

When Life Was Buried Mark 15:42-47

There's a kind of discomfort in being displaced. And maybe I am talking a bit about both physical and relational displacement. Any of you ever walked into a room and immediately thought to yourself, "*Umm...I don't belong here.*" Perhaps it was the wrong classroom, or building, or gathering. Perhaps you wore the dress and everyone else wore jeans and tee shirts. Perhaps it was a conversation where a language unknown to your ears was dominating the air, or maybe even a conversation in English, but because of the subject, it was still all *Greek* to you.¹ Maybe it was a setting where the standards and beliefs felt slightly off; not enough to jump ship immediately, but the discomfort was enough that you decided to leave earlier than anticipated. Think Tolkien's Bilbo Baggins and the invasion of the dwarfs into his own hillside home. Bilbo was beside himself because these kingdom-less dwarf lords made themselves comfortable in his peaceful, non-combative hole in the ground.² He was in the right place with the wrong people, which made him feel as if he was in the wrong place. That feeling may not have an exact name, but if you've lived a while, you know it experientially.

Scripture itself introduces us to people who knew this uneasiness at some point in their lives. A young boy framed by his brothers, sold into a caravan of foreigners and imprisoned in a strange land. A deliverer raised in an Egyptian kingdom, away from his true *homeland*. A queen who wore a Persian crown, yet belonged to another people chosen and loved by the King of Ages. A man in Babylon who learned their wisdom but would not eat their food or bow to their gods. A prophet seeking to bypass God's command to spread mercy, finds himself inside the abdomen of a great fish. And none of these people chose to wind up where they did.

But would not Joseph, Moses, Esther, Daniel, and Jonah testify of the LORD who displaced them so that many might be stunned by His wisdom, power, justice, and grace? And could all those accounts be breadcrumbs of a providence leading the believing reader of scripture to a grander conclusion?³ Could the grave of the most important Life to ever to draw breath be the intended destination?

Today, we discover in Mark 15 that evil marksmen have "succeeded" in their desires to be rid of Jesus. The Author, Giver, and Fountainhead of life—life abundant, free, and eternal—He is lain crushed, cold, and seemingly conquered in an unused grave. Is this the detour *du jour*? And what of these evil acts against the innocent Son of God avalanching in the most demonstrative way? Is the LORD leading? Is He reigning? Is *a tomb* truly a key stratagem in the defeat God's and our most lethal enemies?

I. Jesus was buried

Mark has set out to give us the details of what happened immediately after Jesus' death. Beginning in verse 42, we're brought to a mid-to-late afternoon on a Friday. It was the *day of Preparation*. This was a day to ready one's self and the whole family for the Sabbath. It included tasks such as cooking, cleaning, organizing, and even relational preparations such as reconciling with someone

¹ Car engine lingo. Consider me clueless in those conversations, even if I'm shaking my head in a way that conveys surety or knowledge.

² J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 12-14.

³ Imagery drawn from last week's exposition by Pastor Matt, <https://southwoodsbc.org/media/3sszh5n/exodus-13-17-14-14-stand-by-and-see-salvation>

over a dispute. The Jewish people used the daylight of Friday to accomplish these tasks because, beginning at sundown, the Passover Sabbath officially began. So, Mark is speaking to the urgency here involved in making sure the body of Jesus is prepared for burial. With the Sabbath regulations, according to Deuteronomy 21:23 all criminals who were hung “*on a tree*” had to be buried the same day. So, considering both the Sabbath and Jesus’ status under the law of Moses as a condemned law-breaker, haste was necessary.⁴

In verse 43 we’re introduced to someone for the very first time in scripture—*Joseph of Arimathea*. He undoubtedly understood the haste required here. We’re told that he is *a respected member of the council*. This refers to the Jewish Sanhedrin, the religious leader’s association out of which sprung many of Jesus’ fiercest enemies and critics. But Luke tells us that Joseph was not one of them. In fact, Mark states some very positive remarks about him. First, he wrote that Joseph was *himself looking for the kingdom of God*. This likely conveys, along with the testimony of Matthew and Luke, that Joseph was indeed a follower of Jesus. I’m not totally convinced that viewing Joseph as someone who has well-developed spiritual muscles and maturity is the best way to understand him, at least based on all the information we’ve been given about him by all the Gospel writers. Taking John’s testimony, we can safely assume that Joseph wrestled with exactly what bowing to Jesus meant for his own life as a public, religious figure.⁵

Maybe on some level all believers can understand the struggle of Joseph. Coming to the point of crowning Jesus as King by faith, the expectation that everything would and should remain as status quo might be hard to shake off. Faith in Christ is a journey of thuds and twists. To draw from the imagery in our text, many idols buried inside of old habits, desires, and motivations must come to die under this King’s reign. Trusting in Jesus and having Him reigning in our hearts fundamentally changes our nature, our relationships, and the very course of our lives. With those changes, however, some sorrows stick around, and some changes aren’t necessarily for the better. One wonders if Joseph’s *respected member* status on the Sanhedrin board continued.

