

The Faithful Watch: Women at Jesus' Tomb

Faithful Witnesses at the Tomb

By Dr. John S. Waldrip

Good evening, everyone. Welcome to the auditorium here at Calvary Road Baptist Church in Monrovia, California, the People's Republic of California and the Gulag known as Los Angeles County. We're glad that you are here. It was a warm day. I forgot to turn on the spotlight. Let me do that now to fill in the shadows under my eyes so that I don't look evil in a camera. Nice to have you here this evening. Let's go to the Lord in prayer, shall we?

Father, we do thank you for your goodness. We appreciate so much the opportunity that we have to approach the throne of grace anytime we want, anywhere we want, for any reason. What a tremendous privilege that you give to those of us who know Christ as our savior, who have these family privileges, being in the family of God with an elder brother such as him. We ask that you might bless us today, that you might bless our study of your word, our time of prayer to follow. We pray for Jim and Nazarin. We pray for Brian, so thankful that he's home from the hospital. We pray for Erica and Sarah's pregnancy. So delighted for those two young moms. Pray that you might encourage them, keep them healthy, keep them strong, keep them fit. We pray for Greg Dixon and his treatment of lymphoma that the chemotherapies will prove to be successful. We pray for our sick loved ones, our through the Bible reading program, how important it is for us to read the word of God each and every day. And we pray for our missionaries to Greece, who are in the States and traveling. We pray also for Samuel Ry who will be coming to the US in a couple of months and we hope to see him here. So we pray that you might bless us, help us to focus this evening and teach us things, minister to us spiritually. And for that we thank and praise you in Jesus name. Amen.

Like for you to turn in your Bible if you would please to Matthew chapter 27. I tell you what, why don't you go first to Luke chapter 23. There is a way these passages are found in the Bible. And then there's the chronological sequence in which these events occurred. And what we're going to look at this evening in the time that we have is the watch of the women by the tomb of the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember he was taken down from the cross where he was crucified with the two thieves on Golgotha's brow on Mount Calvary. And then he was taken to a tomb, a nearby tomb that was owned by a fellow named Joseph of Arimathea. And we're going to look at the women have now come into play. And we're going to learn some things about them. And so, we will spend some time this evening, focusing on the women who observe the burial of his body and the location of Joseph's tomb. Now, that's in Matthew 27, and Mark 15, and Luke 23, but

we're going to go to Luke 23 first because that is what I and I think you will agree with me that's the most likely chronological sequence.

Luke chapter 23 and verse 55. Verse 55. Luke 23:55 reads, "And the women also in addition to all these other things, and the women also which came with him from Galilee, followed after and beheld the sepulchre, and how his body was laid." So they were quite attentive, weren't they?

Now if you would please turn to Mark chapter 15. Mark chapter 15 and verse 47 where we are provided a considerably less amount of information than Luke provides for us. In Mark 15:47 we read and Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph beheld where he was laid. So that's a lot less information than Luke provides. And then we end up with Matthew chapter 27 and verse 61. We'll look at more of Matthew, but for now we'll look at just at verse 61. And there was Mary Magdalene and the other Mary sitting over against the sepulchre.

So, beginning with Luke chapter 23 and verse 55, if you'd go back there, it would be good for us, I think, to take a step back. Can I share something with you? When you're studying the Bible, don't be a slave to the last book you read. Okay? Don't get me wrong, I got a room full of books. I'm a bibliophile. I love books. But you don't want to be trapped by the view of an author. Okay? You don't want to be trapped by his view of things or by their view of things if you read several of them. You need to be trapped by your view of things, right? Your position, your understanding, your perspective, and your viewpoint. And to help us, I would like for us to do something that I'm unaware of commentators doing, but I think it's beneficial. I think it's helpful. And so, I would like for us to take a step back from Luke 23 and verse 55 in order to look at Luke's approach to showing the sequence of events surrounding the burial of the Lord's body. And we can do that if you will if you will go back in your with your eyes to Luke chapter 23 and verse 52.

So as we read verses 52 through verse 56 and we're only going to deal with verse 55 tonight, but I want to point something out to you on the way there. I want to point out that there are considerably more occurrences of the English word and than the word kai in the Greek text which is typically normally routinely and most frequently translated and. Okay. So the translators of the King James version and most even the modern guys that use those that lousy eclectic text will add conjunctions that are not found in the text. But so what I'm going to do is I want to read through the passage and I'm going to notably pause where the Greek kai is found in the original text. And I'm going to do that so that you can see how Luke establishes the principle events of his short timeline. Okay.

