

**The Amazing Burial of Jesus, Part 1**

Scripture: Matthew 27:57-61

Code: 2399

As you know, for a long time now we've been in the gospel of Matthew and we find ourselves in the last section of chapter 27. It's our commitment at Grace Church to just go through one book of the Bible after another. And we have had glorious years together in this gospel of Matthew.

We come this morning to a text of Matthew that usually is passed by rather rapidly. It isn't one of those with which we're familiar, it doesn't contain any verses or lines which we might remember. It probably never was the subject of a sermon you heard in the past or a Sunday school lesson or a Bible study. Nobody ever took their life verse out of this portion. In fact, for the most part it seems to be a rather routine portion which discusses the burial of Jesus Christ.

But the fact is it is an amazing passage of Scripture. And in looking at the burial of Jesus Christ, we are face to face with some astounding truth. I mean, generally all of us who are a part of the Christian faith are aware of the significance of the cross of Christ. And we have and should have made much about the cross. For weeks we've been studying the elements of the cross described by Matthew and the other gospel writers. And we sort of are ready for the resurrection. We're anxious to get to chapter 28 and see Jesus risen from the dead. And admittedly, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the single greatest miracle the world will ever know because it is that miracle of resurrection which demonstrated His accomplished work on the cross which redeems us and His power over death which brings us to glory. And so rightly so do we extol and celebrate and exalt the miracle of the resurrection...and rightly so do we glory in the crucifixion where our sins were borne by the Lord Jesus Christ to free us from their guilt and penalty.

But between the crucifixion and the resurrection there is the burial of Jesus. And at first thought it would seem to be anything but miraculous, a rather mundane and necessary act with little or no consequence except for what happens on both ends of it. But that's not the case at all. The burial of Jesus Christ is as supernatural and as miraculous in many ways as was His death and as will be His resurrection. It is a marvelous and thrilling account of supernatural intervention in every detail in the life of Christ...from His birth to His burial to His resurrection, everything is controlled by God the Father for the fulfillment of divine purpose and prophecy. And we shall see that as we look at this text.

Even His burial then becomes a testimony to His kingliness, a testimony to His deity. Even His burial is proof in fact that He is none other than the Son of God who He claimed to be. It is a marvelous and

thrilling thing to see God giving evidence as to the deity of Christ even in His being buried.

Now it comes to us in three particular features in verses 57 through 66. The first testimony really comes through Joseph of Arimathea, the second through Mary Magdalene and the other Mary in verse 61, and the third strangely enough through the chief priests and Pharisees from verse 62 to 66.

Joseph and the two Marys and then the group of scribes and...or the groups rather...group rather of chief priests and Pharisees each play a very important role in the burial of Jesus which role ultimately speaks to the truthfulness of Christ's claim to be the Son of God. And so, God is giving testimony to His Son even in this.

Now we need to begin with looking at Joseph of Arimathea. Joseph of Arimathea is the first focal point of the burial of Christ...from verse 57 through 60 we'll look at this. And we don't know much about the man but enough to really see some marvelous things. Let me give you just a little bit of background. There are two key prophecies that must be fulfilled in the burial of Jesus...two very explicit ones. One is an Old Testament one given by Isaiah. The other is a New Testament one given by Jesus Himself.

In Isaiah chapter 53 and verse 9, this whole chapter, as you know, is devoted to the death of Christ. It talks about the fact that He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, He bore our griefs, carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities. It talks about Him being taken from prison unto judgment, and so forth. It describes the meaning of His death. Then in verse 9 it says, "His grave was assigned to be with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death."

Now the Holy Spirit through the prophet of Isaiah says it was an assignment for Him to be placed with criminals in a criminal grave, yet that didn't happen but rather He was with a rich man in His death. Now that rather strange and obscure prophecy would be very difficult to understand until one arrives at the burial scene of Jesus Christ. Keep it in mind, He was to have been buried or He was to have been put in a grave for criminals, but instead He is buried with a rich man in His death.

