

The King is Buried

Matthew 27:57-66

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This morning is Palm Sunday, but that is not where we are in our text. We are actually studying a Good Friday passage. We have spent the last two sermons looking at Jesus' death on the cross. This morning, we will cover His burial.

The burial of Jesus usually doesn't get much attention. It gets mentioned, but we typically move from the crucifixion to the resurrection and sort of assume His burial. I get it. It doesn't seem like much happened in Jesus' burial, but it's very significant. So, it may have been a silent Holy Saturday that Jesus was in the tomb, yet it was anything but insignificant. Let's pray and get to work on our text.

Do you ever walk through cemeteries? Have you ever just taken time to walk through one and contemplate the lives of the people who are buried there? For many of us, the only time we ever go to a cemetery is when we have to go to a funeral.

That makes sense. For some of us, cemeteries can be depressing. They remind us of loved ones we have lost. They can bring back painful memories and sad emotions. They can evoke memories of the longest night of our lives. The kind where sleep doesn't come. But it is not just death and funerals that make us feel this way. There are times when we have painful experiences break our hearts.

You know those moments when your heart is heavy, and air itself seems thick and hard to breathe. You sit in the dark and wonder if anything will ever be right again. It seems like your future and your dreams are lying in a grave. It feels like your prayers hit the ceiling and fall to the ground. It is those moments when it seems like your hope has been buried. It feels like all hope is lost. Have you ever been there?

This is the moment we are at in Jesus' life and death. For His disciples, it feels like all hope is lost because their hope has just been crucified. He has been buried in a tomb that cannot be opened. A large, cold, hard stone has been rolled over the entrance. There is no way in and no way out. It seems like all hope is dead.

This may be where you find yourself this morning. You have had some experience that makes you feel like all hope is dead. Sure, the doors of the church are open, and people are friendly, but your heart feels dead and buried. It feels like all hope is lost. Now, you are only left with sadness, depression, fear, and doubt. If this is you this morning, I'm glad you are here. I hope the Lord breathes new life into your heart.

Perhaps you are here and you understand what I have been describing because you have been there before. You remember the dark night of the soul. Perhaps you are here and you have no idea what I am describing because you have never had this kind of experience. I don't mean to frighten you, but at some point in life, you will be there.

The good news for us is that Jesus has been there too. Friends, Jesus not only predicted His suffering, death, and resurrection, but He also predicted His burial. His burial verified His death, so that His resurrection would announce the effectiveness of what He achieved in His death.

The Apostle Paul explained this as the gospel. In 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, he said that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and was raised on the third day, appearing to many witnesses. Upon these facts revealed in Scripture, we hang all of our hope for eternity.

This means that if you are a child of God, you can walk peacefully through a cemetery, knowing that Jesus Christ conquered death on your behalf. Hopelessness and despair never need to be your companions as you travel through this life. When you are united to Jesus Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, you always have hope.

Friends, the good news of Christ's burial is that it substantiates His death. The fact is HIS burial is where we find hope and new life.

Let's walk through our text. I have three points, and then we will draw out the implications and applications of the text at the conclusion.

I. Jesus is the Hope of Faithful Disciples (vv. 57-61)

First, look in vv. 57-58:

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. ⁵⁸ He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him.

When I say Jesus is the hope of faithful disciples, I'm not talking about popular, well-known disciples. I'm talking about obscure disciples of whom we know very little about their lives. Sometimes, the most faithful disciples are not the ones who are the *loudest, most vocal, and prominent*. It is the ones that stay the course and display *costly, quiet acts of deep devotion to Jesus in the hardest moments of their lives*.

When Jesus died on the cross, it seemed like everyone had abandoned Him. Then, out of nowhere, we read about an obscure but faithful disciple named Joseph of Arimathea who comes to take Jesus' body, prepare it for burial, use his own tomb, and then bury Jesus' body. We basically know nothing about Joseph. You can search your Bible, but you will only find him connected to the story of Jesus' burial.

Yet, we can piece together a few details about him from all four Gospels. From them, we learn that he was a secret follower of Jesus who was now going public with his faith. He was a wealthy man from the town of Arimathea. He was also part of the Sanhedrin Council, but he had not consented to the condemnation of Jesus. Whether Joseph knew it or not, God used him in a mighty way. The Lord used this obscure, secret, faithful disciple to fulfill prophecy regarding Jesus' burial and eventual resurrection.

Before we go any further, we need to consider how the Romans treated the bodies of those they crucified. They didn't bury the dead bodies of criminals after they were crucified. They usually left them on the crosses to decay. The bodies left on the crosses served as a deterrent to those considering a life of crime. If, by chance, the bodies were taken down, they were cast into a ravine full of corpses. The bottom line is that those who were crucified were never given a proper burial. It is in this cultural setting that Jesus died and was buried.