So looking at verse 52, this man went unto Pilate and begged the body of Jesus. The word and is not found in the original text in that verse. Verse 53. And there it is. It is found there. And he took it down and wrapped it in linen and laid it in a sepulchre that was hewn in stone, wherein never man before was laid. Verse 54, and that day was the preparation, and the Sabbath drew on. Verse 55. And the women also which came with him from Galilee followed after and beheld the sepulchre. Followed after and beheld the

sepulchre. The and there is not found in the Greek text. Verse 56. And they returned and prepared spices and ointments and rested the Sabbath day according to the commandment.

So Luke likes to break up his sequence of events using this word kai and we lose some of that in the English version because the translators have introduced a bunch of ands that are not found in the original text. So let's look at verse 55. Having read that in verse 55 there's four things to point out.

First, the reader's attention is directed to women who were present on Golgotha to witness the savior's crucifixion. That is a focus that is unique to our scriptures and not hardly ever found in other faith systems such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Shintoism, Islam, etc. Okay. The place of women in the scriptures is unique and it's elevated. All right.

The second thing we notice in verse 55, these were women who came with the Lord from Galilee. Not much attention is paid to this women who followed his entourage during the course of his earthly ministry as he wandered about. And what we have here suggests but does not insist that they followed him throughout his earthly ministry or at least for significant periods of time. You say, "Well, why is it then that there were women who followed him and the evidence is that they were women of means?" In other words, they were women who were married to well-off men and they could afford that. Okay? They could afford to do what most women couldn't do because they had access to finances. But it's not mentioned much in the four gospels. You say, "Why not? Anybody here ever read any military history at all? Okay. Ever heard the phrase camp follower? A camp follower? Anybody know what a camp follower is? Those were the women of ill repute that followed soldiers everywhere.

By the way, General George S. Patton Jr. from San Marino. His camp follower was his sister's daughter who was so despondent over the death of her much older boyfriend that when General Patton died as a result of an automobile accident after World War II, two weeks later she killed herself. There were camp followers in the Revolutionary War. There were camp followers in the Mexican War. There were camp followers all over the place in the Civil War. There were camp followers in World War I. There were camp followers in the Spanish-American War. There were camp followers in World War II. Korea, not so much. A little cold, you know, little nasty. But being a camp follower is so in the New Testament the issue of women who followed a group of men around is dealt with in a very very delicate way so as to leave no one with the opportunity of insinuating these women were camp followers. They were not camp followers. All right? They were disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ who kept appropriate distance who functioned according to all the social mores in operation at that time for women of standing, women of refinement, women of high morality, women of integrity, women of virtue, all that kind of stuff. So those very few times it is mentioned in the New Testament, you kind of have to dig out the likelihood that those women were there because the gospels are not going to pay much attention to it and it's because there is care and concern for the reputation of those women. Okay, that's the reason not much is said about them.

Sadly you don't get much about that in commentaries and but anyway third thing that we find in verse 55 is they followed these women that are referred to in verse 55. They followed these ones who followed the Lord Jesus Christ during his earthly ministry on that grisly day when the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified between two thieves after he died after he gave up the ghost after his body was taken down from the cross. These women followed Joseph of Arimathea and the men who did the lifting for him. Because you remember we talked last time this rich guy born and raised in Arimathea and who wore silk probably he's not going to grab hold of a bloody corpse. He's not going to do that. He had guys there. He probably too old. He would have hurt himself had he tried to do it. But he had guys with him. He was a wealthy man. He had servants. He had guys that would do his lifting for him. Stuff like that. And he and his guys were taking the body of the Lord Jesus Christ from Golgotha to the tomb the sepulchre of Joseph of Arimathea which was very close by. It was in very very close proximity but these women they not participating in that in any way. There was no participation in that effort of getting his body from Golgotha's brow around to the sepulchre.

But they did tag along at a distance and watch what was going on. They were intensely curious about where the body of their Lord was going to be placed. And finally they both we see in verse 55 they both saw the sepulchre and interesting Luke always has these kinds of observations. They paid attention to how his body was laid. Why do you suppose they did that? Does it strike you that this is not an uncommon thing when it comes to women? Or they will watch a guy do something and then they will later improve on what he did because that's what these women are going to do. They watched the placing of the Savior's body in the tomb. And I'm not suggesting that they were displeased with anything that they saw, but it wasn't quite done the way they would have done it. And we'll see evidence of this as we continue.

