

He Was Buried

Mark 15:40-15:47

Many weeks ago when we started our study of the book of Mark, we read the very first verse which says, "**The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.**" This book has been the gospel, the good news, concerning Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As we have read and studied this wonderful book we have seen that everything in Jesus' life, all His words, all His actions, all His miracles--everything in His life points to the climactic moment of Jesus' death on the cross and His resurrection three days later. Jesus died and rose again. This is the good news, the gospel. The apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15 reminding his readers and us of the gospel: "**1 Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you--unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.**"

Christ's death and resurrection are two essential elements of the gospel by which we are saved. But did you notice that there was a third element in between death and resurrection? What was it? "**and that He was buried.**"

Today I want us to examine this often overlooked element of the gospel because we are going to see that Jesus' burial is also an essential part of the good news--it is vital for our salvation.

Listen as I read Mark's account, chapter 15, starting in verse 40:

- 40 There were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joses, and Salome,**
- 41 who also followed Him and ministered to Him when He was in Galilee, and many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem.**
- 42 Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath,**
- 43 Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.**
- 44 Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time.**
- 45 So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph.**
- 46 Then he bought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen. And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb.**
- 47 And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses observed where He was laid.**

First, let's look at the facts:

1. All that was done at Jesus' burial

The witnesses (15:40-41, 47)

The witnesses of Jesus death and burial were the women. Here Mark tells us for the first time in his book that beyond the male disciples who followed Jesus, there were a number of women. Mark mentions several of their names: **Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joses, and Salome.**

These women were apparently well-known in the early church, including Mary's sons James and Joses or Joseph. Salome is probably the mother of James and John, according to Matthew 27:56. Luke tells us that Jesus had freed Mary Magdalene from being possessed by seven demons.

What Mark tells us about these women is that they "**followed Him and ministered to Him when He was in Galilee.**" Like the apostles, these women were followers of Jesus, they were his disciples. Their distinguishing characteristic was their service. They ministered to Jesus. They helped to provide for His needs and those of His apostles.

And in keeping with their devotion and practical concern for Jesus, the women continue to keep watch over Jesus during His crucifixion and His burial.

The Time Element (15:42)

Mark notes that the crucifixion took place on Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). He brings this up to explain the necessity of removing Jesus' body.

Often when men were crucified the bodies remained on the crosses even after death to further disgrace the victims. Unless a family member asked for the body, they usually dumped their corpses in a mass grave, or they were left to rot without being buried.

It was particularly important for Jesus' body and those of the other two victims to be removed because of the Sabbath coming on, and not just any Sabbath, it was the Passover Sabbath. John tells us that the Jewish leaders did not want their holy day desecrated by these men's cursed bodies so they asked Pilate to have their legs broken to hasten their death. Then the bodies could be removed.

If Jesus' body is to be rescued from disgrace, someone must act quickly. Neither Jesus' mother nor his disciples are in a state of mind or in a position to do so. One man steps forward.

The Courage of a Secret Disciple (15:43-45)

Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

Mark suddenly introduces a man named Joseph who is from Arimathea. We have not read about this Joseph before Mark and we will not read about him again. But all four gospels tell about Joseph of Arimathea. Mark tells us that Joseph was a prominent member of the Sanhedrin council. Remember that it was the Sanhedrin who convened in Caiaphas' house in the middle of the night, condemning Jesus of blasphemy in an illegal trial. But Mark also tells us that Joseph was **waiting for the kingdom of God.** He was sincerely looking for the kingdom of God to come.

Luke's account gives us very important information about Joseph. Luke tells us that Joseph was a good and just man who had not consented with the Sanhedrin

council nor their deed (Luke 23:50 -51). Even though Joseph was a prominent member of the Sanhedrin, he apparently was not part of the trial that night. Mark 14:64 said that all at the trial in Caiaphas' house consented with the charge of blasphemy and agreed that Jesus was deserving of death.

John tells us that Joseph was "**a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews**" (John 19:38). Though a secret disciple, Joseph of Arimathea finally gathers up his courage. He goes in before Pilate and asks for the body of Jesus. Once the centurion determines that Jesus is dead, Pilate grants Joseph the body of Jesus.

John also tells us that Joseph is not the only one who is going to care for the body of Jesus. Nicodemus, the one who had come to Jesus with a question in the secrecy of night in John 3, also comes with burial ointments and spices to prepare the body for burial.

Here are two secret disciples publicly showing their care for Jesus. Nicodemus, a Pharisee and ruler of the Jews, and Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Sanhedrin, are the ones to take care of the body of Jesus. Where are the visible disciples? Where are Peter, James, John, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Matthew and so on? The prominent disciples that we have read about are not around. However, those who had so much to lose now stand up to take care of the body of Jesus. I am sure their fellow Jewish leaders were not thrilled to know that Joseph offered his tomb for Jesus' body.

The Burial at the Tomb (15:46)

It has been accurately said that we have more information about the burial of Jesus than of any other person in history. Let's see all that went into the burial of Jesus.

Bound in linens (Mark 15:46). Many linen layers and strips were used to wrap the body tightly. If one were alive and wrapped in such a way, the person would not be able to unwrap and release himself.

Seventy-five pounds of burial spices (John 19:39). If the linens were not enough, John tells us the amount of spices that were placed upon the dead body. This amount of weight placed upon the body would have made escape a greater impossibility.