The second prophecy is one in the New Testament given by Jesus Christ Himself. And we find that one in the twelfth chapter of Matthew and verse 40...a very explicit one. Jesus says, "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Jesus here predicts then that there will be three days between His death and resurrection. Not only that, that He will be in the earth three days. He will be buried for three days. Now He there calls them three days and three nights, or three day and nights, as the Jewish colloquial expression was.

So there are two major prophecies very explicit, very easily recognized that must relate to the burial of Christ. He must be buried with the rich and He must be buried for a period of three days. Now God uses Joseph of Arimathea to fulfill these prophecies as the human instrument. So Joseph then gives testimony to the deity of Christ through being used in fulfilled prophecy...fulfilled prophecy.

Now let's go back to Matthew chapter 27 and notice verse 57. "When the evening was come," and we need to stop at this point and point out to you that this evening is the early evening of the Jewish day which is 3 P.M. to 6 P.M., the closing out of the day, the Sabbath day will begin around 6 P.M. and run from evening to evening. And so it is three in the afternoon on Friday. It is the early evening. A very important note. By 3 P.M. Jesus was dead. That in itself is amazing because usually those who were crucified lingered longer than that. Some lingered for many days. In this particular case Jesus was nailed to the cross at nine in the morning and dead by three in the afternoon. And you will remember in our study last time, we pointed out that He was dead not because someone took His life but because He gave His life. No one took His life from Him, He yielded up of Himself and that is what astounded Pilate, how He could be dead so soon. But it was imperative that Christ be dead by 3 o'clock so that He could be in the grave on some part of Friday so that that day could be included in the three days He had to be in the earth. He had to be buried on Friday so that Friday, Saturday and Sunday, at least a portion of each of those days, He would spend in the earth as He had prophesied that He would.

Now go to John chapter 19 and let me show you how this scene begins to unfold. By three o'clock in the afternoon, Jesus is dead. He has yielded up His own life. He said it is finished, Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit, giving Himself up. He who controlled life also controlled death. He who could raise Himself from the dead could also cause Himself to be dead by the expression of His own divine will. He willed Himself then into the Father's presence in death at three in the afternoon. And so, Jesus is dead on the cross.

Now we pick the story up in John 19 verse 31, "The Jews...and whenever John uses the term Jews he has reference not to the multiplicity of people but to the leaders who are hostile to Christ...the Jews therefore because it was the preparation." Paraskeueis a word that basically means the day before the Sabbath. This leaves no doubt in the mind of any Bible student that it indeed is Friday. This was the technical term for Friday. It was called the preparation because as far back as the sixteenth chapter of Exodus the Jewish people were instructed that they were to keep the Sabbath holy and that meant that any food preparation for the Sabbath had to be done on the day before. Do you remember that even when the manna was delivered by God for them, they had to collect enough on Friday to carry them over Saturday because they were not permitted to do that on Saturday? So Friday became known then as the day of preparation for the Sabbath because all that the Sabbath would encompass had to be done on the day before so that the Sabbath was not in any sense unholy or unsanctified or unspent apart unto devotion to God.

So, the Jews then came and it was the preparation, that is Friday. "That the body should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath." Which obviously tells us it was Friday because they were concerned that the bodies would hang on the cross on the Sabbath. It was the Sabbath on Saturday and the parenthesis indicates not just any Sabbath but an high day. What does that mean? It was not just Sabbath it was also...what?...Passover. Passover falling on the Sabbath. And so they were very concerned that these dead bodies not be suspended in the air right outside their city just north of the temple area on the Sabbath day. I mean, it was Passover and Passover was a very important day and they were very sure to obey all of the rules and regulations on the Passover day and in the Passover season. And basically they were reaching back to a text in Deuteronomy 21 verses 22 and 23 which says, "And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death and he be put to death and thou hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree but thou shalt surely bury him that day for he who is hanged is accursed by God, that thy land be not defiled."

