men to do this work. But the work needed to be done quickly. As Edersheim, a converted Jewish Rabbi, reads the accounts of the burial, he calls it a “haste embalment.” Jews did not embalm but desired to seal the body and keep air out. Their desire was to suppress the odor of decay.

The procedure is described this way:

1. The body would be first washed. This would have been a very difficult task for the two men.
2. Generally, about half of the body's weight would be needed in spices, for Jesus it tells us 65 pounds!

3. Section by section, the body would be covered with a layer of myrrh, a fragrant gummy substance which will both seal and act as a glue.
4. Section by section, clean linen strips would be bound around the fingers, arms, and legs, like a mummy.
5. A separate cloth would be wrapped over the face of the dead person.
6. More spices would be laid under and around the body.

The body's wrapping will be a big part of the resurrection evidence to those who entered the tomb!

III. Body Buried

- **New Sepulcher** Every Gospel devotes at least one verse to the tomb. This is an important part of the Gospel story!
1. **“Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden (“his (*Joseph*) own tomb” Matthew 27:60) a new sepulcher (“which he had hewn out in the rock:” Matthew 27:60), wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day; for the sepulcher was nigh at hand. (“and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulcher, and departed.” Matthew 27:60)” John 19:41-42**

The greatest fact of the tomb is that it fulfills Old Testament Scripture. Isaiah 53:9 “And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death...”

Here is how the Gospels describe the tomb:

1. It was new high-level burial tomb – no one had ever be buried there before -3 Gospels tell us this fact.
2. It was hewn out of rock - 3 Gospels tell us this. This will be important as evidence for the resurrection. There was only one way in and out and that was sealed and guarded. No one stole the body!
3. It was in a garden – John is the only book that relates this. It is unlikely the Garden Tomb shown today on Holy Land tours was Jesus' burial site, but it would be very similar in design.
4. It was close to the execution site – John tells us this fact. Several authors felt that a man of Joseph's standing would not have desired a tomb for himself near an execution site. They wrote instead that Joseph might have earlier purchased and prepared the tomb close to Golgotha for Christ. I'm not so convinced of this theory. In reality, we know Jesus did not have to have Joseph know and prepare things early. God has the power to move in the hearts and affairs of man to work His plan.
5. It had a large stone that served as a cover to the entrance – 2 Gospels relate this fact. When the Gospels say it was “rolled” gives the indication the stone was a disk type that had a groove or track made for placement of the stone in front of the doorway. Often these tracks were chiseled out in a downward angle, making reopening the tomb very difficult, needing several men to do it. Then a second stone would customarily be put up against this round stone to hold it from ever tipping. The rolling of the stone would signal the burial process was complete.

- **Women Witness** Three Gospels record the woman at the tomb.

“And the women also (“Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses” Mark 15:47), which came with him from Galilee, followed after, (“sitting over against the sepulcher,” Matthew 27:61) and beheld

the sepulcher, and how (“where” Mark 15:47) his body was laid. And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the sabbath day according to the commandment.” Luke 23:55-56

I'm sure it wasn't much past the sunlight returning to the sky that the women and acquaintances of Jesus saw a new commotion at the crosses. It must have startled them as they made out two well dressed, prominent Jewish Leaders working with the soldiers to remove Jesus' body. To them, these men were not friends, but foes! All watching must have been very concerned about the motives of these two Sanhedrin members. I am sure that they didn't trust them and would have been wondering what was to become of Jesus' body!

It was **only** Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James the less and Joses that followed and watched Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus. They wanted to know where the body of Jesus would be taken and they were led to the garden tomb, probably not far from their advantage point where they had watched the cross of Jesus.

Let me make it plain, these two VIPs and two women would not have spoken. Perhaps the ladies knew who the men were, but culture and custom would not have allowed interaction between common woman and these distinguished men. Remember, both men were associated with the Religious Leaders who killed Jesus! But sitting across from the tomb, we are told they watched the men work quickly. First, tenderly washing and cleaning the matted body of Jesus. Then efficiently but carefully applying the aloes and myrrh while wrapping the new, clean linen strips around each limb and then the body. I wonder at what point they consider these two men, who had humbled themselves to do such a task for the Jesus' body, not to be enemies but instead friends. What a surprise it must have been.

