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Sermon Notes

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The Burial of Jesus Christ

Mark 15:40-47

The Astonishing Providence of God: Orchestrating Events Down to the Detail

What many could simply skip as a minor matter, the gospel writers go into careful detail about. Clearly the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus are the central issues of the gospel; but the burial of Christ has an important role to play as well... and the accounts stand as clear testimony to how powerfully God orchestrates events to achieve His eternal purposes

- God orchestrated the timing of Jesus' death so that he could be buried three days and three nights
- God orchestrated the quiet witnessing of the burial by some women to make absolutely certain the location of the tomb
- God orchestrated the courage of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, two men who had been up to that time only secret disciples of Christ, but who now took their lives and reputations in their hands to give Him the rich man's burial predicted in Scripture
- God orchestrated even Jesus' enemies to do exactly the opposite of what they intended... by posting a guard, they intended to quell any proclamation of the resurrection by Jesus' disciples; but in so doing, they became unwilling witnesses to the absolute truth of the resurrection

Proverbs 19:21 Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails.

The women's hearts were filled with love for Jesus, not a desire to serve a role in God's eternal plan to witness to the resurrection

Joseph's heart was filled also with love and loyalty to Jesus, and perhaps a little shame at having kept his faith quiet up till then; perhaps the same could be said for Nicodemus; but neither of them were thinking they were fulfilling a specific prophecy written seven centuries before they were born

The Pharisees and Sadducees were certainly not seeking to be a strong part of God's plan in making the resurrection a historic fact beyond any fair-minded person's ability to explain away

Pilate and the Romans also were not seeking to make the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ easier... But God is the eternal God, whose plans must always come to pass:

Psalm 115:3 Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.

I. The Burial in Prophecy and in Proclamation of the Gospel

A. The Burial of Jesus Christ is Essential to the Proclamation of the Resurrection

1. Paul's strong assertion in 1 Corinthians 15

1 Corinthians 15:3-4 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures

2. Paul's use of Christ's burial in Romans and Colossians

Romans 6:4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Colossians 2:12 *having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.*

B. The Burial of Jesus Predicted in Prophecy

1. Isaiah 53 clearly predicted the death of Jesus for our sins; but more, Isaiah 53:9 speaks of the MANNER of his burial

Isaiah 53:9 *They made His grave with the wicked, and with the rich at His death*

a. One noun, two adjectives in this prophecy

- i) Noun...“Grave”: Hebrew word translated grave means a sepulcher where dead bodies are laid, a very specific topic in Isaiah 53 in which the Suffering Servant dies and is buried

Since verse 9 in that prophecy speaks of his GRAVE, he clearly died... But the verse gets very specific with two key adjectives... two descriptive words for types of people

- ii) Adjectives: They made his grave with the “wicked”... AND with the “rich” in his death

Putting it together, it seems the verse indicated the Suffering Servant would die and be given (assigned) a grave with the wicked, but that He would end up in a rich man’s tomb

The burial with the wicked was undoubtedly the Roman plan... they would have liked nothing better than to use Jesus’ body as a WARNING to all who passed by; allowing the birds of the air and wild beasts to dishonor it... then, perhaps bury it several days later in a common grave

BUT for Jesus to be buried in a common grave would have removed all the physical evidence for the resurrection that Joseph’s tomb afforded

The wealth aspects of Jesus’ burial are a major theme of this account

Mark mentions that Joseph was a prominent member of the council:

Mark 15:42-43 It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, ⁴³ Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body.

BUT Matthew makes it plain that this man was rich:

Matthew 27:57 As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus.

And John adds the wealth of Nicodemus as well:

John 19:39-40 He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. ⁴⁰ Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs.