Now they weren't necessarily always attending to this issue. There were many other days when they didn't mind someone hanging on a cross over night. But here was the Passover and they were very concerned to carry their legalistic and traditional and even scriptural injunctions to the limit. And so because of this, they come to Pilate and they say, "Look, we don't want these bodies hanging there." Now the only basis for taking them down would be that they were dead. And this wouldn't happen in that brief a time. And so it would be necessary then that as they request in verse 31, their legs be broken. The word "broken" literally means to shiver to pieces. And what the Romans did was take a large wooden mallet like a huge hammer and they would smash the legs until the bones were disintegrated. The effect of that was to cause the body then to slump on the two wounds in the wrists and suffocate the internal organs. Prior to that when there was still structure in the legs, the victim could push himself alternately up and back, sometimes hanging on the wounds of his hands and sometimes hanging on the wounds or being literally propped up by the wounds in his feet. But at least there was a little bit of relief. Once the legs were smashed to pieces, the body would then slump, suffocate the internal organs. The pain would be excruciating.

And then following that they would give what Edersheim calls "the death stroke." And they would ram a spear into the heart. And I suppose we might ask why it was that if they were going to ram a spear into the heart they even bothered to break the legs. And some have suggested to us a couple of reasons...one, the pain and excruciation of the shattered legs would put the victim into a tramatized state where the piercing of the heart could be done and almost like a relief kind of thing rather than a severe mortal wound as might be given to a victim not in that kind of extreme pain. Others have suggested, however, that they crushed the legs as sort of a momentary penalty for the fact that the victim was going to die too soon, as if to say you're not going to be able to stay there and suffer the full pain so we're going to intensify the pain that you have right now. And perhaps there was an interval of a few minutes between the crushing of the legs and the jamming of the spear. We can't be certain about that.

But the idea was to cause the victim to die immediately. And therefore take the body down off the cross and maintain the sacredness of the Sabbath. Is that not inconceivable that they would slaughter the Lord of the Sabbath in an effort to keep the Sabbath? But that was the twisted thinking of their system.

So, they came in verse 32, the soldiers did, and they crushed the legs of the first...that is the thief on the one side of the Savior...and then they crushed the legs of the other who was crucified with Him but when they came to Jesus they saw that He was dead already and they broke not His legs. Even in His death, prophecy is now fulfilled for in Psalm 34 and verse 20 it says very very explicitly and very clearly of the dying Savior, "He keeps all His bones and not one of them is broken." How do you know that that prophecy is intended to be for Jesus Christ? The testimony of Scripture makes it clear. Notice verse 36, "For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, a bone of Him shall not be broken." Now that doesn't say that the Roman soldiers were doing to that to fulfill the prophecy of Psalm 34. The Romans wouldn't even have known Psalm 34. The Romans did it because God brought them to that. In other words, they passed by breaking Jesus' legs because that's exactly what God wanted them to do to fulfill a prophecy that would demonstrate that God indeed was certifying this as the Son of God.

You say, "I don't buy it. They didn't break His legs because He was dead." Then ask yourself this, look at verse 33, or 34, "One of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side and immediately came there out blood and water." Then ask yourself the question, if they knew He was dead, why did they offer the death stroke into His heart which revealed the fluid, the serum in the pericardium as well as the blood gushing out of His heart? Why did they do that if He was already dead? The answer is in verse 37, "And again, another Scripture saith, They shall look on Him whom they pierced." And that is out of Zechariah 12:10. The prophet said they won't break His legs. The other prophet says they will pierce Him, that does not make sense that they would do one and not the other and that is the point. They did exactly what God intended them to do to certify that this is indeed the one of whom the prophet spoke. Even in His death, prophecy is being fulfilled.