Luke tells us that the ladies “beheld the sepulcher, and how his body was laid.” (v. 55) Notice they observed **how** he was prepared by Joseph and Nicodemus. Several authors feel the ladies peeked into the tomb for a good look at the preparations! It makes me smile when I read, “And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the sabbath day...” Luke 23:56 True to the nature of women, when we watch men do something we can do, we feel it could have done it better---or at least improved! The two Marys didn't have the wealth of the VIPs to outdo their supplies but perhaps they felt they could wrap better! But more probable they just wanted to have a part in the burial preparation...in their thinking their last service to the Master. Remember, the men were hurried, time was short. The ladies now knew where Jesus' body lay and will return on Sunday morning.

IV. Body Secured Only Matthew tells of this detail in the burial of Jesus.

- **Problem to Pilate**

“Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, Saying, Sir (so respectful), we remember that that deceiver (could not bring themselves to say His name) said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again.”
Matthew 27:62-63

Here we read of the strange Sabbath day gathering and meeting between the Religious Leaders and Pilate. It is not only strange but a violation of Jewish law! The wording in the KJV is a bit obscure and clumsy to our ear but when looked at carefully, instead of spending this special Sabbath in the Temple worshipping and teaching, the Religious Leaders came to Pilate with a very unusual request!

Something seemed to have caused fear in the hearts of these men. The day before they were bold, manipulating, intimidating, heartless, all to see Jesus crucified before the Sabbath! Now, on that precious Sabbath, they were back in Pilate's court putting on an air of respect and needing a favor. Even Pilate would have thought it odd. I would like to suggest that the events surrounding the death of Jesus **did get their**

attention! The eerie darkness that afternoon, the veil ripping from top to bottom, the earthquakes, then two respected members of the Sanhedrin deserting and actually working together to give Jesus of Nazareth a proper Jewish burial, I think these events shook these harden haters of Jesus! Instead of bowing before God and begging for forgiveness this Sabbath Day, they ran to Pilate to continue their conspiracy against the Truth!

“We remember” is a surprising statement. When would they have heard Jesus say, “After three days I will rise again.”? There are about a dozen recorded times Jesus said this to His followers. Look at John 2:22---here is the passage the Religious Leaders will bring as a witness against Jesus. Jesus tells how he will raise up the temple after three days. He would be speaking of His body in the resurrection. Did they understand this prophecy? However they heard, they took Jesus’ words about His resurrection more seriously than the disciples! While the disciples found no comfort in Jesus’ words, the Religious Leader’s remembered!

- **Desire of Pilate**

“Command therefore that the sepulcher be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first.” Matthew 27:64

Now, because of these claims, they were almost as afraid of Jesus after His death, as when He was alive. They did not want His death to turn into a positive for His followers, just as with the placard when they had tried to control the discussion at the cross, now they felt compelled to control the body during those first three days in the tomb. The Religious Leaders certainly didn’t believe He would rise again, but they wanted to be prepared for any attempt by the disciples of Jesus to take the body and then promoting His ministry again. They wanted the problem of Jesus to die and be gone at the cross!

- **Compliance of Pilate**

“Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure (secure) as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulcher sure (secure), sealing the stone, and setting a watch (guard).” Matthew 27:65-66

Pilate certainly must have been wearied of questions and requests about Jesus of Nazareth. Now after His death, Pilate is still being bothered by the VIPs of Israel! His attitude in reply to the Religious Leaders shows he wanted nothing to do with guarding a dead man. So, he gives the job and responsibility totally to the same men who had wanted Jesus dead. It seems when reading the phrase, “Ye have a watch:” Pilate is telling the Religionist to take their own Temple guard and secure the tomb. But more than 50% of English translations will read, “Have a watch” or “Take a watch” other words, a Roman guard. The Greek seems to support this idea better. A look at the full story concerning the soldiers, Pilate, and the Religious Leaders after the resurrection, we find the soldiers will return to tell the chief priests what happened at the tomb. The Jews will pay them off and protect them from Pilate’s discipline for having had Jesus’ body stolen while they slept. If these were Temple guards, they would have had nothing to fear of Pilate. No, these were trained, disciplined Roman soldiers, who Pilate sent to the tomb. They secured the tomb with a Roman seal under the direction of the Jews. If someone broke the seal it was punishable by death. The Religious Leaders did as Pilate told them, “make it as sure as ye can.”

