

The Gospel of Luke (#107); The Crucifixion and Burial of Christ (3)

Today we will read and reflect upon Luke's account of Jesus dying upon His cross and of the reaction and response of those present who had witnessed His death. Here is Luke 23:44 through 56:

Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. ⁴⁵Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.'" Having said this, He breathed His last.

⁴⁷So when the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God, saying, "Certainly this was a righteous Man!"

⁴⁸And the whole crowd who came together to that sight, seeing what had been done, beat their breasts and returned. ⁴⁹But all His acquaintances, and the women who followed Him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

⁵⁰Now behold, there was a man named Joseph, a council member, a good and just man. ⁵¹He had not consented to their decision and deed. He was from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who himself was also waiting for the kingdom of God. ⁵²This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁵³Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a tomb that was hewn out of the rock, where no one had ever lain before. ⁵⁴That day was the Preparation, and the Sabbath drew near.

⁵⁵And the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid. ⁵⁶Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment.

This passage may be considered in three divisions. First, we read in rather brief detail of the death of Jesus on His cross (vs. 44-46). Secondly, we read that Luke recorded the reaction and testimony of witnesses to the death of Jesus (vs. 47-49). And third, Luke records the details of the burial of Jesus (vs. 50-56).

I. The death of Jesus (23:44-46)

Before us is the heart of the gospel, even the death of Jesus Christ on His cross. Luke's record is not lengthy. The actual death of Jesus is addressed in only three verses. We have previously read of Jesus on His way to the cross and then of the interaction of the two thieves that hung on either side of Him. But thus far in Luke's account we have read only a few words regarding Jesus and what He had said Himself. He initially prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (v. 34). And then Jesus had promised the repentant, believing thief, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (v. 43). But Luke records but one more word of Jesus which is in the passage before us. At the very point of His death, Jesus declared, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.'" In these three verses Luke describes the suffering and death of Christ.

It is interesting what Luke does not include in his account, details that are recorded in the other Gospels. Luke did not relate Jesus declaring from His cross in Aramaic, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani", which translated means, "My God, My God why hast Thou forsaken Me?"¹ These words, which are recorded in both Matthew and Mark, are the first words of Psalm 22:1. Also in Luke's record there is no

¹ Interestingly, Matthew recorded these words differently than Mark, reading "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani", but translates it the same as in Mark's Gospel, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Cf. Matt. 27:46 and Mark 15:34). Mark recorded the first two words from the Aramaic, "Elio, Elio", but Matthew recorded these same two words in Hebrew, "Eli, Eli."

reference to our Lord's words regarding the concern He had for His mother and having entrusted her care and well-being to the apostle John (cf. John 19:27). Luke does not tell of the Roman soldiers breaking the legs of the two thieves to quicken their deaths but passing by Jesus because He had already died (cf. John 19:33). There is no reference in Luke's account of the Roman spear having been thrust into the side of Jesus to assure that He had died (cf. John 19:34). And interestingly, Luke does not include (nor does Matthew and Mark) the final words of Jesus that are recorded in John's Gospel, "It is finished" (John 19:30). Luke in His account of Jesus Christ dying on the cross set forth the fewest details recorded of all the four Gospels.

We read in **verse 44**, "***Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour.***" When most people reflect on the period of time in which our Lord Jesus hung upon His cross, that is, on Good Friday, the three hours from noon until 3:00 are thought to be the total length of time that our Lord endured His suffering unto death. But actually what Luke records, "about the sixth hour... until the ninth hour", in which there was darkness over all the earth, was only half of the total of six hours that our Lord hung upon His cross. We read of this time frame only in Mark's Gospel:

²⁵***Now it was the third hour, and they crucified Him.*** ²⁶And the inscription of His accusation was written above: THE KING OF THE JEWS...

³³Now ***when the sixth hour had come***, there was darkness over the whole land ***until the ninth hour.*** ³⁴***And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"*** which is translated, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? (Mark 15:25-34)

Although our Lord hung on His cross for six hours, it was after the first three hours that the sun had darkened and had remained so until the ninth hour of the day. They had apparently first nailed our Lord on His cross at about 9 AM in the morning, and then at noon the sun was darkened, and it stayed dark until our Lord died at about 3:00 in the afternoon.