So, it was at great personal risk that Joseph went to Pilate and requested the body of Jesus. It was a great personal risk because by requesting the body of Jesus, he was connecting himself to Jesus. This could put him on the radar screen of the Roman military as a collaborator with Jesus. He might even be labeled as a threat. It would *most certainly* cost him his reputation among the Jewish religious elite, especially on the Sanhedrin Council. It would also put his financial livelihood and professional future in jeopardy but he didn't care. His love and devotion to Jesus moved him to obedience to God's call on his life. His *cowardly faith turned to courageous faith*.

The gospel writers want us to see something in Joseph's burial of Christ. Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 53:9,
And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death.

God, in His power and providence, used an obscure, fearful disciple to fulfill His word. This seemingly mundane act of kindness to bury the body of Jesus was crucial to fulfilling Isaiah 53.

Finally, we see how a wealthy man used his wealth for the good of the Kingdom of God. You see, God is not against wealth. Wealth can be a *good thing*, but when it becomes an *ultimate thing*, it becomes an *idol*. The Lord is against *idolatry*. However, here we see a wealthy man giving his wealth to be used for the Lord's purposes at great personal cost and risk.

Let's keep going. Look in vv. 59-60:

And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud ⁶⁰ and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away.

Joseph's faithfulness to Jesus also prepared us for the resurrection of Jesus. Joseph took Jesus' body and buried it in a tomb he had built for himself. John's Gospel adds that Nicodemus helped Joseph prepare Jesus' body for burial.

So, here we have these two Pharisees who stand to lose everything by caring for Jesus' body. They are also making themselves unclean for the Passover by handling a dead body. Yet, they wrapped Jesus' body in a clean linen cloth and anointed Jesus' body with seventy-five pounds of spices. All of this was done in accordance with the Jewish burial customs. Now, remember, if Jesus' body were left in the custody of the Romans, He would have never been buried.

After they had finished preparing the body, Joseph had a large stone rolled over the tomb's opening. The tomb would have looked like a cave. On the front of the cave was a very large round stone cut so that it would roll. At the very mouth of the cave was a track cut on an incline. The stone was placed at the top of the incline where it was secured with a scotch (a wedge placed under a wheel or other rolling object to prevent it moving or slipping). After the body was prepared for burial, the scotch was removed, and the stone would roll in place and seal the tomb. It would have taken a few strong men to do all of this, so we may assume Joseph and Nicodemus had their servants assisting them.

Matthew closes the burial scene by telling us that other disciples were there too. Look in v. 61:

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

So, the Marys were with the men. They were giving quiet support and devotion to their crucified Lord. It is also worth noting that by being there, they took the same risk of being ostracized and persecuted by Jews. Yet, they continued to be public with their devotion to Jesus.

Also, by being there, they knew where Jesus was buried. This becomes critical for Jesus' resurrection. As we will see, these ladies become the first evangelists after seeing the empty tomb and Jesus.

Let's press pause right here because we need to take in this scene. Here we have two extremes on the socio-economic ladder at Jesus' tomb. We see the very wealthy and connected and the very poor and marginalized at Jesus' tomb.

Friends, this is a picture of the church. Everyone needs Jesus, whether you are rich or poor. We all come to Jesus the same way—by faith and repentance. We all come together to worship Him. It doesn't matter where you come from or what you have or don't have. It is about the worship of the Savior who gave His life for us. So, we don't judge others when we come to worship Jesus. We love and accept one another no matter where we come from in life: rich or poor, connected or disconnected, well-known or obscure. The ground at the foot of the cross is level, and it is level in our worship of Jesus.

I want to make one more application to these verses. Friends, a small act of kindness born out of the burden of our faith really matters. We may wonder if it matters whether we talk to our neighbors about Jesus. We may wonder whether a quiet witness of Jesus really matters. We may wonder if our small amount given to the church or missions really makes a difference. We may wonder whether a small act of kindness done in the name of Jesus really matters. Friends, it really matters. It matters for you and for those to whom you serve in Jesus' name.

You and I never know what the Lord will do with our small act of kindness done in Jesus' name. Perhaps something like a small anonymous gift, a gentle witness, a kind word, or just quietly sitting with someone who is grieving is the difference between heaven and hell for them. Never underestimate how your faithfulness to Jesus may be used in the providence of God. We all have different gifts to use in service to Jesus, so let's use them.

Nineteenth-century pastor J. C. Ryle wisely observes:

This fact is full of comfort and encouragement. It shows us that there are some quiet, retiring souls on earth who know the Lord, and the Lord knows them, and yet they are little known by the church. It shows us that there are "different kinds of gifts" among Christ's people: there are some who glorify Christ

passively, and some who glorify him actively; there are some whose vocation it is to build the church, and fill a public place, and there are some who only come forward, like Joseph, in times of special need. But each and all are led by one Spirit, and each and all glorify God in their different ways.¹

We should never look at what we have to give to Jesus as small or insignificant. All of it is valuable in His Kingdom.

