

### LESSONS ON PREDESTINATION #63

"The Burial of Jesus' Body"  
(Scriptures from NKJV)

John 19:31-42:

*Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should 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. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe. For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, "Not one of His bones shall be broken." And again another Scripture says, "They shall look on Him whom they pierced."*

*After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being 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. So he came and took the body of Jesus. And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. Then they took the body of Jesus and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews' Preparation Day, for the tomb was nearby.*

**INTRODUCTION:** The burial of Jesus is the second of the basic doctrines of Christianity listed by the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 15:3-5, "*For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: 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, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.*" Each of the Gospel writers devote a significant amount of space to the topic. There are ten verses in Matthew, six verses in Mark, six verses in Luke and five verses in John. We are prone to give little thought to the burial of Jesus. Instead we quickly move on to the good news of the resurrection since so much depends upon it.

#### **A. SO WHY IS THE BURIAL OF JESUS SO IMPORTANT?**

1. The first reason is that the burial proves that Jesus was really dead. If it could not be proven that Jesus actually died, then skeptics could say that perhaps He only seemed to die. Perhaps He swooned and the cool air of the tomb revived Him and He was able to convince His followers that He had defeated death. What proofs are given from the historical data?

a. First: the testimony which the Roman centurion gave to Pilate as recorded

in Mark 15:44, 45 - "**Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time. So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph.**" NOTE: It was the centurion's job to verify the deaths of the crucified victims. This was the significance of the soldier piercing the side of Jesus with a spear. It was not to kill Jesus, but to verify that He was already dead.

b. Second: the testimony of Joseph of Arimathea, who came before Pilate to claim the body of Jesus. In John 19:38-40 we read, "**After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being 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. So he came and took the body of Jesus. And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury.**" NOTE: Joseph was a man of high rank among the Jews and a member of the Sanhedrin. He was also accompanied by Nicodemus. Thus Pilate has three witnesses to the death of the body of Jesus.

c. Third: the testimony of the women who watched Him buried. In Luke 23:55 we read, "**And the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid.**" NOTE: It would have been impossible to deceive the centurion and his men, along with Pilate, and a group of women!

2. The burial details fulfilled Scripture. There is a prophecy concerning the Messiah in Isaiah 53:9 which reads, "**And they made His grave with the wicked—but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth.**" NOTE: Those who were responsible for Jesus' death intended for Him to be buried with the criminals in a disgraceful manner, but God intended for Him to partake of an honorable burial after His most dishonorable death. He would be buried in the tomb of an honorable rich man.

3. The burial contains deep theological significance.

a. In Romans 6:4, Paul speaks of Christians being buried with Jesus in His death, just as they are raised with Him in His resurrection. In so doing, He is discussing the Christian life, explaining why believers cannot continue living in a life of sin. He says, "**Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.**"

b. James Montgomery Boice sheds light on this when he says:  
When theologians work out these parallels, they have little trouble showing how we have been crucified with Jesus, raised with him, or even made to ascend into heaven with him. But they have trouble with the burial. How were we buried with Christ? They ask. What does this add that is not already covered by our death to sin?

I suggest that the reason burial is an important step even beyond death is that burial puts the deceased person out of this world permanently. A corpse is dead to life, but in a sense it is still in life, as long as it is around. When it is buried, when it is placed in the ground and covered with earth, it is removed from the sphere of this life permanently. It is gone. That is why Paul, who wanted to emphasize the finality of being removed from the rule of sin and death, emphasizes it. He is repeating but also intensifying what he said about our death to sin earlier. "You have not only died to it," he says, "You have been buried to it." To go back to sin once you have been joined to Christ is like digging up a dead body.

I do not think the Gospel writers had this in mind when they wrote about Christ's burial, but guided by the Holy Spirit, they were laying down as a detail of history what Paul in particular would later unfold in its full theological significance. (Boice, *Matthew*, Vol. 2, P. 631, para. 3-5).

## **B. PERSONS AND EVENTS ASSOCIATED WITH CHRIST'S BURIAL**

1. The Jewish leaders urgent desire to have the bodies removed from the cross before the Sabbath day arrived.

a. The Jewish Sabbath began at six o'clock on our day of Friday. The Jewish calendar did not have names for the days of the week like our calendar. Our Sunday was merely called the "first day" of the week, and followed our Saturday, which was the "seventh day" of the week.

b. In order to achieve this, they went to Pilate and asked that the legs of the victims be broken to hasten their death. By breaking their legs, the victims would not be able to support their weight and die of suffocation. After breaking the legs of the other thieves, they were surprised to find that Jesus was already dead. Jesus died much sooner than normal for victims of crucifixion. He was put on the cross at the third hour, or 9:00 a.m. and died at the ninth hour or 3:00 p.m. Thus He was only on the cross for six hours. Most people, who were crucified, lingered for two or three days. Jesus died before the robbers. As pointed out earlier, this came as a surprise to Pilate when Joseph of Arimathea asked for His body. The reason the Lord died so soon is that He gave up His life to death when He willed to do so. He was truly a Sovereign King!