Furthermore, it tells us in verse 34 that, "There came out blood and water." Now there's an interesting prophecy in Psalm 69. Psalm 69 talks about the cross, we believe, because it says, "They offered me gaul for my drink," and it talks about Jesus thirsting and all of that on the cross. And then it says in verse 20, "Reproach has broken my heart." And I read this week an account by a medical doctor of the fact that it is very very rare but under extreme intense pressure and trauma, the heart which is a muscle could in fact rupture and therefore spill its blood into the pericardium with the limp serum and create the blood and water that flowed out of the side of Jesus Christ. That is a real possibility. We can't be dogmatic that His heart actually burst, but we do know this, the heart does react to the emotions of the mind, does it not? We know that as simply as your heart beginning to beat faster when something happens to stimulate your emotions. Under the intense and unbelievable

weight of all the sins of all the people who ever lived on the face of the earth, it is not inconceivable that a human heart could literally rupture and therein another prophecy be fulfilled.

So, Christ is dead on the cross. And even in being dead on the cross the things that are going on explicitly and to the very detail fulfill what the prophetic promise was. His legs will not be broken, His side will be pierced and He will have a broken heart...whether broken by the rupture of the heart muscle or broken by the piercing of the spear, either way the prophecy is fulfilled.

So He's dead. And it's the first evening. The spear wound, by the way, was so deep in Him that He could say to Thomas at a later time, "Thrust thy hand into My side and be not faithless but believing," when Thomas needed assurance that this indeed was the risen Christ. By the way, the blood and water show that He was truly human and they also show that He was truly dead...truly dead.

Now once this happened the body had to be taken off the cross. And when taken off the cross it would be thrown into a common criminal's grave. And it's very likely that that would be a pit somewhere where they threw the criminals or it might be Gehenna, the valley of Hinnom, where the city dump in Jerusalem was and they might have just throw the bodies there to be consumed by the always smoldering fire or to be ripped and shredded and eaten by wild animals. The Romans customarily did nothing more than throw the bodies of criminals into pits to be burned or eaten by scavengers. And that was what would have been assigned to Jesus. Isaiah 53 says in verse 9 He would be assigned with the wicked in His death...but He would wind up with the rich.

How would this happen? And who would care for His body? The disciples were all fled. Even John doesn't seem to be around at this particular time. And certainly the rest haven't shown their faces at all. And the women don't have any resource to bury Jesus Christ, they're from Galilee, they don't have any grave in the city of Jerusalem. Who is going to care for this? And how fast it must be cared for so that Jesus should be in the grave by six o'clock so that He can be there part of Friday because by His own prophecy He has to be in the ground three days. And so, God the Father in a miraculous and marvelous way moves on the heart of a man, and we pick the scene up in verse 57 right where God would have us pick it up, "When the evening," that is when it came to be between three and six, "was come, there came a...what kind of man?...a rich man."

How interesting...how interesting. A rich man came. A rich man from Arimathea. Now he was more than just a rich man. In fact, you could have said a lot of things about him and never even said that he was a rich man. But oh how important it is that he be stated to be a rich man. I mean, for example, Mark says in chapter 15 verse 43, he was a Sanhedrin member, that means he was a member of the ruling body that convicted Jesus Christ of the crime of being the Son of God, or claiming to be the Son of God and sentenced Him to death. He was a member of the Sanhedrin. That same verse in Mark 15:43 also says he was a knowledgeable counselor, that is he was a man who had great knowledge and wisdom as a counselor. That same verse also says he was one who

waited for the kingdom of God, that is he had a heart that really sought God and God's truth. You go to the gospel of Luke and Luke tells us in chapter 23 verse 50 that he was a good man. And then he says he was a just man. And then in the next verse, Luke 23:51, he says he was a man who had not consented to condemn Jesus to death. Though he was a member of the Sanhedrin, he had not consented to the condemnation of Jesus.

So here is a good man and a just man, and a man who would not condemn an innocent person to death and a knowledgeable counselor and someone waiting for the kingdom of God and a member of the Sanhedrin. But above all things, he was a...what?...a rich man. And that for the sake of the fulfillment of the prophecy. Now it tells us he was from Arimathea. The only thing we know about Arimathea is a statement made by Luke in chapter 23 verse 51 that Arimathea was a city of the Jews. Now that designation puts it in Judea rather than Galilee. Galilee was known as Galilee of the Gentiles because it had been populated by so many Gentiles from other surrounding areas. But Judea, the southern part, was distinctively Jewish, so when it says it was a city of the Jews it is to say it was in Judea.