II. The Weakness of Jesus vs. the Schemes of Man (vv. 62-66)

Nothing is weaker than a dead body, right? This is what we have in Jesus' death. He is really dead. It seems like He cannot do anything. He didn't bury Himself. Joseph and Nicodemus did that. He didn't prepare His body for burial. Joseph and Nicodemus did that. He didn't roll the stone over the entrance; Joseph and Nicodemus did that. Jesus is dead, the tomb is sealed, and yet the "powerful" religious leaders still fear Him.

So, these guys made plans to ensure Jesus doesn't come back. They want the tomb sealed and guarded. Look in vv. 62-66:

The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate ⁶³ and said, "Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.' ⁶⁴ Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first." ⁶⁵ Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can." ⁶⁶ So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.

There's a lot of irony in these verses. First, consider that the religious leaders (who hated Jesus) remembered that He had said He would rise from the dead. Ironically, the religious leaders remembered that and were concerned, but Jesus' disciples didn't remember He said that.

Friends, here is just a little side note: Matthew tells us about Jesus' burial to his own shame. He didn't make himself look good by including Jesus' burial.

Think about it: He didn't help Joseph and Nicodemus bury Jesus' body. He didn't sit with the Marys at the tomb and watch Jesus be buried. To top it off, at least Jesus' enemies remembered that He said He would rise from the dead. Matthew didn't remember that, yet he included this in the story to his shame.

Second, it is ironic that the religious leaders call Jesus an *impostor, a deceiver, and a fraud*. The very men who lied under oath and falsely charged Jesus with treason and who misled the people of Israel called Jesus an *impostor and a fraud*. Next Sunday, we will see in Matthew 28:11-15 how they continued to lie and mislead the Jewish people about Jesus' resurrection. In reality, they were the deceivers and frauds.

Third, there is an irony in Pilate's words,

"You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can."

That's what they did. They put a seal on the stone and posted a guard. The purpose of the stone was to prevent anyone from entering the tomb to remove the body. The purpose of the guards was to prevent anyone from moving the stone. The purpose of the seal was to prevent anyone from moving the stone without leaving evidence that the stone had been moved. In other words, if someone bribed the guards, broke the seal, and moved the stone, it would have been a capital offense against the Roman Empire. They wanted to ensure that no one could move that stone without being in loads of trouble.

¹ J. C. Ryle, *The Crossway Classic Commentaries: Matthew*, 286.

Friends, the religious leaders and the Roman guards were not as strong and prepared as they thought they were. They had no idea what was coming. The Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:25,

For the . . . weakness of God is stronger than men.

Even in His death, Jesus was stronger than the schemes of these men. Jesus' enemies do not get the last word.

Ultimately, the religious leaders made a futile request, and Pilate's response was just as useless. All of their actions only served to verify and strengthen Jesus' resurrection from the dead. In their attempt to thwart God's plan, they proved that the resurrection really did happen.

Friends, take hope because the enemies of the cross never win. They make their plans to stop the church and the spread of the gospel—they cannot do it. Even the plans of the enemies of the cross are worked into God's plan to send the gospel to the world. The enemies of the cross never win. Their schemes never succeed because the weakness of God is stronger than the strength of men.

III. When Hope is Buried—the Silence of Holy Saturday

At this point, no one can see what's coming. No one is expecting Jesus to really rise from the dead. All the followers of Jesus can see is the sadness, emptiness, mourning, and wondering if all hope is lost. Now, granted, we know the rest of the story. We will celebrate the resurrection next Sunday – Easter Sunday – because we know how this ends.

Although we know Jesus has risen from the dead, we often have moments in our lives and even seasons of our lives where it seems like all hope is lost. It feels and sounds like the Lord is giving us the silence of Holy Saturday. There may be so much silence that it feels like Jesus is dead, the tomb is sealed, and the guard is posted. It feels like all hope is lost. Have you ever been there? Some of you know what I am talking about because you have been there. It can be a dark place.

So, in these moments, we may give mental ascent to Jesus' resurrection, but as our hearts are breaking, it doesn't feel like He is alive. It seems like our prayers go unanswered. It feels like we are sitting in a tomb surrounded by darkness with only dark thoughts and ghostly whispers of deep sorrow telling us – it is hopeless.

In these moments, our faith must have eyes to see that God is at work behind the sealed stone. We must trust in Jesus because He has already worked our redemption. We must trust in the God who raises the dead, whose power is greater than man's power. We must believe that God is at work in the darkness and silence. We must have the eyes of faith to know Jesus is alive, the tomb is empty, which means there is always hope.

I want to close our time with some implications of the King's Burial that will help us as we prepare for Resurrection Sunday.

