

MBC - 12/2/2018 - Pastor Doug Thompson
“The Amazing Burial of Jesus”
 Matthew 27:55-66

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Gospel of Matthew, ch.27, and v.55. Jesus has breathed His last. No one took His life from Him, but He laid it down of His own accord, when He was ready, and when His task on this earth was finished. No one looking on this dark, horrible scene with 3 broken, bloody corpses hanging on crosses, would know it - but Jesus Christ has just redeemed, by His death, “a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages.” Let’s read what happens next—

- Matthew 27:55-66 ⁵⁵There were also many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, ⁵⁶among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. ⁵⁷When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. ⁵⁸He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. ⁵⁹And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud ⁶⁰and 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. ⁶¹Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb. ⁶²The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate ⁶³and said, “Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise.’ ⁶⁴Therefore 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.” ⁶⁵Pilate said to them, “You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can.” ⁶⁶So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.

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I. The significance of Jesus’ burial.

We celebrate the birth of Jesus on Christmas, His death on Good Friday, and His resurrection on Easter Sunday - but we don’t do “Awesome Saturday!” We don’t do anything to acknowledge His burial. The passage we just read might seem like it’s just filler, waiting for the next big event, Jesus’ resurrection. But I want to show you this morning that Jesus’ burial is very significant. We just recited it in the Nicene Creed: “He suffered and was buried.” The Scriptures mention Jesus’ burial often. Paul said that it is part and parcel of the Gospel message—

- 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 ³For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴that he was *buried*, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.

And when Peter preached the very first Easter sermon on Pentecost, he didn’t just preach Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection, but he made a major point that Jesus was buried, but while in the tomb, He didn’t suffer any decomposition because that’s what the Scriptures predicted!—

- Acts 2:25-31 ²⁵For David says concerning him, “‘I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; ²⁶therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. ²⁷For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. ²⁸You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’ ²⁹“Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was

buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, ³¹he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.”

That is *supernatural* - God kept His Son from any decomposition, just as the Scriptures predicted. Let me say this: I believe that after Jesus died, His humiliation ended. He finished His earthly course, and God said, “No more dishonor for My Son!” And we’ll see that again in just a minute.

And there is also a theological significance to Jesus’ burial - it is a God-ordained picture of what happens when a person is born again—

- Romans 6:3-4 ³Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We 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.

Paul says that your baptism is a picture of your union with Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection: you died with Him, were buried with Him, and you have risen with Him to newness of life!

- When I put a person down under the water, it says, “This person died and that old person was buried with Jesus.” And when I bring them up it says, “And he or she has been raised up with Jesus, old things have passed away, behold, new things have come!”

Jesus’ burial is why we baptize by immersion, not sprinkling - and it’s also why we only baptize believers, not little babies because we it’s only by faith that we die to our sins in Christ, and are buried with Him, and raised up with Him. Little babies don’t have faith, so they can’t die with Christ. Spurgeon must have offended a whole lot of paedo-baptists when he said that baptizing a baby is like burying a person alive!

And there is an *apologetic* importance to Jesus’ burial. I.e., it’s an important part of our defense of the faith. Let me explain what I mean—

- Satan basically has two lies against the resurrection: The first one says that if Jesus really did die on the cross, then He didn’t rise from the dead. But the second says that if Jesus *did* come out of the tomb, He was never really dead to begin with. This is what many Muslims believe—

*Years ago, I was on a long flight, on my way to Romania, and I was seated next to a Muslim business man from Kuwait. He saw me reading my Bible, so we started discussing the differences between the Bible and the Koran. He was insisting to me that his Islam was the most important thing in his life - while he kept ordering drinks from the stewardess! He said “I hope Allah will forgive me!”

The more he drank, the more *animated* our discussion became. A man from India who was a teacher of Hare Krishna came down the aisle, and this Muslim grabbed him and told him to join in! So I turned in my Bible to Jn.14:6, and I had both of these men look at the passage while I read it: “*Jesus said, I am the Way, and the truth, and the Life, no man comes to the Father except through Me.*” I said, “Jesus claimed to be God in human flesh, and the only way to know God and have eternal life. And He proved that by dying

on the cross and rising from the dead after three days--what do you say about Jesus Christ?"