Now we assume that it was in great proximity to the city of Jerusalem because the fact is that Joseph of Arimathea had his own grave in there, in the city, right outside the city--I should say--of Jerusalem where he would put Christ eventually. So we assume that he wouldn't have lived very far from there. Many Bible scholars feel that the Arimathea is just a form of the old word Ramah which is the city from which Samuel came approximately three or four miles north of Jerusalem, which is very likely. Others would go a little further, say 20 miles north to a place known as Ramathaim-Zophim and feel that that was the place, we really can't be dogmatic. My own conviction is that it was probably somewhere very near Jerusalem because that's where his tomb also was.

Now it says about this particular man named Joseph, the end of verse 57, "Who also himself was...and the Greek text says...discipled by Jesus," using a verb form. He had become a follower of Jesus. He was discipled by Jesus. The word "discipled" means to be a learner. He was learning from Jesus. He was listening to Jesus. He was believing what Jesus said. He was following Jesus. He was a disciple. Perhaps he had been at the trial before Annas and Caiaphas because his Sanhedrin membership would give him access. Maybe he was even there at the trial before Pilate. But since that time he's been doing some things to prepare because this is something that's now in his heart to do, to provide for the burial of Christ.

Now we don't know what his involvement is in the past. We have no information except one statement given by John in his gospel, chapter 19 verse 38, John says this, "He was a disciple of Jesus...listen...secretly for fear of the Jews." Up to this point he had been a secretive disciple because he was afraid of what it would cost him. He was afraid of the leaders. I mean, if he was a member of the Sanhedrin and they found out he was following Jesus, it would be the end of his Sanhedrin rights. It would be the end of his wealth because he wouldn't be able to do business with

anybody. It would be the end of his social status, he and his family would be alienated and ostracized. It would be the end of everything. The price would be very very high and this man was not going to take a step of boldness and identify with Jesus until he was certain that Jesus was in fact worth the effort.

But God moves on his heart. Supernaturally wonderfully, the secret disciple has to act fast. How many secret disciples do you think there were in Jerusalem who happened to have an empty tomb right near Calvary? Probably one and sovereignly does God move on his heart. And Mark says he summoned up courage...he summoned up courage. He had to move fast because God had to have somebody get Jesus in the ground while it was still Friday. So far the Jews had cooperated. They were in a hurry to get Him down. So they cooperated and Pilate who could have just left Him there hanging, corrupting and decaying, honored their request because he was not about to offend them, they had gotten enough into him with their blackmailing forcing intimidating approach. He wasn't going to carry it any further. So the Jews had cooperated, Pilate had cooperated, now the Lord needed somebody who could get Jesus in the ground before Friday ended. And so here came this man.

Now some have asked the question, "What about in Matthew 12:40 where it says, 'As Jonah was in the belly of the great fish three days and three nights, so must the Son of Man be in the earth three days and three nights,' doesn't that mean that He had to be there actually three full days and three full nights?" The answer to that is no. There are many people who take that view and therefore they back the crucifixion clear back to Wednesday. They have Him in three Wednesday, Wednesday night, Thursday, Thursday night...no, that doesn't work, I don't know how...Thursday, Thursday...Friday, Saturday and up on Sunday. The problem with that is any of those views that say three days, three nights leave you with a fourth day resurrection.

In other words, if you take the view that He had to be there three days and three nights, He can't rise till the fourth day. But everything in the text says on the third day. So that eliminates the need for interpreting that particular three days and three nights as if it meant three actual 24-hour periods. It is simply a Jewish colloquial expression for any part of a day. To them a 24-hour period was called a day and a night. They had no other way to refer to it in the Greek except a very obscure word, a sort of a combination word which is not used at all. And they would rather not use that but the more common rendering.