First Implication: *Jesus really did die.* Jesus didn't fake His death or almost die. He really did die, and He really was buried in a tomb that we sealed by the Roman Empire and had Roman guards posted to prevent anyone from stealing His body.

Remember, Matthew shamed himself by explaining Jesus' burial. Why? Because he abandoned Jesus. If this story were made up, Matthew would have told it to make himself look good, not bad. One of the reasons we know it's true is because he made himself and all of Jesus' closest disciples look really bad by abandoning Jesus when He was buried.

Friends, Jesus really did die, and He really is alive. The stone was rolled away, and the tomb really is empty.

Second Implication: *God's promises were fulfilled.* As we have seen throughout the crucifixion and burial, God continued to fulfill Scripture. Specifically, Isaiah 53 was fulfilled when the wealthy Joseph of Arimathea took Jesus' body and buried it in his tomb. Throughout Matthew's Gospel, we have seen how Jesus fulfilled all of the

Law and the prophets. Even in His burial, God's word was fulfilled. The bottom line is that God's word doesn't return void. It always accomplishes its purposes (Isaiah 55:11). Which means, we can trust in His word.

Friends, when life is at its darkest moment, God's word empowered by God's Spirit is what we need. The Psalmist writes in Psalm 19:7-10,

*The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; ⁸ the precepts of the
LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure,
enlightening the eyes; ⁹ the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules
of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. ¹⁰ More to be desired are they
than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the
honeycomb.*

The Lord gives us many gifts to help us through difficult, dark days. He gives us His church: Dear brothers and sisters in Christ who call us to encourage us, pray for us, meet with us over a meal or coffee, and remind us of the gospel. They support us, cry with us, and sometimes just sit silently with us.

These are all wonderful gifts, but nothing does the work in our hearts like the word of God does. It is living and more powerful than any two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12). God's word will do its work in our hearts, but we must spend time in it. We must read it, listen to it, study it, sing it, pray it, and hear it faithfully preached for it to do its work in our hearts.

Third Implication: *Jesus' burial is our burial.* Here's what I mean. We need to avoid the tendency to jump from the crucifixion to the resurrection. Friends, Jesus' burial has very important theological meaning.

Here's what I mean: We talk about being crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20). When we do, we are talking about how Jesus took our sins upon Himself on the cross and how He nailed our sins to the cross. This certainly is true.

However, often, very little is said about our sins being buried with Him and how we are buried with Him. When we are born again, we die to our sins and our old lives (Romans 6:11). They are buried with Christ. He took all of that to the tomb and left it there.

The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 6:4,

*We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as
Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in
newness of life.*

The Apostle Paul is telling us of the importance of Jesus' burial, and he connects it to our *baptism*. Friends, the word *baptism* means to *immerse*, and there are two kinds of *immersion* he is referring to in this text as it relates to Jesus' burial.

First, he is talking about when a person is born again or saved. At this point, when a person is saved, they are baptized in the Holy Spirit. We also call this being born again by the Spirit of God. When we are born again, there is a spiritual immersion that occurs. We go from spiritual death to spiritual life. We were dead and buried in our trespasses and sins. Then, when we profess faith in Jesus, we are brought out of the spiritual grave into new life in Christ. Our old nature and sins are buried with Christ, in a spiritual grave, and then we are made alive to live a new life in Christ – we are given His resurrected life.

So, when Jesus was buried, He took our sins to the grave. He paid for them on the cross and left them in the tomb. This is the spiritual baptism believers experience.

Second, Jesus' burial gives us the picture of the ordinance of *baptism* that we practice in the church. Those who profess faith in Jesus and repent of their sins are *immersed* in water to show they follow Jesus. It shows that they have died to their old life of sin and have been raised to new spiritual life.

This new spiritual life doesn't happen at the moment of the baptism, but when the person is born again. The ordinance of baptism follows our conversion or how we have been raised to new life in Christ.

So, the water in the baptism symbolically represents the grave in which Jesus was buried. Only baptism by immersion in water gives us this picture of Jesus' burial and resurrection. Sprinkling doesn't give us this picture.

The ordinance of baptism shows what Jesus has done for us. He died on the cross for our sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day. He paid for our sins and left them in the grave. When we are baptized, we proclaim to the world that we have died to sin and been raised to a new spiritual life. Baptism is an outward expression of what has spiritually happened in our lives.

Just to be clear, baptism doesn't save. There is no special water in our baptism that washes away sin. So, we don't practice baptism in order to be saved, but because we have been saved. We practice baptism by immersion because we are commanded to follow Jesus' example, and Jesus' burial gave us all of this. It is the first step in obedience to following Jesus and it reminds us of His burial.

Friends, don't skip over Jesus' burial. Don't move too quickly from the cross to the resurrection. Linger on the profound theological truths and applications of Jesus' burial this coming Holy Saturday.