And so, keep in mind that as Joseph did what he did with his servants, tending to the body and disposing of the body, he did what he did openly. Remember, he had been a secret disciple until this time. And now he comes out. He goes to Pilate publicly pleading for the body of Christ. He's doing this. Everybody sees, everybody observes. He doesn't care. Okay. And so observing him do what he did openly, the women also did what they did openly. Of course, they were open by being there, but they followed and they did so at this time at this point without apparent interaction taking place that Luke at least no interaction that Luke records with his readers. In other words, we have no indication that they spoke to Joseph, that he spoke to them, that they were walking closely behind, that they were conversing with him along the way. No, no, no. We no indication that any of that. I think they kept a discrete distance because they didn't know him. And back in the day that it just was not appropriate for a woman to approach a man she did not know. Okay.

Now, if you would turn to Mark chapter 15, we're going to get there eventually, but not right away. Mark is content to record the names of the two women, both of whom were named Mary. Okay. And by the way, the New Testament Mary is the Old Testament Miriam. So Moses, his older sister Miriam had exactly the same name as the mother of the Lord Jesus Christ and also this woman who was from Magdala. It was so confusing

to Muhammad that he thought that Moses's sister and Mary the mother of Christ lived at the same time although they were separated by more than a thousand years because they had the same name. Okay. So Mark is content to record the names of these two women. The first woman is named is from They call we call her Mary Magdalene, which means she's from Magdala. Magdala is a little village that when you're on oh my goodness, what is the name of the cliff that I love when I when I go to Israel? I love going there. There is a on the west side of the Sea of Galilee, there's a huge monolith way it's a monster rock and it's directly across from where the Gaderene was. Over here is Bethsaida and Capernaum and Chorazin. And right down below, it takes you probably an hour to get there from up here, but all the way down and around is the little village of Magdala, right on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. That's where this woman was from. And the second the second Mary is a woman who had a son named Joseph.

Interesting because we read the Bible and because we read the Bible again and again and again and again because we read the Bible frequently trying to read the Bible through at least once a year. We remember from Matthew 13:55 that the Lord Jesus Christ had at least four half brothers and at least two sisters because the first time he went back to Nazareth after his public ministry commenced and he began working miracles, they got agitated and they insisted that he work a miracle for them and they and he didn't want to. And they got mad at him and were going to try to kill him. But in Matthew chapter 13:55, is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, the carpenter's son, and his brethren James and Joseph and Simon and Judas and his sisters. So Mary had at least seven children. The first one, the virgin-born son first was the Lord Jesus Christ. Then after that, Joseph and Mary were a normal husband and wife, and they had four more sons and they had two daughters.

So, here's the question. Is it possible that this Mary who had a son named Joseph, is it possible that she is the mother of Christ? Or are there two women in Matthew named Mary who both have sons named Joseph? This folks, this might be the Lord's mother. And the reason I say that is because of her the notable lack of emphasis of her reflecting her role in God's plan. She delivered the incarnate second person of the triune Godhead and participated in him being raised along with her husband Joseph. She played other than that no part in God's plan of redemption. She is not a mediatrix. We don't go to her to get her to talk to her son. No, none of that Catholic malarkey. She plays no role in anyone's salvation. She herself was a sinner who needed to be saved. She referred to God as her savior. Only sinners need a savior. She acknowledged herself to be a sinner.

And so if she is Mary who gave birth to the Savior, would that disturb you? It's very understated here because you find nothing in the New Testament that elevates and exalts her the way they do in Roman Catholicism. That is a complete Roman Catholic invention. So other than identifying the women, Mark limits his record to their observation of where the body, the savior's body was buried.

Matthew on the other hand, verse 61, he leaves us with even less than Luke and Mark do. From him we are given Mary Magdalene and the other Mary sitting over against the sepulchre. Oh, they were sitting down next to the tomb. That's all we got. Okay.

So these things being related to us, we see that Luke provides us with additional information in verse 56. So if you would go back to Luke 23:56. And they returned and prepared spices and ointments and rested the Sabbath day according to the commandment. So we know that time is running out. They had to get these bodies off of the crosses before the sunset. And because time was running out, the two women that are named by Matthew and named by Mark, but are not named by Luke, leaving open the possibility that there might have been more than two women there with Matthew mentioning only two and Mark mentioning only two, but there might have been more. There are occasions in which fewer people are named than the number of people that were there. So at any rate because the sun is in the process of setting they returned to their quarters wherever it was they were staying while they were in Jerusalem for the high holy days and they did what little they could do by way of preparing spices and ointments in the time they had left before sundown.

So Joseph had his spices and ointments there that were wrapped and they apparently as they're going back to where they're going to spend the night, they pick up some spices and ointments along the way because maybe there's a guy's way of doing it and then there's a gal's way of doing it. And if Joseph of Arimathea was finished, these women were not finished. Okay. And of course they rested the Sabbath day according to the commandment. Once the sun set they did nothing. Right.