Darkness had covered the region for three hours. Again, verse 44 reads, "Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour." Luke gives the reason for the darkness in **verse 45**: "***Then the sun was darkened...***"

Suddenly the land became dark. The very fact that this darkness is mentioned shows that it must have been intense and unforgettable. Moreover, it occurred when least expected, at high noon, and lasted three hours.²

In the days of the prophet Amos, God foretold through him to Israel of His impending judgment upon the people and their land. Darkness was a sign of God's judgment.

The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob:

"Surely I will never forget any of their works.

⁸Shall the land not tremble for this,
And everyone mourn who dwells in it?
All of it shall swell like the River,
Heave and subside
Like the River of Egypt.

⁹"***And it shall come to pass in that day," says the Lord God,***

***"That I will make the sun go down at noon,
And I will darken the earth in broad daylight;***

¹⁰I will turn your feasts into mourning,
And all your songs into lamentation;
I will bring sackcloth on every waist,
And baldness on every head;

² William Hendriksen, **New Testament Commentary, Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke** (Baker Academic, 1978), 1034.

I will make it like mourning for an only *son*,
And its end like a bitter day. (Amos 8:7-10)

The Darkening of the sun was not due to an eclipse of the sun, for the Passover was always performed when there was a full moon. It was a supernatural darkness over the region. It is best not to view this as darkness over the entire earth, but rather over that region. The darkness would have resulted in the people of Judea and Galilee recognizing that they had forfeited the blessing of God and were now under His wrath. Some have interpreted this three hour period of darkness to be a fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel 2:28ff, which reads,

“And it shall come to pass afterward
That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh;
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
Your old men shall dream dreams,
Your young men shall see visions.

²⁹And also on My menservants and on My maidservants
I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

³⁰“And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth:
Blood and fire and pillars of smoke.

³¹***The sun shall be turned into darkness,***
And the moon into blood,
Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord.

³²And it shall come to pass
That whoever calls on the name of the Lord
Shall be saved.
For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance,
As the Lord has said,
Among the remnant whom the Lord calls. (Joel 2:28-32)

This prophecy was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost, but perhaps the darkening of the sun on the day of our Lord’s crucifixion was the beginning of God’s manifestation of His judgment, signaling the end of this generation in judgment. The darkening of the sun may have been an emblem depicting the solemn nature of the event, the displeasure of God for the action taken by others upon His Son, and the foreboding judgment because of their rejection of Him.

William Hendriksen (1900-1982) gave a good description and explanation of this darkening of the sun during these three hours.

As to the third question, “Did it have any meaning?” here a positive answer is certainly in order. Yes, it did have a very important meaning. The darkness meant judgment, the judgment of God upon our sins. This punishment was borne by Jesus, so that He, as our Substitute, suffered most intense agony, indescribable woe, terrible isolation or forsakenness. Hell came to Calvary that day, and the Savior descended into it and bore its horrors in our stead. How do we know that this answer is correct? Note the following:

- a. Darkness in Scripture is very often a symbol of judgment. See Isaiah 5:30; 60:2; Joel 2:30f; Amos 5:18, 20; Zeph. 1:14-18; Matt. 24:29f; Acts 2:20; 2 Peter 2:17; Rev. 6:12-17).
- b. With view to His impending death the Savior had Himself stated that He was giving and was about to give His life as “a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45; cf. Matt. 20:28; 26:28).

- c. The agony suffered by our Lord during these three hours was such that He finally uttered the explanatory words found in Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34, but not recorded by Luke, the words, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”³

In addition to the sun being darkened, we also read in this verse that “*the veil of the temple was torn in two.*” In both Matthew and Mark’s Gospels, emphasis is given to this veil having been torn from top to bottom, showing that it was God Himself who caused this veil in the temple to tear open, the veil that had separated the holy place from the Holy of holies. With the death of Jesus atonement for the sins of His people, He opened up the free and full access of the believer in Jesus into the very presence of God. Sin is no longer an impenetrable barrier to access and prayer to God.