The zeal of the Religious Leaders to keep a watch in case of a tomb tampering will actually strengthen the fact that Jesus rose! No one was allowed in, the tomb was guarded by trained Roman soldiers, sealed by Roman seal, instead---**Jesus came out!**

All these measures made the truth of the resurrection even more wonderful! Warren Wiersbe completed his thoughts on this section of the burial by saying, “Without realizing it, the Jewish leaders and the Roman government joined forces to help prove the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” p. 84

Believer’s Application:

1. How do you view Jesus, like Pilate or Joseph of Arimathaea?

I want to point out the difference in attitude of Joseph of Arimathaea and Pontius Pilate regarding the body of Jesus. Two different Greek words are used by these men when speaking of the body of Christ. When Joseph asked for the Jesus’ body, he used the word *soma*, meaning a body containing the whole of a person: in personality, standing, and character. The emotion of this word would therefore be personal involvement in care and tenderness. When Pilate spoke of Jesus’ body he was completely detached of emotion. He used the word “*ptomas*” meaning lifeless body, corpse, dead body, carcass. To Pilate Jesus was a dead body needing to be disposed of, but to Joseph of Arimathaea Jesus was the beloved Messiah whose body was precious.

Some respected theologians believe that through study and the direction of God, Joseph had come to an understanding of the true work of the Messiah in the world. Did he taken the challenge of Christ when He told the Religious Leaders, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.”? (John 5:39) Others feel the new boldness of Joseph was due to a request or teaching Jesus made directly to him, much like the audience Nicodemus had with Jesus in John 3. However it might have happened, it seems, he came to understand of Christ’s substitutionary death for the sins of the world happening that day. Biblical scholars will even go to the point to say Joseph had earlier purchased the tomb close to the execution sight, made preparations for a quick burial, and waited for the death of Christ so he could quickly secure and protect the His body. Could it be? Yes, but we cannot know for sure. What we are sure of is this, Joseph of Aramathaea, a VIP within the rulers of Israel, believed that Jesus was the Messiah and was willing to lay aside his life, wealth, position, and reputation to care for His body of Christ.

How about you? What is your attitude regarding Christ? Have you come and looked honestly at the Scriptures concerning Jesus? Have you prayed and asked God for leading in knowing the truth of God? Do you view Christ in a personal manner, or are you detached from Him like Pilate? It saddens me that Pilate had heard and literally walked away from these words of Jesus, “To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth.” (John 18:37) And now, after Jesus’ death, the body of Christ was nothing more than a mere corpse to Pilate needing to be disposed of!

Today, choose to have a personal, and active relationship with Jesus. He died to take away your sin, He loves you, He seeks to change you, give you purpose and direction.

2. A Test of Faithfulness – The Woman at the Tomb!

This had been a long, incredibly difficult, and emotional day for these two women. Yet, they remained close to the body of Jesus. Perhaps, you have endured a day like this in your life. Hopefully, not too many! I can remember an all-night vigil beside a hospital bed not knowing what would be the future for my little sweet 5 month old girl, then there was standing beside the casket of my mom for a long visitation line, followed by the emotional funeral service, all that, after a week of exhausting preparations. Also, I’ve received incredibly bad news and I remember the moments dragging by as we waited for any more information! Going through and remembering those difficult events in my life, gives me a glimpse of the devotion and loyalty those two women showed to Jesus that day.

They were limited in their ability to protect Jesus. As women, they could not defend Jesus before Pilate; their voices would not have been heard before the Sanhedrin! But all day long, they did what they could! When all others had deserted Christ, they remained! We can easily guess, they spent 8-9 hours that day following Jesus; first with Jesus' mother and John, later with other friends of Jesus watching from afar, and lastly at the tomb. Not out of curiosity but faith, devotion, commitment, and love! They remained courageously with Jesus until the end!

Romans 12:1-2; Titus 2:12-14

How do we pass the Test of Faithfulness? Are we...

1. **Willing to extend and sacrifice ourselves in time and resources?** This is not the first time we read of these women. Luke 8:1-3 tell us they had been serving Jesus with their time and resources for months in Galilee. They had been willingly sacrificial, they have been "zealous of good works", doing the "acceptable will of God"! They **have been** doing what they could! Is that our heart and desire? Is that our reality?
2. **Enduring in the face of difficulty?** Do we go up against hard and difficulty circumstances and find ourselves quickly thinking, "I've had enough" "This is all I can take" "I can't take this anymore" "This is not worth it!" and do all we can to escape? These dear woman endured the most traumatic and disturbing day of their lives, because of their love, loyalty, devotion, and commitment to Jesus Christ. Paul told Timothy to endure hardness like a good soldier (2 Tim. 2:1-4). This should be always in our thinking when struggling through difficulties. Trust God and wait patiently for Him to place together perfectly the puzzle of His will for us!