Cost of these items was enormous...market value of 75 pounds of myrrh today: \$200,000! So Jesus was "with the rich in his death"

2. Matthew 12 and Jonah: the TIME of His burial

Matthew 12:40 as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

So, Jesus had to be in the tomb before sundown on Friday, so that the three days span (according to Jewish reckoning) would be achieved... any part of a day/night counted as the whole day

C. The Burial Essential to Proving the Resurrection

1. If the Romans had been able to humiliate Jesus' body as they might have planned, and then buried him in a common grave, there would have been no physical evidence of the resurrection... no EMPTY TOMB!
2. Clearly, the physical evidence of the empty tomb was vital to the origins of Christianity, as all the gospels describe the emptiness of the tomb as key evidence

3. John's Gospel is the strongest on the empty tomb

John 20:1-9 *Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ² So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" ³ So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴ Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷ as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. ⁸ Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹ (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)*

Key elements:

- Stone removed from the entrance
- Tomb empty... the Lord is gone
- Strips of linen in which Jesus had been wrapped, lying in a certain formation
- Head covering folded by itself

Physical evidence was the ground for John's initial faith in the resurrection... but the Scripture would be the final ground

This physical evidence was part of the proclamation of the gospel by the eyewitnesses:

1 John 1:1 *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched-- this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.*

The empty tomb was essential also to Peter's proclamation to Jerusalem on Pentecost... a mere fifty days after Jesus died:

Acts 2:23-32 "[Jesus of Nazareth] was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. ²⁴ But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. ²⁵ David said about him: "I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. ²⁶ Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, ²⁷ because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. ²⁸ You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.' ²⁹ "Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. ³⁰ But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. ³¹ Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. ³² God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact

Implied in this proclamation is this: David's tomb is here and his body is still in it! Jesus' tomb is here, and you can all visit it and see for yourselves... His body is GONE!

Thus the empty tomb was essential to the start of Christianity! The actual burial of Jesus was key to the proclamation of the resurrection

Now... let's look at the details coming from the text

II. The Precise Timing of the Burial

Mark 15:42 It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached...

A. The Carefully Choreographed Timing of Jesus' Death

1. "Evening" refers to the period from 3:00 until 6:00 pm; the Jews considered this the end of the day
2. When Jesus spoke his last words from the cross and "yielded up his spirit" (Matthew 27:46-50), the text tells us it was ABOUT THE

NINTH HOUR... that is, about 3:00 pm, the beginning of the evening

3. For three reasons, it was essential that Jesus die several hours before the end of the day
 - a. First: the Sabbath began at 6:00 that day... Jesus had to be taken down from the cross before then and prepared for burial in order not to profane the Sabbath
 - b. Second, in order to avoid having his legs broken, which was forbidden concerning the Passover Lamb
 - c. Third, in order to fulfill the prophecy of Jonah, three days and nights
4. On the profaning of the Sabbath:
 - a. Jewish law required that the bodies be removed and dealt with before the Sabbath began... no work could be done on the Sabbath, and specifically the bodies could not be allowed just to hang there overnight

Deuteronomy 21:22-23 If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, ²³ you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse. You must not desecrate the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.

- b. Therefore, John tells us the Jews demanded that Pilate break the legs to accelerate the death process

John 19:31 Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down.

- c. Jesus HAD to die before they came to break His legs

John 19:36 These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken"

This comes from the statement that the Passover Lamb's bones could not be broken (Exodus 12:46)

- d. Also, another scripture had to be fulfilled about Jesus being pierced:

Zechariah 12:10 "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son."

- e. If Jesus hadn't died when He did, the Roman soldier wouldn't have pierced Him with his spear, bringing the flow of blood and water from Jesus' side
 - f. The TIMING was everything... Jesus just died exactly at the right time
 - g. But now, God has to move powerfully on Joseph's heart to get Jesus buried in his new tomb
 - h. For there is a second prophecy in relation to time: JONAH
5. The prophecy of Jonah had to be fulfilled: three days and three nights

Matthew 12:40 as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

- a. It is vital that we understand this timing
- b. It is not three full days and three full nights... but any part of a day involved "a day and a night" in the Jewish reckoning

Ticket in the parking garage: one minute into the second hour, you pay for the whole hour; or the whole day, if you are renting something by the day

If you arrive at a place on Monday morning, and then leave Wednesday at noon, we consider that a "three-day visit"

- c. Jesus had to be in the tomb before sundown so that He would be in the grave Friday, Saturday, and Sunday... the three days

III. Friendly Witnesses to the Burial

A. The Women Who Were Witnesses

Mark 15:40-41 *Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. ⁴¹ In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.*