So with Friday concluded at sundown and the new day beginning Matthew's account provides details of what happened on the next day. And this is verses 62-66 of Matthew chapter 27. So go back to Matthew 27 and we'll take up verse 62. Now the next day that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate.

So the phrase the day of the preparation was the common Jewish reference for Friday. You say Friday, I say Friday. The Jews would not say Friday. They had a name for it, but they would call it the day of preparation. Why? Because it's the day that comes before the Sabbath. In other words, on Friday, you get ready for Saturday. Okay? Very common reference as the day before the weekly Sabbath. That's their way of saying Friday. Okay? That that's all it means. It means nothing more than that.

Interesting to note here, however, is that the Pharisees who seem to have had nothing to do with the Lord Jesus Christ's crucifixion, the trials, the standing before Pilate, chief priests, no Pharisees. So, they didn't have anything to do with the Lord's crucifixion and have not been mentioned together by Matthew since way back in Matthew chapter 21. So, they're just missing from Matthew 21:45 all the way up to now. But they are now together in an audience with Pilate on Saturday morning at his judgment hall. Saying, "Well, why would they do that?"

Because there was a very very obvious hostility between the Herodians, the Sadducees who most of the priesthood were Sadducees and the Pharisees. These three clearly identifiable groups did not like each other at all. Okay. So what is it what's happening with the chief priests there and the Pharisees there? And I think the operative contemporary way of explaining those two groups being there is the phrase my enemy's enemy is my friend. My enemy's enemy is my friend. It's what Bill Clinton used to call triangulation. He always tried to set it up so that he was one of three loci of activity. And he wanted to play these two against each other where he could be friendly with this group and friendly with this group so that these two would hate each other.

By the way, that's what Nixon was doing when he went to China, the United States and then China and Russia and he wanted to make sure that China and Russia were not good buddies so that the United States would be friends with China and at the same time we could be more friendly with Russia while doing what we could behind the scenes and behind the curtain to make sure that they were not good friends and so that kind of thing has always been operative among the pragmatic and the political and that seems to have been the operative principle with the two groups, their enemy of course being the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Pharisees were against the Savior. The Herodians were against the Savior. The Sadducees, the chief priests, they were against the Savior. And so when it was convenient for them to oppose the Savior, they would at least temporarily ally with each other in opposition to Christ and his cause.

Now look at verse 63. Saying, "Sir, we remember that that deceiver said while he was yet alive, after three days I will rise again." Now, you have to have a pen to mark your Bible because you need to mark your Bible. Do you see the word sir in verse 63? It translates the Greek kurios. Kurios is the common Greek word for Lord. The vast majority of time in the New Testament that word is translated Lord, not sir. Okay? These Pharisees and these chief priests, their Lord was certainly not the Lord Jesus Christ. Their Lord, at least at that time, their Lord, who they acknowledge to be their Lord by calling him sir, using the word kurios, is the governor of Imperial Rome. How very telling.

Notice how they refer to the one who said not too many hours before who said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the father but by me." Of course, they hadn't heard him say that, but he still said that. Notice how they refer to him. Those deceivers called him deceiver. And so it is with wicked men and women. Haven't you noticed? Haven't you observed? Perhaps in your own life. Unfortunately, we see it in the political realm all the time so frequently calling others what they are, accusing you of what they do. And psychologists and there's not very much about psychology that I approve of or like but there are some uses some very legitimate uses of psychology but psychologists will call it projection. It's attributing to others your characteristics. Oh, he's a dictator. He's a dictator. He's a dictator. But a couple of years ago, it was you that were requiring people to get vaccinations under threat of termination from your job. So who's the real dictator calling this person a dictator when actually you're the one who

was acting like a dictator? So this kind of projection we see all the way back and it's a very common characteristic in lost people.

And finally in this verse, they reveal what they are most afraid of, don't they? If you listen carefully and if you listen long enough, people will usually tell you the truth without really wanting to sometimes. And what these guys are really afraid of is they are afraid of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. That's the worst for them. Christ's resurrection is the worst thing for the lost. Why? If you are an unsaved person, the worst possible thing that could ever happen in your future is the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Because his resurrection from the dead means you are doomed and you are damned. And it's only a matter of time because it means he was right. He was who he said he was. He is who he said he is and he left and someday he's coming back again.

