

Mk. 15:40-47 “Burial Witnesses”

For the Children: Have you or your parents ever witnessed a car-crash. The police sometimes talk to such witnesses, especially if there it is a serious crash, with injury or even death. They want to get the facts straight. Well, the death and burial of Jesus was even more important. God made sure that there were many witnesses – women, Jewish leaders and Romans. However, the main witness is God’s Word itself. That Word tells us that Jesus had to die and be buried, so that death would be followed by life with God for all His children. **Questions:** Why did God use so many women as witnesses? How can we be sure that Jesus was really dead? What is important about His burial?

Introduction:

First Point: Truly Dead

- 1) The Witness of Women: A group of women watched their Lord die on the cross. The women included Mary Magdalene, Mary (Jesus’ mother or aunty?), Salome and others. There were also some men present, including John (Lk. 23:49, Jn. 19:26-27). It showed some courage for all of them to be there. But the women are singled out for their simple devotion to the Lord, their desire to minister to Him. See also Mk. 8:1-3, 14:3, 16:1 and Lk. 7:38. Greatness in God’s Kingdom is a matter of humble service. The Lord also loves to use the weak and “insignificant” to witness to His great deeds. So the Lord uses the witness of these women, though a woman’s testimony was not valued by the Jews.
- 2) The Witness of Joseph: Joseph of Arimathea was a prominent member of the Sanhedrin, and a god-fearing man – though he had formerly kept his belief in Jesus secret (Lk. 23:51, Jn. 19:38). Now, when humanly-speaking, there seemed less reason to believe in Jesus, he finds his courage and openly approaches Pilate. It is similar with Nicodemus, who assists Joseph in this (Jn. 7:50, 19:39).
- 3) The Witness of the Romans: Pilate was amazed that Jesus had died so quickly. Before releasing Jesus’ body to Joseph, he checks with the centurion who supervised His crucifixion. The Romans were very particular about making sure their victims were certifiably dead. It was unusual to release the body of one executed for treason, and to release it to a non-relative. Pilate probably did so because he knew Jesus was innocent.
- 4) The Significance of This Witness: Thus it is clear from the witness of the women, 2 members of the Sanhedrin and the Romans, that Jesus was truly dead – not in a coma. He had to die physically to pay the price of our sins – so we could be set free from death. He also had to be dead for the resurrection to mean anything.

Second Point: Truly Buried

- 1) The Witness of Women: The women also witnessed Jesus’ burial (v. 47). They did not go to the wrong site and, finding an empty grave, jump to the conclusion that Jesus was risen.
- 2) The Witness of Joseph: Joseph witnessed Jesus’ burial, in the new tomb Joseph had intended for himself (Mt. 27:50). Nicodemus witnesses this as well (Jn. 19:39). So, for that matter, do the Romans – for they allow guards to be posted at the tomb to prevent rumours of a resurrection (Mt. 27:62-66).
- 3) Burial Details: Joseph rushed to give Jesus a decent burial in a near-by site, since the Sabbath was about to commence. He followed Jewish custom which (based on Dt. 21:23) did not like to leave corpses hanging in the open too long. According to that custom, he had the body wrapped in linen strips, layered with spices – over 45 kg. of it! (Jn. 19:40), which Nicodemus had organized. Then a “large stone” (Mt. 27:60) was rolled in front of the entrance – too large for one man to shift!
- 4) The Significance of This Witness: The burial of Jesus had to take place, since He suffered for our sins, which deserve the humiliation of the grave. Jesus suffered that humiliation for us, but was not forgotten by His Father – so that we would not be left in the grave. The burial also testified that Jesus really was dead, and the resurrection really was a rising from the dead. This burial also fulfills Is. 53:9 – a hint of the vindication to come. All of this is essential to the Gospel (1 Cor. 15:3-4).