With the tearing of this veil in the temple by God Himself, we have signified that as far as God is concerned, Judaism was finished as a religion for His people. The old covenant, the temple with its sacrifices, the Levitical priesthood stipulated by the Mosaic Law, and the whole system of Judaism that had emerged over the centuries, had been made obsolete by the death of the Son of God. The barrier which stood between God and man, as symbolized by that heavy veil, was now removed, and there was now true access to the Father in heaven provided through the body of the Lord Jesus. His death on His cross rendered access to the presence of God through an earthly veil as outmoded and finished. We read in Hebrews 10 of what Christ made available to His people through His death:

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, ²¹and having a High Priest over the house of God, ²²let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Heb. 10:19-22)

We should be quite disturbed when we hear and read of Christians belief and teaching about a supposed future rebuilding of a Jewish temple in Jerusalem on the temple mount, as though there is something in the Scriptures which teaches such a thing. You can read on the internet numerous articles that relate searches for the lost ark of the covenant. Search is made for a lost container of the ashes of a Red Heifer so that the renewed Levitical priesthood may be duly ordained and cleansed, enabling their coming into the presence of God in a rebuilt Jewish temple. You can read about supposed granite pits where Jews are supposedly quarrying stone to rebuild a temple. You can also read about intricate genealogical searches in order to determine blood lines to the tribe of Levi to assemble a bonified Jewish priesthood. To them we might say, “Search for the veil, and if you happen to find it and if it happens to have a patch job where it was torn in two, nevertheless, hang the thing up in a rebuilt temple and see if God will show any regard for it at all. The whole matter is a needless and wasteful matter which only serves to direct people away from the Lord Jesus to Whom alone they should have their eyes of faith fixed. The veil was torn down the middle by God Himself, and that breach is to remain. Jesus declared from His cross, “It is finished.” A new and living way has been opened through the torn body of Jesus. Entrance into the presence of God is available to all who believe on Jesus.

We read of one final cry of our Lord in **Luke 23:46**, “*Father, into Your hands I commit My Spirit.*” And then Jesus dies. His life in this world having ended. His war having been completed and won. Our salvation having been secured for eternity. The words of Jesus reflect a prayer which was commonly cited by Jews in the evening as they were preparing for the night’s rest. Here we see our Lord Jesus dying in peace. His life and work had been completed.⁴

The words that Jesus pronounced, “Father, into Your hands I commit My Spirit”, which He had expressed with a loud voice (cf. Matt. 27:46), He quoted from King David, who penned these words in Psalm 31:5. When reading this psalm, it may give us insight into what our Lord may have been thinking and feeling as He expressed these words from His cross. David wrote,

³ Ibid., 1034f.

⁴ By the way, there is no suggestion in Scripture that Jesus went for three days into hell, a place of torment, before being resurrected. He died and went to paradise, where all the Old Testament saints had gone before that time.

In You, O Lord, I put my trust;
 Let me never be ashamed;
 Deliver me in Your righteousness.
²Bow down Your ear to me,
 Deliver me speedily;
 Be my rock of refuge,
 A fortress of defense to save me.
³For You are my rock and my fortress;
 Therefore, for Your name's sake,
 Lead me and guide me.
⁴Pull me out of the net which they have secretly laid for me,
 For You are my strength.
⁵***Into Your hand I commit my spirit;***
 You have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth. (Psa. 31:1-5)

That Christ quoted these words from the Old Testament shows

“that it was the Spirit of Christ that testified in the Old-Testament prophets, and that He came to fulfil the Scripture. Christ died with Scripture in His mouth. Thus He directs us to make use of Scripture language in our addresses to God.” (Matthew Henry)

Notice also, that in our Lord's last words at the moment of death. He addressed God as “Father.” ***“Father,*** into Your hands I commit My Spirit.” Not that long before, when the full weight of sin was credited to Him hanging on His cross, He had cried out, “***Eloi, Eloi***”, that is, “My God, My God.” Into the hands of His Father He committed His spirit, and then His soul passed into His presence.