1. Women there out of love for Jesus: courageous loyalty to stand with Jesus at His time of need, as they had throughout His ministry
2. John's Gospel tells us that Mary, the mother of Jesus was there
3. Two other women named Mary were there as well
 - a. Mary Magdalene was there... a woman from whom seven demons had been cast out
 - b. Mary the mother of James the Lesser, Son of Alphaeus (one of the Twelve Apostles) was there
4. Also the Mother of Zebedee's sons—James and John
5. There were probably other women there as well, since Mark describes them as MANY in verse 41

G. Campbell Morgan described the mental state of these women with great pathos:

“These women were hopeless, disappointed, bereaved, heartbroken; but the love He had created in those hearts for Himself could not be quenched, even by His dying; could not be overcome, even though they were disappointed; could not be extinguished, even though the light of hope had gone out. And over the sea of their sorrow there was no sighing wind that told of the dawn.”

6. Conspicuously absent were all the male Apostles of Jesus... although John was there until he took Jesus' mother away to care for her

B. Joseph of Arimathea: The Wealthy Man Predicted by Isaiah

1. Amazing how God worked on Joseph's heart!
2. Up to that moment, like Nicodemus, Joseph had been afraid to fly his colors as a disciple of Jesus

John 19:38 Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews.

3. Yet God sovereignly put courage and faith into both of these secret disciples at exactly the right moment to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy about a RICH MAN
4. Joseph was "discipled" by Jesus... interestingly the Greek text uses the verb form; it seems Jesus had spent some direct personal time meeting with Joseph
5. He was a member of the Jewish Council, and was risking everything for a dead Messiah

C. Joseph's Bold Request

Mark 15:43 Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body.

Joseph was in a great hurry, and had completely lost his fear of the Jews or of Pilate. I believe this was the direct action of the Holy Spirit on him to fulfill the prophecy of his burial

He had counted the cost and was willing to be identified as a follower of Jesus at this point

D. Pilate Granted the Request... Surprisingly

Mark 15:44-45 Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died.

⁴⁵ When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph.

1. Pilate's surprise underscores the cruelty of crucifixion, and the sovereign power of Jesus over the timing of his death... Jesus simply "gave up his spirit" when he chose to die
2. It is also surprising that Pilate gave Joseph Jesus' body
3. Ordinarily, the Romans would have sought to use the dead bodies as an object lesson that it doesn't pay to oppose Rome
4. But since Joseph was a member of the council, it could be that Pilate thought he was doing the Jews a favor... it is not likely he would have granted the body to anyone else but a Jewish leader
5. God sovereignly directed the heart of Pilate in this matter!

Proverbs 21:1 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.

IV. The Physical Aspects of the Burial

Mark 15:46 So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.

A. Wrapping Jesus in Grave Cloths

1. John's Gospel: Myrrh and Aloes

John 19:39-40 [Joseph] was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. ⁴⁰ Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs.

2. Myrrh

- a. Costly aromatic resin cut from a small bushy tree grown in the Arabian peninsula; it was collected and stored for about three months until it hardened into fragrant globules; it was sticky and would hold the strips of linen together

- b. shows up three times in Jesus' life... at birth, as one of the gifts of the Magi; and twice at His death—mixed with wine as a sedative, which He refused to drink, and then in His burial
- 3. Aloes: also an aromatic spice
- 4. The purpose of the aromatic spices: to conceal the smell of decay when the body decomposed!

Psalm 16:10 you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.

- 5. As we've noted, the quantity is astounding... either 75 or 100 pounds weight; an amount fit for a king
- 6. They wrapped up Jesus' body carefully in the strips of linen; not embalming as the Egyptians did, but showing great honor to Jesus
- 7. These sticky spices would have made the wrapping easier and left the linens in a specific shape after the resurrection

B. Joseph's New Tomb

- 1. Matthew 27:60 tells us the tomb was "his own new tomb that he had carved out of the rock"
- 2. Joseph as a wealthy man had had the money to carve out of solid rock his own grave, like a small cave... new, never been used
- 3. Likely, it would never be used again!

C. The Stone in Front of the Entrance

- 1. This was a large round disc of solid rock, set into a channel which could be rolled down in front of the entrance to the tomb
- 2. It was secured this way to prevent wild animals and grave robbers from molesting the dead

D. The Women as Witnesses... Again!

Mark 15:47 Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid.