c. The term "the Preparation" was the day before the Passover season during which all leaven was to be disposed of and all ceremonial cleansing was to be finished. The term, "high day" means that the regular Sabbath and the Passover were the same day, making the one day especially important. We will discuss this more in detail when we cover the topic as to what day Jesus was crucified, and how long He stayed in the tomb. One view holds that He was crucified on a Friday, the other that it was on a Wednesday.

d. As we have covered earlier, it was the Centurian's responsibility to verify that all the victims were dead. The piercing of Jesus' side was to verify He was already dead.

e. In verse 35, John's account is not based on hearsay, fable, or legend, but is his own testimony as an eye-witness. He records the significance of the breaking of the legs and the piercing of Jesus' side as being the fulfillment of two Old Testament prophecies.

(1) The first involved the reason why Jesus' legs were not broken. According to Exodus 12:46 and Numbers 9:12, no bone of the Passover lamb was to be broken. In reference to the lamb, the Exodus passage reads, **"In one house it shall be eaten; you shall not carry any of the flesh outside the house, nor shall you break one of its bones."** Jesus was the perfect fulfillment of the Passover lamb and could not have any of His bones broken. In addition to these historical requirements, Psalm 34:20 is an explicit prophecy which reads, **"He guards (keeps) all his bones; not one of them is broken."** John then says in John 19:36, **"For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, Not one of His bones shall be broken."**

(2) The second is a prophecy given by Zechariah 12:10 which reads, **"And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn."** Jesus' early death not only protected Him from having His legs broken, it also led to Him being pierced to be sure He was dead. In John 19:37 we read, **"And again another Scripture says, 'They shall look on Him whom they pierced.'"**

f. All prophecy is certain to occur because God has predetermined it to occur. God foreknows all that He has first purposed to bring to pass. He does not predetermine what comes to pass based on His omniscience -- seeing what men will do. This is denied by the Arminian or semi-Pelagian system of theology. Here is an example of how the Arminian system understands the events of the crucifixion. In his commentary on John, Robert Tourville, says:

The events just related concerning the Lord's crucifixion are what John's Gospel refers to as "these things." The sequence is this: God by His omniscience knew the events which were to occur; He moved on the prophets to record the details of the Messiah's person and ministry; and finally, the events happened as He foreknew and inspired the prophets to write. (Tourville, *The New Testament Study Bible, John*, p. 519, para 2, re. John 19:36, 37).

One can easily observe that in this system, all of the events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus originated in the minds and wills of the creatures, rather than the Creator God! God is merely an observer foreseeing what men would do. Thus the marvels of the cross find their origins in men, not God! This flies right in the face of Scripture and robs God of His glory. We quote again the words of the early Christians in Acts 4:27, 28, **"For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done."** NOTE AGAIN: God's predetermined purpose determines how men will act, and God sees or knows for certain how men will act prior to their acting.

2. Joseph of Arimathea claims the body of Jesus.

a. This is recorded in John 19:31-42. It is also recorded in Matthew 27:57-60, Mark 15:42-46, and Luke 23:50-54.

b. Matthew tells us he was a **"rich man."** (Matthew 27:57) He also tells us he was a **"disciple of Jesus"** (Matthew 27:57). Mark and Luke tell us he was a **"prominent council member,"** meaning he was a member of the Sanhedrin. Luke tells us he was **"from Arimathea, a city of the Jews."** (Luke 23:51). Luke tells us he was **"a good and just (righteous) man. He had not consented to their decision and deed."** (Luke 23:50, 51). Both Mark and Luke say he was **"waiting for the kingdom of God."** (Mark 15:43; Luke 23:51). He was like Simeon and Anna who are mentioned in Luke 2:25, 26. He was a Jew who expected a Messiah.

c. John tells us that while Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, he kept it a secret for fear of the Jews. John normally took a dim view of those who were secret disciples. In John 12:42, 43, he says, **"Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."** However, Mark tells that Joseph **"coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus."** (Mark 15:43). It is interesting that this is the first and only time we ever hear of Joseph. Yet at the moment when all the other disciples (except John)

had forsaken Him, he came forward boldly to identify himself with Jesus. He did so at great personal cost, in that this must have ended his career with that court. The Sanhedrin would have had no use for him once he had shown an interest in their enemy. What brought about this change? We are not told, but one could speculate that he had seen enough to have had his fill of the Jewish leaders.