To show you that, look back in your Bible for a moment at Esther chapter 4. In Esther chapter 4 you have sort of an indication of this same usage in verse 16. There's a request there made for fasting. Esther wants the people to fast for three days and three nights. Now does she mean three 24-hour periods so that they don't stop till the fourth day? No, because in the next chapter, chapter 5 verse 1, it says, "It came to pass on the third day. Now the need for fasting was over, she made her appearance and so forth. So what we see there is the same thing we see in the New Testament.



The concept of day and night is simply a reference used by the Jews to a 24-hour period.

Now if you were to say, for example, "I'm going to go to San Diego for three days," does that necessarily mean you're going to be there three 24-hour periods? Not at all. It could mean that you were there for a few hours one day, a full period of time another day, and a few hours on the third day. And that is consistent with the way the Scripture refers to it.

We, for example, could look at many of the Scriptures in the New Testament related to the resurrection of Christ and we see this. On the road to Emmaus in Luke 24:21, the disciples are bemoaning the consequence of the death of Christ. And it says in verse 21, "We hoped it had been He who should have redeemed Israel." Boy, we wish it had been Him. Too bad it wasn't. He's dead. And then they say, "Besides this, today is the third day." So they understood that it wasn't going to be after three 24-hour periods but it was going to be on the third day that that's what our Lord had intended to say. And in fact that is exactly what He did say back in Matthew chapter 16, verse 21...He would be killed and raised again the third day. Chapter 17 has the same thing in verse 23, they shall kill Him and the third day He shall be raised. So the references, the chronological historical factual references to the death of Christ indicate that Christ expected and those who expected it expected a third day resurrection, not a resurrection after three 24-hour periods which would put it on the fourth day. We conclude therefore that when Jesus said three days and three nights He wasn't saying three full 24-hour periods, but three portions of those full 24-hour periods. A day and a night being the same that we would use for a day. I was there a day...it doesn't mean 24 hours, it means any portion of a day.

Now this is consistently understood by the Jews as well. Look at Matthew 27, where we are, and notice verse 63. We remember that He said after three days I'll rise again. Now here's an interesting thing. Here they use after three days. Now did they mean on the fourth day? No. Verse 64, "Command therefore that the sepulcher be made sure until...what?...the third day." So when they said after three days they were simply saying after any part of the day has started. Now I know that's kind of technical but I want to cover that because many of you have been asking me about that particular statement in Matthew 12:40.

To put it in a historical setting for you, the Talmud says, the Jewish commentary on tradition and Scripture, the Talmud says this, "A day and a night makes one ona(?) and a part of an onais as the whole." So there they explain the meaning of that. So it is Friday. And it isn't important that He be there a full 24-hour period, but I'll tell you something, it is absolutely essential to the integrity of Jesus and the Word of God that He be there a part of that first day, right? So He's got to be in the grave before six o'clock.

And the Lord has gotten the Jews to get their part done, and Pilate's done his thing, and now we've got to find a guy to bury Him and he has to be a rich guy who has a tomb near enough so that Jesus

can be carried from the cross after being let down by the soldiers to the tomb, properly prepared with the linens and the spices, put in the grave and it's still Friday. And this has to be done by a bunch of people who don't know they have to do it really before evening comes. You say, "Well, they wouldn't want to violate the Sabbath." Listen, don't worry about that, Joseph had already done that in terms of the tradition because when he went in to Pilate's praetorium to ask for the body, he had defiled himself. That's what the Jews earlier wouldn't do. Secondly, when he himself carried the dead body of Jesus from the cross to the tomb, he would have defiled himself with a dead body. So he...that was not a big issue to him. He would have gotten Jesus in the grave even if it had been after the beginning of the Sabbath. He was operating with speed and haste not because he was concerned about his own observance of the Sabbath but because God was very concerned that Jesus be in there before the Sabbath began.