So verse 64, this is what they wanted from Pontius Pilate. They said, "Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night and steal him away and say unto the people, he is risen from the dead. So the last error shall be worse than the first." Notice what the chief priests and Pharisees wanted from Pontius Pilate. Isn't it interesting how they really don't want this Roman to interfere until they want him to interfere? They want him to leave them alone until they don't want him to leave them alone. They pleaded for Roman intervention. These people who despised Roman intervention, they wanted Roman intervention to guarantee the security of the contents of Joseph of Arimathea's sepulchre.

They were afraid that the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, who had only demonstrated cowardice over the last 24 hours, but they were afraid the disciples would boldly steal the corpse to pretend he had risen from the dead. It never crossing their mind that this miracle worker who had raised others from the dead, Lazarus in their backyard, they saw him raised from the dead. They were there and they were afraid that they were afraid that the body might be stolen. And it never crossed their mind that he might actually be who he said he was. This miracle worker that they could never actually, oh, he's evil. He's evil. He's evil. Name one thing he's done wrong. Name one thing he's done wrong. We don't like him. Because he was going to upset the apple cart of their smooth running operation that they had going on, their religious operation going on in Jerusalem.

Verse 65, Pilate said unto them, "Ye have a watch. Go your way. Make it as sure as you can." The Greek for watch settles the dispute among some about the tomb guards being Jewish or Roman. Some people, well, I think they were Jewish guards. No, I think they were Roman guards. No. Actually, this is pretty well settled. Is the Greek word translated watch. It is only and always refers to Roman soldiers. It is never used to refer to Jewish temple guards or Jewish fighters. It's always refers to Roman soldiers. And so that lets us know that the ones who were guarding the tomb were without any doubt at all. They were Romans who were sent to guard that tomb.

And how along with Roman guards whose failure would mean their deaths, you can't bribe Roman guards. Why? Because the penalty for a Roman guard to lose what he was guarding was death. How much money can I give you to let me have that body?

You knowing that tomorrow you're going to die for it. No amount of money. Because you know that tomorrow you're going to die for it. The centurion is going to walk over there and he's going to see, okay, where's the body? Well, and he's going to stick them and they're going to die. So that makes you unbribeable. Okay. Not capable of accepting a bribe.

So that's step number one in making sure the contents of the tomb were as secure as humanly possible because they were told to secure the tomb was to be secured as sure as you can. So you got the guards there, but that's not all you have. The stone over the entrance to the sepulchre would be sealed with wax or perhaps clay where the stone and the tomb. Let's say this is the hole and the stone comes up and there's a gap where the stone is in front of the tomb. Somewhere there they would put a wax seal or a clay seal with an imprint clearly identifying it as Roman and that would prevent any opening without telltale evidence of tampering and it would be bad news if the Romans came back and that thing was cracked meaning that it had been tampered with there would be a full-scale investigation you violate a Roman seal and it would be your death if you were caught.

So, it's hard to imagine the tomb being more safe and secure from body snatchers. And then in verse 66, so they went and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone and setting a watch. In other words, they sealed the stone so it wouldn't be moved. They had the guards put in place.

So, think about this. At the insistence of the chief priests and Pharisees, and it was the Jews who insisted on it. They were the ones clamoring for this. The Roman governor authorized two measures to provide as much guarantee of the security of the contents of Joseph's tomb as you can imagine. There is the Roman seal and then there are the Roman soldiers with authority to kill. They weren't like our National Guard. You know, the United States, we never give our National Guard bullets. Did you know around the world at every embassy in the world where there is a US embassy, there are United States Marine Corps guards guarding those embassies. There's a special detachment of Marines at every embassy. They're never given bullets. Did you know that they're never given bullets? All they could do is point and go. That's all they could do, right? Unlike the Romans, they had standing orders. They could kill anybody who messed with them. They could kill anybody who messed with them.

And so, and they were under threat of losing their lives should they lose their charge, should they fail to protect the contents. So, pretty safe, pretty secure, humanly speaking. So this is what we have. At this point in our study of the life and the lessons of the Lord Jesus Christ, we have the virgin birth. We have the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have the crucifixion of Christ. And we have the burial of the Savior's body along with a guarantee that nobody is going to steal the body. Okay.

It seems like a very bad time for the unfolding drama of redemption. But God's not done yet, is he? God's not done yet. Lord willing, next Wednesday night, we begin looking at the events related to the resurrection of Christ.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for your goodness. Oh, what a wonderful story, this old, old story. I pray that we might be encouraged. I pray that we might be informed. I pray that we might be challenged, that we might be committed to complying with your will for our lives, that we might live for you, love you, and serve you effectively. That we might seek the salvation of the lost around us whose eternal situation is dire and they do not realize it. Bless we pray in Jesus name. Amen. Does anybody have a question about the verses that we looked at this?