Now when considering the person of Jesus Christ as truly God and truly man, contemplating His death brings forward a few matters that require careful consideration. This year is the 1700th anniversary of **The Nicene Creed**, which had convened in 325 AD in Nicaea (Nicaea), which was located south of what is today Istanbul, but then Constantinople. The purpose of an official creed in Christian history was to formally provide a doctrinal statement of correct belief among Christians who were being confronted and challenged by heresy. The false doctrine of Arianism was spreading, which was the teaching that Jesus Christ was only a man, not God incarnate. The Nicene Creed set forth the biblical teaching about the Holy Trinity and the person of Jesus Christ specifically. Here is the statement of the creed:

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made; of the same essence as the Father. Through Him all things were made. For us and for our salvation He came down from heaven; He became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and was made human. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried. The third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead. His kingdom will never end. And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life. He proceeds from the Father and the Son, and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified. He spoke through the prophets. We believe in one holy catholic,⁵ apostolic church. We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look forward to the resurrection of the dead, and to life in the world to come. Amen.

⁵ The word, catholic” is not referring to the Roman Catholic Church, but the word catholic means universal.

Our own confession of faith states the same truth regarding the person of Christ as one divine person with two natures. Here is the statement on the person of Christ from the **London Baptist Confession of 1689**.

The Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity, being very and eternal God, the brightness of the Father's glory, of one substance and equal with Him who made the world, who upholdeth and governeth all things He hath made, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon Him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit coming down upon her: and the power of the Most High overshadowing her; and so was made of a woman of the tribe of Judah, of the seed of Abraham and David according to the Scriptures; so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion; which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man. (John 1:14; Galatians 4:4; Rom 8:3; Hebrews 2:14, 16-17; 4:15; Matthew 1:22-23; Luke 1:27, 31, 35; Rom. 9:5; 1 Tim. 2:5) (Article 8, Paragraph 2)

Jesus Christ is one person, but with two natures—a divine nature and a human nature (which is both His physical body and human soul). His divine nature could not experience death, for even in the incarnation, the Son of God was of one essence with the Father. The divine nature of Christ is in fullness everywhere. He is eternal. He is omnipresent. His divine essence, although dwelling in Jesus Christ in fullness (cf. Col. 2:9) is the eternal, omnipresent God. When Jesus Christ died on His cross, we should understand that He died with respect to His human body and soul, not His divine nature. It is not possible for God to die.⁶ Here in verse 46, in Christ's final prayer, He committed His spirit/soul to His Father in heaven.

This committal of Christ to the Father also suggests Christ entrusting His Father to deal justly with Him in His death in that the Father would raise Him from the dead, His human soul being reunited with His human body in the resurrection. And then as the God/Man, Jesus Christ, He would dwell forever with His people in the presence of His Father. As one set this matter forward,

Christ hereby signifies His dependence upon His Father for His resurrection, by the re-union of His soul and body. He commends His spirit into His Father's hand, to be *received* into paradise, and *returned* the third day. By this it appears that our Lord Jesus, as He had a *true body*, so He had a reasonable soul, which existed in a state of separation from the body, and thus He was made like unto His brethren; this soul He lodged in His Father's hand, committed it to His custody, resting in hope that it should not be left in *hades*, in its *state of separation* from the body, no, not so long as that the body might see corruption. (Matthew Henry)

But our Lord also set forth an example to you and me as Christians as we face our own death.

Christ has hereby left us an example, has fitted those words of David to the purpose of dying saints, and hath, as it were, sanctified them for their use. In death our great care should be about our souls, and we cannot more effectually provide for their welfare than by committing them now into the hands of God, as a Father, to be sanctified and governed by His Spirit and grace, and at death committing them into His hands to be made perfect in holiness and happiness. We must show that we are freely willing to die, that we firmly believe in another life after this, and are desirous of it, by saying, *Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit*.

But with these final words of Jesus, the account of Luke does not end. Luke identified and referred to three witnesses of Jesus having been crucified and having died upon His cross. A Roman soldier declares

⁶ As much as we value Charles Wesley's hymn, "And Can It Be", the line is errant that states, "that Thou, my God, shouldst die for me." Rather, it would be better for it to state, "that Thou, O Christ, shouldst die for me."

Jesus' innocence (23:47). The crowd recognizes their horrendous deed (23:48). And His own disciples are witnesses of all these things (23:49).