You know, it just boggles my mind when some of these puny brained people come up and say, "Well, I don't believe the Bible." I mean, what in the world...you know, my response to that is, "Well, you must have studied this thing for years to come to such an astute conclusion." "Oh no, I haven't." "Well, do." See. I mean, I've been doing this for a long time and the more you dig into the Word of God the more astounding it is that every detail is covered. And I don't mean to be ungracious about that but simply to say don't do that to the Word of God unless you're in a position to say you've come to that conclusion after long years of study. It's there, it's all there, so clear.

So here comes Joseph and he went to Pilate in verse 58. That was something, folks. I mean, you can't imagine the price he paid when he did that. In the first place, he didn't know what Pilate would do to him. Pilate had had enough of Sanhedrinists. Pilate had enough of those intimidating blackmailers who were going to tell Caesar on him if he didn't do what they wanted. The Sanhedrin had forced him to kill an innocent man. The Sanhedrin has forced him to violate his conscience. The Sanhedrin had even given nightmares to his wife. The Sanhedrin had put him in a humiliating position for a haughty Roman. And he didn't like them, you can be sure of that. And why would he be generous to a member of the Sanhedrin and give him the body? And besides, the only person who had the right to a body would be a family member, otherwise the criminal's body was to be publicly desecrated as part of the testimony of what a criminal act results in.

So, Joseph had no right to the body and he certainly as a member of the Sanhedrin had no particular favor to expect from Pilate. Furthermore, he would have had to explain why he wanted the body since he was a member of the Sanhedrin who were desiring Jesus to be dead, and also since he wasn't a member of the family and what would he say, other than that he was a follower of Jesus Christ which would be sort of a joke to Pilate because this poor tortured pathetic individual, Jesus, had just died on the cross without anything very attractive about Him. So the amazing reality is that there was no human reason that Joseph could have expected to receive the body.

Furthermore, it's remarkable to me that Joseph would have known that upon doing this the word would spread like wildfire that he himself was going to bury Jesus Christ, that he was a disciple of Jesus and he would have lost his reputation, he would have lost his social standing, his status, all that he had. He would have been in a situation where he no longer would have been able to do business with people. He would have lost his wealth and on and on it goes. The price was very high.

And may I remind you of something very marvelous? He is doing this for a man he believes in not who has risen from the dead, but who is dead. That is remarkable commitment...remarkable. So convinced that this man was the man of great truth that he would step out and be courageous even though the man was dead and give Him the dignified burial He deserved. He was drawn by love and attraction to Jesus to do this for Him, who had been so desecrated and dishonored, even at the loss of all of his own benefits in life.

So verse 58 says he went to Pilate and begged the body of Jesus. The implication here is that he had to beg for it. Then Pilate commanded the body to be given over. First of all, Mark 14 says Pilate sent some people to check if Jesus was dead because he couldn't believe He'd be dead already. And Joseph wanted the body. He polluted himself in a traditional ceremonial sense by even going to Pilate, he sort of polluted himself for the Sabbath. And then he further, as I said, polluted himself by carrying the dead body of Jesus which we assume he must have carried himself. No doubt the soldiers took Him down and then Joseph took Him away.

By the way, I want to just add a footnote. I wish we had time to go to John chapter 19 verses 39 and 40 because there was another man with Joseph whose name was Nicodemus. And it's a wonderful scene. Nicodemus was the teacher in Israel, no doubt also a member of the Sanhedrin. These two men were very very prominent men. I mean, this man was a wise counselor, a knowledgeable man, a man of stature and dignity. And Nicodemus was the teacher in Israel, according to John 3. And here are these two men who are coming to Jesus in His burial. And it says that Nicodemus brought myrrh and aloes, aromatic spices. They didn't embalm, they just anointed the body with a heavy load of spices to keep the wretched smell of death from polluting the area around. And it even says in John 19 that Joseph of Arimathea brought what amounts to about 72 pounds of this. Myrrh was a liquid and aloe's a powder and they mixed it. And Joseph got the fine linen, it says in verse 59. So they must have worked out a deal where you buy that and I'll buy this. The only time anybody ever got anointed with 72 pounds of that stuff was when they were royalty. And these two dear men are saying, in effect, the world may not offer you that kind of respect that a king should have, but we will even in your death. And they bury Him with a burial of a king. And the women helped, too. And they wrapped each limb, arms and legs, and then the torso and a special napkin for the head. And as they wound those robes...those linens around Him, they filled the linen with all the spices and put Him in the grave.