d. It was Joseph who took the body of Jesus down from the cross. He was certainly the leader, and would make use of others such as John, Nicodemus, the centurion, and the women. Mark tells us that he purchased the linen cloth to wrap the body of Jesus (Mark 15:46). The cloth would be torn in long strips for the purpose of wrapping it around the limbs and the body. John tells us those bands were sprinkled with spices as the strips of cloth were being wrapped around the body of Jesus. In John 19:40 he says, ***"Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury."***

3. Nicodemus assists Joseph in the burial.

a. Only John gives us this information. We read in John 19:39, ***"And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds."***

b. Nicodemus was also a member of the Sanhedrin, who John refers to as the one who had at first ***"came to Jesus by night"*** (John 3:1-21). While Joseph is said to have brought the linen, Nicodemus brought the spices. They consisted of Myrrh, which was a fragrant, gummy resin, which in powdered form was often used with aloes, an aromatic powder made from sandalwood. Unlike the Egyptians, the Jews did not embalm their dead. Instead, they used fragrant spices to offset the smell of the decaying body for as long as possible. The spices were sprinkled on the strips of cloth that were wrapped around the Lord's body. More spices were then packed around and under the body once it was placed in the tomb. They did a thorough job in that neither Joseph or Nicodemus or John and the women expected Jesus to rise from the dead. Had they believed His predictions to rise again, they would not have bothered to prepare His body so thoroughly.

4. The tomb where Jesus was buried.

a. While all four Gospel writers tell us that Jesus was buried in a tomb, only Matthew tells us it was Joseph's own personal new tomb. (Probably for his own burial). Luke tells us it had never been used (Luke 23:53). Matthew, Mark and Luke all tell us that it had been cut out of a rock, probably out of a hillside.

b. Only John describes the locality of the tomb. He says it was close to a garden where the crucifixion had taken place. If Jesus died at about the ninth hour or 3:00 p.m., and the Sabbath would begin at 6:00 p.m., then they must get Him buried in a very short time. The tomb “just happened” to be nearby, so they laid Jesus in the tomb, and Matthew and Mark say that the tomb was sealed by rolling a great stone over the door. Because this was done on the day of Preparation, they would be considered unclean in that they had handled a dead body. Thus they would have been unable to participate in any more of the festive activities.

5. The women observe where Jesus was buried.

a. This is described by Luke in Luke 23:55, 56 which reads, ***“And the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment.”***

b. Among these women are Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus. Matthew and Mark inform us of this. Luke tells us that they saw Joseph and Nicodemus place Jesus in the tomb, even to the point of how He was laid in the tomb. This is important in view of Matthew 28:1 where the same women appear again. This refutes the theory which denies the resurrection by saying that the women went to the wrong tomb. They, along with Joseph, Nicodemus, the Roman guard, and the Jewish leaders knew which was the right tomb.

c. The women would return home to rest on the Sabbath and prepare further spices to enable them to anoint the body of Jesus in a more complete manner on the first day of the week.

6. The Jews place a guard at the entrance of the tomb.

a. We are told this in Matthew 27:62-66. ***“On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, saying, ‘Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise.’ Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, ‘He has risen from the dead.’ So the last deception will be worse than the first.’ Pilate said to them, ‘You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how.’ So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard.”***

b. The Jews are here concerned that the disciples would steal the body of Jesus and fake a resurrection. The disciples had no such plans. They did not expect Him to rise from the dead, and they were in hiding for fear that the Jews would come after them. (John 20:19). Pilate grants their request, the tomb is sealed, and a Roman guard is placed at the entrance of the tomb.

The empty tomb and the first day of the week will prove to be a huge problem for the Jews to address. They will fabricate the story that the disciples stole the body while the guards slept and made up the lie about the resurrection. We will deal with this more in the upcoming lessons on the resurrection. But here the enemies are confronted with this fact: the tomb where Jesus was buried is empty.

c. William Lane Craig points this out when he says,

The point is that the Jews did not respond to the preaching of the resurrection by pointing to the tomb of Jesus or exhibiting his corpse, but entangled themselves in a hopeless series of absurdities trying to explain away his empty tomb. The fact that the enemies of Christianity felt obliged to explain away the empty tomb by the theft hypothesis shows not only that the tomb was known (confirmation of the burial story), but that it was empty . . . The fact that the Jewish polemic never denied that Jesus' tomb was empty, but only tried to explain it away is compelling evidence that the tomb was in fact empty. (Lane, *The Historicity of the Empty Tomb of Jesus*)

d. God's sovereign providence continues to work in every situation to accomplish His purpose, and the burial of His Son is no exception. I close with this question. Did God preordain all this according to His wise purpose and work through the free actions of men and angels, or did He merely foresee what men and angels would will to come to pass? If you believe the first, you are a Calvinist. If you believe the latter, you are an Arminian. Who gets the glory for the cross? Men or God!