Placed in a new tomb (John 19:41). Jesus was also placed in a new tomb. There can be no confusion on this matter, such that people would not know where Jesus was laid. A new tomb was used, and there would be no mix-up concerning location of bodies.

The tomb was nearby (John 19:42). Along the same lines, the new tomb was near the crucifixion site. Therefore, the body did not travel miles and miles with no one knowing what happened to it. The body went a very short distance, which was important so that the preparations could be made on the body before the Sabbath came.

The women saw where Jesus was laid (Mark 15:47). No one can claim that these women did not know where Jesus' tomb was or that they became confused. They were watching where Jesus was laid so they could return later and anoint Him after the Sabbath was completed.

A large stone was placed against the door (Matthew 27:60). The stone that covered the tomb was large enough that one person could not move it. It would take quite a few people to move the stone slightly uphill and out of its track.

The tomb was made secure by the Jews (Matthew 27:65). The Jews did not want anything to happen to the body of Jesus because Jesus claimed that He would rise from the dead. Therefore, the Jews did everything they could to make the tomb secure.

The stone was sealed (Matthew 27:66). Further, the Romans sealed the tomb so that any tampering with the tomb would be quickly noticed. No one would be able to slip in and out of the tomb without someone knowing something had happened. The tomb was sealed and the seal would be broken if someone had gone in or come out.

A guard was set in front of the tomb (Matthew 27:66). Finally, on top of all these things, a guard was placed in front of the tomb to ensure that no one could tamper with the tomb. A trained military guard whose sole purpose was to watch the tomb was placed where Jesus' body was laid.

Many of the things done were simply normal Jewish burial customs (John 19:40). Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus performed the burial preparations that were normally performed upon a Jew. But Matthew 27:62-66 shows us that all the security of the tomb was due to the fear that Jesus would actually rise from the dead or that the disciples would perform a hoax and claim that Jesus had risen from the dead. The Jews made absolutely certain that nothing could be done to the body so that the disciples could not claim that Jesus had risen from the dead.

2. Why Jesus' Burial Is Important

The Burial Proves Jesus Truly Died

All of these burial facts are important because the facts prove Jesus truly died. The Roman soldiers at the crucifixion knew when someone was dead. Further, Pilate summoned a centurion to double check that Jesus was dead, because Pilate was surprised that Jesus died so quickly. The Romans checked that Jesus was dead before releasing the body. Not only this, John tells us that the Roman also thrust a spear through Jesus' side (John 19:34) proving Jesus had died, because water and blood poured out.

Nicodemus and Joseph also were convinced that Jesus was dead. The women saw that He was dead. His real death sets the stage for His true resurrection. Jesus was dead and buried. The Jews never claimed that Jesus was never dead when the apostles went around claiming a risen Jesus. This could have been the Jews easy defense, but everyone knew that this was simply not true. The burial proves that Jesus truly died.

The Burial Fulfills Scripture

The burial is also necessary because it is the fulfillment of scripture and prophecy. Isaiah prophesied, **"He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth"** (Isaiah 53:9). Matthew tells his readers that Joseph of Arimathea was a rich man and it is in his grave that Jesus was laid. Jesus is the Messiah, fulfilling every detail of the prophecies of the Old Testament.

The Burial Sets the Stage for His Resurrection

So Jesus' burial sets the stage for His resurrection. Jesus was buried that he might rise. Of course, burial is not needed for one to come to life; if anything it adds a barrier to being resurrected. But that is just the point. The burial makes the resurrection all the more glorious because of its barriers. The wrappings of the shroud that bound him, the stone that sealed the body in the tomb, serve as foolish guards to hold Him down in the depths of death, and Jesus breaks free of these material bonds as easily as He breaks through the spiritual bonds of death. Nothing can hold Jesus back; nothing!

The Burial Has Spiritual Significance Today (Romans 6:1-11)

Jesus' burial is part of His work of redemption. All that is taking place – the sufferings, the death, and even the burial – is for our benefit.

In Romans 6 Paul writes: **3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 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.** (Romans 6:3-4).

The basic message of Jesus' burial is that there is a sense in which we died with Christ and were buried with him. Our old nature was killed and buried, so that our new nature might be raised to life. That is what baptisms signifies – not only Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, but ours as well. We die with Jesus and we are raised to new life with Him. Again Paul says, **"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."** (Galatians 2:20). The victory over death is ours because it is Christ's victory and we are joined in him. You will overcome death because you have already died; your old self has already been buried. What lives now is the new life you have when you were raised in Christ Jesus. That gives us a sure hope not only in life but also in death.

Wesleyan Methodist missionary, James Calvert (1813-1892), committed his life to reaching the indigenous peoples of the Fijian Islands. It is widely reported that upon his voyage, the ship's captain warned him to turn back, saying, "You will lose your life and the lives of those with you if you go among such savages." Calvert replied, "We died before we came here." Calvert was able to face death with courage because he had already died with Christ. His old life was buried with Christ.

Has your old self died and been buried? Are you living a new life in Jesus Christ? We don't just believe in Jesus and then go on in that same dead existence that we had before. It is the resurrection of a new life, not the resuscitation of an old one that we live. Our old life was buried with Christ, the new life we live is Jesus living in us.