The guru just got quiet, but the Muslim said: "I know that story, but your Bible is wrong! According to the Koran, Jesus didn't die on the cross!"

The Koran teaches that God would never humiliate the prophet Isa like that, so some interpret that to mean that God took Him to heaven without dying, other Muslim scholars believe that the Romans accidentally crucified someone else, and people just *thought* it was Jesus - some say it was really Judas, or Simon of Cyrene - the guy who carried Jesus cross.

- But another popular Islamic theory says that Jesus was really crucified, but He never died. He just *fainted* on the cross, and in the coolness of the tomb, He revived! This is called the Swoon Theory—
- So after being tortured almost to death, undergoing crucifixion, He fooled all the Roman executioners, who were *experts* on when a person was dead—
- Remember that John's Gospel tells us the soldiers ran a spear into Jesus' side just to make *sure* He was dead, and the clotted blood and water that came out was medical proof of death - even back then!) But against all odds, and after lying in a cold tomb for 3 days—He got better!--and then He single-handedly rolled away a massive boulder, overpowered a fierce squad of Roman soldiers, and *lied* convincingly to His disciples for the next 40 days that He was the Lord of Glory! Yeah, that makes sense.

What is the answer? Jesus really died, and was *buried* - put in a tomb from which no one could get in, and no one could get out - except through a supernatural resurrection. And we need to remember that Jesus predicted His *burial* in this same Gospel—

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

And that is exactly what happened! To the Jews, any part of a day was part of a whole day: Jesus was crucified on Friday, in the tomb all day Saturday, and rose early on Sunday - 3 days.

II. The many women who were there.

I don't want us to roll right past vv.55,66. The Holy Spirit moved Matthew to record the names of these faithful women who witnessed Jesus' death, His burial, and two of them were the first to see the empty tomb, proving Jesus' resurrection. The men are gone. These women stayed—

- ⁵⁵There were also *many women* there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, *ministering* to him.

These were disciples of Jesus, faithful followers who had come with Him all the way from Galilee. They were a travelling support group - ministering - the verb form of the word for "*deacon*" - they constantly served Jesus and the Twelve: "Peter, put on your tunic, you're going to catch a cold. Jesus, You're not drinking enough water - Yes, we know You are the Living Water, don't argue, just do it!" And I'm sure they cooked and did many other things to keep these men on the road. Listen to what Luke says about these "many" women—

- LUK 8:1-3 . . . He began going around from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God. The twelve were with Him, and also some *women* who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward (that's a very important position!), and Susanna, and *many others* who were contributing to their support out of their private means.

Female disciples who were the primary support for Jesus' ministry out of their own pocket-books. Not men, but women! And this means that these industrious ladies also had the spiritual insight to see the value of investing in Jesus and His ministry. Humanly speaking, Jesus couldn't have had the ministry He had without the support of these faithful women.

Matthew mentions **Mary Magdalene** first. Jesus had cast 7 demons out of her, and she never left His side after that. Then he mentions **Mary**, the mother of James and Joseph - and I believe that is Jesus' own mother, Mary. John mentions another Mary, the wife of Clopas - who was one of those Jesus spoke to on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection. And Matthew calls one of these women, **the mother of the sons of Zebedee (James and John)**. Mark tells us her name - **Salome**. And then John's account says that this woman was **the sister of Jesus' mother, Mary**.

So let me put this together: Salome was the mother of the sons of thunder, John and James, and was Mary's sister, which means that the Apostles, John and James, were Jesus' first cousins, and Salome, was Jesus' aunt!

- Now let that sink in: Jesus had an extended family. It's likely that Jesus grew up with James and John, and then you throw in John the Baptist, who was also a more distant cousin. Families were very close in those days, so they must have spent time together. You can picture Jesus, James and John, and little John the Baptist all playing together while Mary, Elizabeth, and Auntie Salome are talking together and knitting, watching the kids. Elizabeth says to her son, "John, Jesus does *not* have to repent - and please stop eating the grasshoppers!"