II. Luke recorded the reaction and testimony of witnesses to the death of Jesus (Luke 23:47-49)

Luke cites witnesses to Jesus' death upon His cross. Take note that they could testify with certainty, "Yes, Jesus did indeed die." But these witnesses to His death would or could also be future witnesses of His resurrection from the dead. Here are **verses 47 through 49**:

⁴⁷So when the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God, saying, "Certainly this was a righteous Man!"

⁴⁸And the whole crowd who came together to that sight, seeing what had been done, beat their breasts and returned. ⁴⁹But all His acquaintances, and the women who followed Him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

A. The death of the righteous Man (23:47)

Luke recorded that one of the Roman soldiers upon witnessing what had transpired during the crucifixion of Jesus, concluded that Jesus died a righteous man, that He did not deserve the maltreatment that He had received. **Verse 47** reads, "*So when the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God, saying, 'Certainly this was a righteous Man!'*" He had concluded that Jesus was indeed innocent and did not justly deserve the treatment that had been heaped upon Him.

Now some people are troubled by the different quotation that Luke gives of this centurion from what both Matthew and Mark record him saying. We read in Matthew 27:54 these words, "When the centurion and those who were with Him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said⁷, "*Truly this was the Son of God!*" Some might say by way of challenge, "Which was it? Did he confess that Jesus was a righteous man or that He was the Son of God?" The response of those who attempt to harmonize the two accounts simply say that they are the same statement told in different ways. But it seems that they are quite different sayings. But if we read carefully the two accounts, we see that there is no contradiction. Luke records what the centurion himself concluded: "Certainly this was a righteous Man!" But Matthew records not only what the one centurion said, but what apparently all (or most) of the Roman soldiers had concluded. Again, here is Matthew's account: "When the centurion *and those who were with Him*, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "*Truly this was the Son of God!*" They all had concluded that Jesus was the Son of God. The one centurion had confessed that Jesus was an innocent, righteous man, who did not deserve the suffering and death that was inflicted upon Him, but they all confessed that Jesus was the Son of God.

B. The whole crowd came under conviction of their sinful participation in the crucifixion of Jesus.

But not only was the Roman centurion convinced that he had been a participant, even a perpetrator, of injustice, but the people in general also were smitten in their conscience that they had done something terribly wrong, for which they deserved terrible, but just consequences. We read in **verse 48**, "*And the whole crowd who came together to that sight, seeing what had been done, beat their breasts and returned.*" How different were they leaving the place of crucifixion from when they had earlier arrived following Jesus to the place of His execution. They had cried out, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!", but all that they had seen and heard caused them to see that they were collectively guilty of great injustice toward Jesus. The crowd and the Roman soldiers were all smitten in their conscience that they were guilty participants in crucifying Jesus.

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900) made an application to everyone regarding the conscience that God has implanted in the soul of every man, woman, and child.

⁷ The Greek word translated "said" is a plural participle, which indicates they all said, "truly this was the Son of God."

Let us observe, lastly, in these verses, *the power of conscience in the case of the centurion and the people who saw Jesus die*. We are told that the centurion “glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man.” We are told that the people who had come together to the sight, “smote their breasts and returned.”

We know not the nature of the feelings here described. We know not the extent to which they went, or the after-fruit which they brought forth. One thing, at all events, is clear. The Roman officer felt convinced that he had been superintending an unrighteous action, and crucifying an innocent person. The gazing crowd were pricked in their heart by a sense having aided, countenanced, and abetted a grievous wrong. Both Jew and Gentile left Calvary that evening heavy-hearted, self-condemned, and ill at ease.

Great indeed is the power of conscience! Mighty its influence which it is able to exercise on the hearts of men! It can strike terror into the minds of monarchs on their thrones. It can make multitudes tremble and shake before a few bold friends of truth, like a flock of sheep. Blind and mistaken as conscience often is, unable to convert a man or lead him to Christ, it is still a most blessed part of man’s constitution, and the best friend in the congregation that the preacher of the Gospel has. No wonder Paul says, “By manifestation of the truth we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience” (2 Cor. 4:2).

