

Text: Matthew 27:57-66

Title: Jesus is Buried

Truth: The authorities made sure Jesus was buried.

Date/Location: January 25, 2023 at FBC

Introduction

After the veil was torn from top to bottom, and an earthquake, and the saints of old were resurrected, the centurion acknowledged that Jesus is indeed the Son of God, and various women who ministered to Jesus saw all these events, there was a hiatus of (reported) activity at the cross until the body was taken down. Some things were undoubtedly happening in the vicinity—like the other victims having their legs broken, and Jesus’s side being pierced, but Matthew is not focused upon those things.

1 Corinthians 15:3-4 explains truth that is situated at the center of the gospel: Christ died for our sins in agreement with the Scriptures, he was buried, that he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures, and that was seen by Peter and the other apostles and disciples.

The fact that a man Jesus of Nazareth died at the hands of the Romans is, historically speaking, absolutely certain. The Bible explains more than the mere fact of the event, adding *why* it happened—*for our sins*, which is in perfect agreement with what the earlier Scriptures had said in portions like Isaiah 53.

The natural next step for a dead person is to bury him. That is exactly what happened. This verifies his death.

I. The Burial

A. Matthew reports about a wealthy person from Arimathea named Joseph. This man shared the name with Jesus’s father and one of the patriarchs of Israel. He himself was a council member like Nicodemus, who was good, just, dissented from the council’s decision to kill Jesus, and was looking for God’s kingdom (Luke 23:50-51).

As an aside, “looking for God’s kingdom” ranks right up there with being good and just as a mark of a true believer. Are you eagerly anticipating the coming of Christ and His rule on the earth as King?

The Gospel of John 19:38-42 describes how Nicodemus joined Joseph in making hasty preparations for the body and placing it into the tomb. They gave of their financial wherewithal to give some honor to the body of the Lord Jesus.

- B. Joseph, like Nicodemus, had decided to give his loyalty to Jesus Christ and become one of his followers (= disciples). For him and for Nicodemus, their action certainly became known in the public and likely sealed their fate as far as the religious and political establishment was concerned. They hated Jesus, so any favorable thing done for him would likely have raised their ire. Being nice to Him by providing a burial was akin to “coming out of the closet” in support of Him.
- C. Joseph had to have official permission to take the body of Jesus, because the soldiers were unlikely to give the body to just anyone. So he went directly to Pilate. Perhaps because of his wealth, he had some channels or special access to do this.

There was some “red tape” involved in this. Mark 15:43-45 explains that Pilate was surprised to hear that Jesus was dead so soon, so he double checked by sending for the centurion in charge of the crucifixion, who verified the death. Pilate then released the body to Joseph for burial. We do not know what happened to the other two thieves, except that they were not kept on the cross (John 19:31).

By the way, this is strong evidence that Jesus did in fact die and did not “swoon.” It is as if God knew that the “swooning” argument was going to be used against the death of His Son, and He arranged things so that an official inquiry was made by the highest governor in the land, with his soldiers, and they verified that Jesus was dead. Coupled with the fact that Pilate and his soldiers were not motivated to fake the death, this is proof beyond a reasonable doubt.

Jesus's body must have hung on the cross for some time from His death until all this was done, without breathing, no movement, blood running out of his riven side. Again, there can be no question that Jesus died.

- D. Matthew does not record the details of the embalming spices (myrrh and aloes) that were customary. Instead, Matthew mentions that Joseph wrapped the body in a clean linen cloth and put it in a new tomb.
- E. Joseph of Arimathea had purchased a burial site for himself, but he donated it for the use of the Lord Jesus. I would pessimistically guess that he figured on it being permanently occupied. The disciples gave evidence of unbelief even after the resurrection of Jesus (Luke 24:11). But then again, the Lord had promised multiple times that he would rise on the third day (Matt 12:39-40, [16:4,] 16:21, 17:23, 20:19, 27:63-64; Mark 9:31, 10:34; Luke 9:22, [11:29-30,] 18:33, 24:7, 24:46; John 2:19-20). Joseph may have picked up on that and thus known that the tomb was a temporary loaner, and that he could use the tomb in the future.
- F. Joseph likely had the help of several individuals (servants?) to make this all happen. The last thing was to roll a large stone against the door of the tomb. This was a tomb hewn out of rock. It was a cave, not a hole in the ground.
- G. As at the end of the previous portion of the narrative—verses 55-56—some women were carefully observing all of this. They were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joses (Joseph). They are the only two mentioned by Matthew. The same two would return to the tomb on Sunday (Matthew 28:1) along with Salome (Mark 16:1).

II. The Tomb Guard

- A. "The next day," in the common understanding of a Friday crucifixion, refers to Saturday, the weekly Sabbath, which was also an extra-important Sabbath because of where the Passover fell on the calendar.
- B. The Jewish leaders came to Pilate again—he must have been sick of seeing them—and recalled how Jesus said He would rise again

after three days. They were fearful this would be made to appear true by the apostles—not that it would in fact happen—so they schemed to make sure it would not happen.

- C. Their mechanism to keep the tomb closed was to set a guard of soldiers to keep the disciples away.
- D. If the soldiers failed, “the last deception will be worse than the first.” The first deception was that the Lord claimed to be Messiah, King, and Son of God. The last deception would be that He arose from the dead. Of course, since the evidence holds up to scrutiny, there is no deception—only truth. The deception present was a species of deception wrought by the Devil upon the minds of those who did not believe what Jesus said (2 Cor. 4:4) so that they wholeheartedly embraced the deception themselves and it became self-deception.
- E. Governor Pilate assigned them the soldiers and told them to secure it the best they could. They put a seal to mark that it was illegal to open the tomb, and they set the soldiers in place.

Conclusion

All that effort was in vain. Daniel 4:35 says that no one can restrain the hand of God or demand of Him an answer about what He has done. God planned to resurrect Jesus, and then in fact did raise Him from the dead (Rom. 4:24, 1 Cor. 6:14, 2 Cor. 4:14). The angels attended, and no soldier nor governor could stop them from doing what had been promised from ages and generations ago. It was impossible that Christ could be held by the power of death (Acts 2:24).

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