Never forget that Jesus had many godly, believing women who followed Him in life and death. And He loved them, and they are highly honored in the Scriptures.

III. "With a rich man in His death."

And Jesus had another faithful friend at His death, a man named Joseph. Turn with me to John's Gospel for more detail—

- John 19:38-42 ³⁸After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body. ³⁹*Nicodemus also*, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. ⁴⁰So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. ⁴¹Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. ⁴²So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.

Again, we're asking, "Where are the Jesus' Disciples? The Eleven?" They won't even come to bury their Master? After a crucifixion, the bodies weren't generally buried, they were just left hanging on the cross to decompose and be eaten by birds. Were they so afraid that they were

going to let that happen to Jesus? Even John the Baptist's disciples came and buried his headless body after Herod had him executed. Jesus' forerunner got better treatment from his disciples than Jesus did from his.

But God isn't going to let His Son suffer any more humiliation - that is finished! Matthew tells us that a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph, wanted to honor Jesus in His death. And he was a follower of Jesus. Now that's important: Earlier in Matthew's Gospel, a rich, young ruler approached Jesus asking about eternal life, and Jesus sent him away because he wouldn't put Jesus ahead of his stuff. And Jesus said, "It's easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to get into heaven!" The disciples said, "Then who can be saved?" Do you remember Jesus' answer? "With man, it's impossible, but with God all things are possible!"

But here at the cross is a rich man, and he is a follower of Jesus Christ! So God did the impossible. That's good news for rich people. And rich people are good news for the church! But notice that he put his riches to work in burying Jesus.

Mark and Luke tell us that he was a member of the Sanhedrin - the same group that plotted Jesus' murder! So no wonder He was a secret disciple, but what Joseph did here was very brave: He was showing kindness and honor to a man who had been condemned by the Sanhedrin as a blasphemer. He was including Jesus in his own family's burial plot - that is a high honor! But John tells us something fascinating: Joseph had a friend, another member of the Sanhedrin, who was also a secret follower of Jesus, *Nicodemus*, who helped him with Jesus' body. Jesus had told him, "You must be born again!" And he was!

- Matthew says that Joseph wrapped Jesus in a clean linen shroud, but this wasn't a one-piece sheet like the shroud of Turin - which is a fake, by the way. The way they prepared Jesus' body was by taking strips of expensive linen cloth and smearing them with a gummy resin made out of spices, and then wrapping the body with these strips. Someone said that was probably the nicest clothing Jesus ever wore!
- And this was about 70 pounds of spices that they used—that's a lot of spices and cloth! It was similar to the way the Egyptians mummified their bodies, except the Jews didn't remove the internal organs, and the body quickly decomposed. (Remember when Lazarus had been dead for four days, Martha told Jesus that he would be smelling pretty ripe.) But I want you to get the picture here: Jesus is wrapped up like a mummy in almost 75 pounds of cloth and spices that are practically glued to His body. This is very important to understand what happens on Sunday - we'll see that next Lord's Day.

John says that Jesus was laid in a new tomb in which no one had been laid. Janice and I have been in the Garden tomb in Jerusalem and seen the spot where many believe Jesus was laid—wow!

- This was a new tomb: The Jews didn't just use a tomb for one body. The tombs where bodies were laid were just temporary resting places. A tomb was called a "*sarcophagus*," which comes from two Gk. words which mean: to eat the flesh. You see, after about a year, the flesh would decompose leaving only the bones, and the family would then remove the bones from the sarcophagus, and put them into a smaller box called an "*ossuary*." This was done partly to save space, but the sarcophagus could be used over and over again.