Maybe not, considering what happens next. Joseph *took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus*. It was not all that uncommon for pious Jews to bury criminals, even those who served in places of religious leadership.⁶ To practice that was not a matter of courage, but one of extraordinary compassion and mercy. And that was partly so because the person who performed or provided for the one buried could not be thanked by the deceased.⁷ But to request the body and bury someone who was a well-known enemy of the state? That surely required mettle and bravery. Speaking of mettle, or a lack of it, the juxtaposition of Joseph attending to the burial particulars of Jesus and not one of His Twelve disciples is almost shocking.⁸ Claiming bold allegiance and proving it, especially when the chips are down, can exist at a great distance from one another.⁹

But this courage was also attended by compassion and sacrifice on Joseph’s part. Verse 46 tells us that *Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him...and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock*. He used his own resources to bury our Lord. There was no cost too great. John 19:39 says that Nicodemus, another religious leader deeply moved by the glory and

⁴ Eckhard Schnabel, *TNTC: Mark*, 427.

⁵ I say the latter because John’s gospel expresses that Joseph is a secret disciple of Jesus because he feared what others might think or do.

⁶ Schnabel, 428.

⁷ Michael Card, *Mark: The Gospel of Passion*, 186.

⁸ Charles Quarles, *EBTC: Matthew*, 742.

⁹ Matthew 26:35, “Peter said to [Jesus], ‘Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!’ And all the disciples said the same.”

teachings of Christ, helped with pricey burial supplies. And Jesus, never missing a moment, foretells this very burial through the act of a repentant woman back in Mark 14. “*She has anointed my body beforehand for burial,*” he explains. The expensive ointment poured over His head by her was by no means a waste. It conveyed her genuine love, but more importantly, it foreshadowed His unrivaled love through sacrifice on a cross. Jesus, dying in shame, was buried out of honor. His heavenly Father was surely tending to the who and what of His interment.

II. Jesus was buried, *truly*

We’re not told anything else of this Arimathean man after the kind and courageous act is performed for the “corpse” of Jesus. That’s the word Mark uses of Jesus’ body.¹⁰ It was a definite word of witness by the apostle. Jesus is buried because Jesus is genuinely dead.

Verse 47 offers up two other people whose names are not incidental. ***Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where [Jesus] was laid.*** This first Mary was a woman from Magdala, a town on the Sea of Galilee. You may recall in Luke 8 that she was delivered by Jesus from seven demons.¹¹ Perhaps we would shadow His every move too if that were us. She and this other ***Mary, the mother of Joses,*** are both present at the crucifixion, seen in the verses preceding our text today. And here they are within seeing distance of the burial site, genuine witnesses to Jesus being placed into the tomb. And Mark documents their names.

But why? Why do Mark and the other Gospels highlight these women? Because they strengthen the collective testimony of the church. Jesus wasn’t kidnapped. He didn’t just swoon into a comatose state only to wake up later. He passed into lifelessness. He tasted death.¹² If early Christians fabricated Jesus’ death, which comes up every Easter weekend by some naysayer’s documentary or historical journal with “new” information, then they would have been fools to use the testimony of women. Why? Because in Jewish thought the testimony of men was the most reasonable way to establish the veracity of remarkable claims. That Mark mentions these women dignifies them and their witness while also simply not trying to manipulate the facts. They were there. They saw it. Then they bore witness to it.

Part of its significance lies in the fact that all four Gospel writers documented this burial, a significance which has never faded. It was and remains no minor detail in the faith once for all delivered to the saints. The apostle Paul thought it so crucial, that he was led by the Spirit to pen these words to the church at Corinth, “*For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, [4] that he was buried...*”¹³ This was a matter of supreme importance. It is grounded in the true event that Jesus died, and that for our countless sins. It is tethered to the sacred root of scripture, foretold by the prophets.¹⁴ And this burial functions as a bridge from Christ’s death to the keystone event which integrates the whole of our faith.¹⁵ We’ll be considering that keystone truth right here in about 40 hours.

¹⁰ Edwards, 489.

¹¹ Luke 8:2

¹² Hebrews 2:9

¹³ 1 Corinthians 15:3–4

¹⁴ Isaiah 53:9 is the most on the nose. Jonah’s three days inside the sea creature seems to be a shadow of this burial as well according to Matthew 12:39-40.