He that desires inward peace must beware of quarrelling with his conscience. Let him rather use it well, guard it jealously, hear what it has to say, and reckon it his friend. Above all, let him pray daily that his conscience may be enlightened by the Holy Ghost, and cleansed by the blood of Christ. The words of St. John are very significant: “If our heart condemn us not, then we have confidence toward God” (1 John 3:21). That man is doing well who can say, “I exercise myself to have a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man” (Acts 14:16).

C. His acquaintances and the women (23:49)

We read of the women disciples from Galilee who were faithful witnesses of what had taken place when Jesus was crucified. **Verses 55 and 56** record these words:

There 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.

These women would be witnesses of the death and resurrection of Jesus. They had followed Him all the way from Galilee. They had been firsthand witnesses of His ministry. But they had been “*looking on from a distance*.” No reaction of them is described here. But the fact that they were there and saw what happened would be born as testimony later in the book of Acts. The women are particularly mentioned here because they will play an important role on the morning of the resurrection.

III. The burial of the body of Jesus (23:50-56)

A. The role of Joseph (23:50-54)

Now behold, there was a man named Joseph, a council member, a good and just man. ⁵¹He had not consented to their decision and deed. He was from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who himself was also waiting for the kingdom of God. ⁵²This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁵³Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a tomb that was hewn out of the rock, where no one had ever lain before. ⁵⁴That day was the Preparation, and the Sabbath drew near.

Joseph was a man from Arimathea, a town whose location has been lost, whose memory seems to be retained only through the kind act of this citizen of the community. He was rich. He was a member of the

Sanhedrin which had condemned Jesus, but perhaps he had not present when the sentence had been passed. He was “looking for the kingdom of God”; this means that he was a disciple of Jesus (cf. John 19:38).

Joseph had courage in that he went to Pilate and gained permission to bury his Master. It must have been a terribly difficult thing for him to do. But he wanted to show kindness to His Master. He prepared and placed the body of Jesus in his own tomb, a hewn out cave in which no one else had been buried. The manner of his burial is a fulfilment of Isaiah 53:9:

And they made His grave with the wicked—
But with the rich at His death,
Because He had done no violence,
Nor was any deceit in His mouth.

Joseph regarded and treated the body of Jesus with respect and dignity. Now it is true that the Scriptures describe the earthly body as a vessel or a house in which the real self dwells, but this does not mean that the human body should be regarded as unimportant. Some Christians seem to reflect more a view of this age in this regard than that which is reflected in Scripture. To treat a body of one who died with respect is to show honor to the one who had occupied that body.

Joseph wrapped the body of Jesus and set it in his own tomb. John’s Gospel records that Joseph, with the help of Nicodemus, used ointment in this process of wrapping the body and that they did so in a manner which was customary with Jewish burial. They must have used about a 100 pounds of the ointment as they wrapped the body and sealed it completely.

In Luke’s account Joseph serves somewhat as a witness of the fact that indeed Jesus had died. Those who try and deny the resurrection of Jesus by saying He only swooned on the cross, not really having died, and that He revived later, have to deal with the fact that this rich man prepared the body for burial and put it in the tomb.

B. The role of the women (23:55, 56)

⁵⁵And the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid. ⁵⁶Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment.

The women too, are witnesses to the fact that Jesus’ body was removed from the cross and placed in a tomb. They desired to anoint the body of Jesus themselves. But the prohibition of working on the Sabbath that began at sundown prevented them from doing so. They would return home, rest on the Sabbath, and then after the Sabbath observance prepare the spices and then return to the tomb early on the first day of the week. The record of these verses also serve as a setting for their witness to the resurrection which follows.

Everyone leaving Golgotha after Jesus had died were very distraught. The crowds “beat their breasts and returned” to their homes. They were quite fearful of what would befall them for the injustice they had brought upon this innocent, righteous man. But even His devoted followers left Calvary distressed, but also disillusioned and despairing, due to all that had taken place that day. But no one expected, no one knew, that Jesus would rise from the dead on the third day, although Jesus had taught that this is what would take place in Jerusalem. And those who had been closest to Him—His disciples--cowered in private obscurity, until these women came to them on that first Lord’s Day morning with their witness that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead.