Again, this was vital because it shows that multiple people knew exactly where Jesus was buried... they would be eyewitnesses to the resurrection

The women would come with additional spices to complete the work Joseph and Nicodemus had done so hurriedly as the sun was going down on Preparation Day

V. Unfriendly Witnesses to the Burial

Mark does not record this, but it is worth mentioning. Our information comes from Matthew 27:62-66

Matthew 27:62 The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate.

A. Chief Priests and Pharisees Relentless in Squashing Jesus' Movement

1. Amazing that these groups got together. The chief priests were usually Sadducees and enemies of the Pharisees on almost every topic but this one: they all hated Jesus
2. Also amazing was their behavior on this day: it was the Passover Sabbath, a high holy day; furthermore, the Greek words used for this meeting indicate they went into Pilate's actual council chambers in the Praetorium—something they ordinarily would never have done, since it defiled them... but if they were willing to kill the Lord of the Sabbath (Jesus), they would be willing to set aside some smaller issues connected with this Sabbath

B. Their Statement to Pilate

Matthew 27:63-64 "Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' ⁶⁴ So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first."

1. Isn't it remarkable that all of Jesus' disciples seemed to forget Jesus' clear prediction that He would rise again on the third day, but Jesus' enemies didn't

2. Even if Jesus' disciples did remember His words, they didn't believe they would happen any more than Jesus' enemies did
3. They call Jesus "that deceiver"... total disdain for the only perfectly honest man that ever lived
4. The threat: the disciples will come and steal the body and proclaim that He had risen... starting an even bigger furor than before
5. The request: they want Pilate to post a guard until the third day
6. This last deception = the false resurrection; the first deception: his claim to be the Messiah

C. Pilate's Statement

Matthew 27:65 "Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how."

1. Some say he simply said "You have your own guard... take care of it yourself"
2. But 1) there's no need for Pilate to tell them they have a guard; 2) in Matthew 28:11-14, the guards seem very afraid of what Pilate will think, so they were probably Roman soldiers
3. It is amazing to think of Roman soldiers, the most powerful military force on earth, standing guard over a dead man in a tomb!
4. BUT no power in heaven, or earth, or under the earth could have stopped the resurrection!
5. All the Jewish leaders did by posting the guard is making the official story—the disciples stole His body in the night—absolutely unbelievable

VI. The Seal: A Symbol of the Limits of Human Power

Matthew 27:66 So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard

A. One Final Twist: The Sealing of the Stone

- B. The Seal Represented the Authority of Pontius Pilate... and Ultimately, the Authority of the Roman Empire
- C. In Effect: Whosoever Breaks This Seal and Moves this Stone Will Have Broken Roman Law... and will be punished accordingly!!
- D. Human Authority Ordained by God... but God Rises Above It
- E. A Fulfillment of a Type
 1. The seal on the stone is a fulfillment of the type in Daniel 6, when the righteous Daniel was left overnight in the lions' den, and a stone placed over the opening... and the stone was SEALED

Daniel 6:17 A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation might not be changed.

2. Darius came the next morning to see if Daniel was still alive... he came up out of the den as a picture of the resurrection

VII. Lessons

- A. The Gospel: Christ Died to Destroy Death... Trust in Him Alone

Hebrews 2:14-15 Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death-- that is, the devil-- ¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

- B. Stand in Awe of the Meticulous Sovereignty of God in orchestrating the details of Christ's burial
- C. God is Able to MOVE His Servants to Do His Will
 1. Joseph of Arimathea was afraid of the reaction of the Jewish leaders to his commitment to Jesus; he loved his rich and powerful life too much to lose it
 2. BUT AMAZINGLY... after Jesus was dead on the cross, and it seemed like His claim to Messiahship was crushed, it is at that exact moment that he was MOST COURAGEOUS for Jesus and risked everything to care for Jesus' lifeless body

3. How can we possibly understand this, except that God moved on Joseph by His sovereign power to do what God wanted Him to do
4. So for us, we should ask Him to do the same in our lives
 - a. We sometimes lack the courage to be bold witnesses for Jesus
 - b. We should realize that the power for these good works comes only from God's Spirit

Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.