¹⁵ David Garland, *ECNT: 1 Corinthians*, 683.

Jesus died, truly. And thus, He was truly buried. It's an immovable cog in the gospel itself. We believe it, proclaim it, and celebrate its significance.

III. Jesus, who was truly buried

Now, if you were to do a simple textual analysis of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, based on the things they wrote and emphasized, you'd find some marked differences. One way Mark stands out regarding the crucifixion account is that he excludes several details found in the other Gospels. Unlike Luke, Mark doesn't include the promise of paradise Jesus made to the repentant thief. Unlike John, Mark fails to include Jesus' cry of victory that the work of redemption is finished. And unlike John again, Mark leaves out Jesus telling John to care for His mother when He's gone. Mark's chief focus, it could be argued, is on the gloom and despair of the One who has lost His life.¹⁶ He is the righteous One suffering without cause, the very fulfillment of Psalm 22.¹⁷ Death knocked, and Jesus answered.

The whole scene, if you are hearing it for the first time or the thousandth time, is startling. Not only because you might conclude, "What exactly did He do to deserve this cruelty?" Or that you enter into the story and feel the injustices moving freely about, even sinister forces if we're seeing with clear eyes. But let's consider it again: Jesus Christ, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, is delivered over to be crucified.¹⁸ This crucifixion is supplemented by a chorus of mocking from soldiers, commoners, religious leaders, and a cynical thief. Creation itself preaches the Sovereign's involvement. The sky darkens. The veil of the temple is ripped in half by hands unseen from top to bottom. The very ground begins to quake. The body of Mary's son is becoming unsustainable for life. Jesus' heartbeat quickens, attempting to keep up with the loss of blood. And then the lifeblood of the greatest Man stops coursing through His veins.

How was it true, then, according to John 1:4, "*In him was life, and the life was the light of men.*"? How could John 5:26 be accurate? "*For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.*"

For any staring at this closed tomb, were the words of Jesus, "*I am the resurrection and the life,*" likened to a limp hand shake? Words which once rang deep and true, verified by a live subject bound in grave clothes, now ringing hollow through the hollows of the Judean hillside? Did He really collude months prior to perform some cheap trick with Lazarus and His disciples, a smooth charlatan who in reality never possessed the ability to overturn death?

The miracles of power—walking on water, healing the sick, multiplying food for the hungry, directing schools of fish to school His disciples—what do they now mean looking upon this morbid Marvel?

The message of grace through story, of greatness through serving, and of glory through suffering—might these rich themes fall into Jewish lore instead of igniting hearts for ages to come?

Does this wielder of the miraculous and the Teacher brimming with unheard-of wisdom belong in this place, in the earth, dead as a doornail, like the millions who had gone before Him?

Is He like them, or is He not?

Conclusion

¹⁶ Mark Strauss, *ECNT: Mark*, 701-702.

¹⁷ James Edwards, *PNTC: The Gospel According to Mark*, 476.

¹⁸ Hebrews 7:26

If we're honest, we'd admit likeness to one another by expressing that we've had the same uneasy feelings; we've asked the question deep down, "Why does it feel like I don't actually quite belong anywhere?"? And what if the answer to that question is resolved, not in understanding proximity, or platitudes, or empty, earth-oriented promises, but resolved in a Person? No more wandering, no great quests needed to discover who I am and where I belong *because of this buried Man*.

He knew displacement, and that on a level we'll never fully grasp. From an eternity of spiritual beauty and perfection, He is born into the world He made surrounded by the ugly and the unholy. But unlike us in so many ways, He embraced an obscure tomb because it was the plan, *predetermined* writes Peter in Acts 2.¹⁹ He loved doing the will of the Father more than what it would cost Him to do that will. But He also loved what His death and burial signified. Life Himself embraced this displacement of death so that the fearful lost might experience home, the lonely estranged might belong, the long-imprisoned might be freed, the guilty sinner might be forgiven, the spiritually dead might have life, and the list goes on. This tomb was the strategy for those opulent blessings to be poured out on your head!

Rising from the soil of this buried Person...joys inexpressible, providences inexplicable, and rewards immeasurable. And that is true because Jesus' dead body will not lie dormant for very long. In fact, on Sunday we'll peek inside an ancient tomb of water with the threat of death walled beside and rumbling behind. It looked bleak there, and it looked bleak here in Mark. The end of verse 46, ***And [Joseph] rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.*** I trust it will be a joy to stand by and see the salvation of our God this coming Lord's Day!

¹⁹ Acts 2:23, "This Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death."