So here is what happened: Joseph appealed to Pilate for Jesus' body. If he hadn't done that, if Jesus was buried at all, He would have just been thrown into a mass grave with other exe-

cuted criminals, but instead, wealthy Joseph intervened and put Jesus in his own new tomb. And this is exactly what Isaiah prophesied 700 years before it happened—

- Isaiah 53:9 ⁹And they made his grave with the wicked (that was the plan, but) and with a rich man in his death.

v.60 says that he rolled a great stone - a massive stone, meant to keep out animals or anyone who would want to tamper with the body - over the entrance of the tomb and went away. But notice who *stays* right there—

- Matthew 27:61 ⁶¹Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (Jesus' mother) were there, sitting opposite the tomb. (facing the tomb)

Faithful women. And beloved, this passage is in the Scriptures for a reason: one of the other silly theories put forth to disprove Jesus' resurrection, is that the women went to the wrong tomb on Easter morning! Mapquest was wrong again. No - they were right there, they knew exactly where Joseph put Jesus' body - and when they went back on Easter morning, that massive stone had been rolled away to reveal that Jesus was risen!

So I want you to see how God is orchestrating here, the very evidence that will vindicate the factual historicity of Jesus' resurrection. We have credible witnesses to His death - yes, He really died; *and* to His burial - eyewitnesses to the tomb in which He was laid. But the ones who did the most to lend the greatest proof of Jesus' resurrection, were the chief priests and the Pharisees!

All of the steps that they took to make absolutely sure that no one *could* tamper with Jesus' tomb, became the evidence that no one *did* tamper with Jesus' tomb - and yet when the stone was rolled away, Jesus was gone! So unwittingly, they proved that God supernaturally raised up His Son.

IV. The precautions that provided the proof of the resurrection.

- Matthew 27:62-64 ⁶²The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, (so this is Saturday, the Sabbath) the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate ⁶³and said, "Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.'⁶⁴Therefore 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."

Isn't it interesting that Jesus' enemies took His words about rising from the dead more seriously than His friends? And it's so ironic that God used the mouths of these evil men to make the very first proclamation of Jesus' resurrection in v.64: "*He has risen from the dead!*" Well thank you, chief priests and Pharisees! He is risen!

Now of course the whole idea that the disciples would steal Jesus' body is ridiculous. First of all, they were scattered and scared out of their wits. Second, the Scriptures are clear that they didn't understand or expect that Jesus was going to be resurrected. Third, it is ludicrous that they would steal Jesus body and then lie about His resurrection to start a religious movement for which they would lay down their lives!

- Matthew 27:65-66 ⁶⁵Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can."⁶⁶So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.

Now you need to know that this stone was massive: a second century manuscript of Mark 16:4 was discovered, and a scribe had written a note in the margin that said, “a stone which 20 men could not roll away!” It was like a stone wagon wheel, and it was rolled down across the mouth of the tomb. And if that wasn’t enough - the roman soldiers sealed it—

The seal was just a couple of leather straps across the stone, and held in place with sealing wax - anyone could break this seal - but it was stamped with the stamp of the emperor! To mess with this seal was to mess with all the authority of Rome!

Now get the picture here: A Roman guard made up of 4 soldiers were guarding Jesus’ tomb: a massive stone, sealed with the official seal of the Roman Empire over it. Those Roman soldiers were the toughest soldiers ever to walk the earth, and to tamper with that wax and leather seal of the Roman Empire was to seal your death sentence. That tomb was as secure as anything in that day could be. Could the guards haven fallen asleep? The penalty for sleeping on watch or allowing a prisoner to escape was death. That actually happened to the soldiers who were guarding Peter in Acts 12. They were all executed. There was no way those soldiers were going to let anybody mess with that tomb.

But they didn’t count on an angel!

The more they did to prevent anything or anyone from messing with Jesus’ body, the more they were providing iron-clad evidence of Jesus resurrection! No one could and no one did get to Jesus’ body - God raised Him from the dead!

Oh, we should tremble at a sovereign God who controls an infinite number of circumstances and details, from the weather, to the wills of men, to do exactly what He wants to do - and not only that, He tells us in detail what He is going to do hundreds of years before He does it! *“He works all things according to the counsel of His will!”*

And if you trust in His crucified, buried, and risen Son, He is applying this same sovereignty over every detail of your life! Think about that. All things, every trial, every tear, is working for your good - and one day, if Christ tarries, you will die, be buried, and raised up in glory, just like Jesus!