And verse 59 says, "When Joseph had taken the body..." My belief that he carried it himself. You say, "Well, was it a long way?" Well not according to the latest archaeological discoveries. Those of you who have been to Israel know that what they believe to be the burial place of Jesus Christ now called Gordon's Calvary, that area, and the Garden Tomb is completely adjacent. I mean, you can stand in the Garden Tomb and be having communion right in front of the open grave where the Lord lay and look to your right and just a stone's throw away is Calvary. And it would have to have been near so that they could transport Him readily and take the time to prepare Him and still get Him in and it still would be Friday. The Lord knew all of that. And it says in one of the other gospel writers that there was a garden there, there was a garden there. And they have discovered that and they've even discovered a winepress in it where no doubt the grapes were crushed, or the olives were crushed. Verse 60 says, "Having wrapped in a clean linen cloth the body, he laid it in his own new tomb which he had hewn out in the rock." And that tomb there known as the Garden Tomb now is cut by hand out of a wall of rock and a little low cliff. And just off to the right of it is another sort of rocky cliff with a skull-shaped visage on it and beneath that on the highway would have been where Jesus was crucified. So if that indeed is the place, Joseph could have carried Him just a very very few feet really away to put Him in his own tomb. Oh how God superintended every detail to make sure Jesus would indeed be in the ground and it would still be Friday.

And so, Joseph got the linen and Nicodemus got the spices and the ladies all helped. They put Him in the grave. And once He was in, verse 60 says, they rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulcher and left. They rolled the stone across. And the stone was there because there were grave robbers, frankly, and very many people were buried with things that belonged to them, things of value. I mean, that was a common practice. People wanted to...even as they do today, you see people in a casket with rings and jewelry and things like that. And there were grave robbers. And then with this particular person there was a great amount of concern. Furthermore they had to protect the body from animals and birds and those that might enter in to do some deed of desecration.

So, the stone was rolled across. And if you were to go to the Garden Tomb you would see a great trough and in it a huge circular stone which would be rolled across the entrance to that place. The wonderful thing is, it all happened on Friday. See, verse 62 says, "Now the next day that followed the day of preparation..." So it was Friday before verse 62. And Jesus was in the grave and the prophecy would be fulfilled if He would come out of it on the third day.

Listen, the amazing burial of Jesus Christ attended to by this secret disciple who now becomes public for the whole world to know throughout all history, Joseph of Arimathea, the whole thing is orchestrated to fulfill specific prophecy that Jesus would be three days and that He would be with the rich in His death. He is buried in a wealthy man's grave which the wealthy man made for himself.

Now I don't know what got Joseph of Arimathea from being secret to being public, maybe it was the earthquake and the darkness and the rocks splitting and the graves opening and the temple veil ripping from top to bottom. I don't know whether it was the heart of love. I don't know whether it was the agonizing sympathy he felt when he watched Jesus going through the things He went through. Whatever it was, humanly speaking, I don't know. What I do know is it was God working on his heart. And God was bringing to pass the fulfillment of prophecy. So Jesus was with the rich in His death and He was in the grave for three days.

Now one verse more. Verse 61 tells us there was a second group of people who also were used by God to give evidence of the deity of Christ, oh...in a wonderful way. It just says, "And there Mary Magdalene--that's Mary from the village of Magdala up on the coast, the west coast of the Sea of Galilee--and the other Mary," she is defined for us in verse 56 as Mary the mother of James, that's James the Little or James the Less and Joses, she's also called by the other writers the wife of Cleophas or Alphaeus, she was one of those ladies who served the Lord, who came with Him from Galilee, who attended to His physical needs, who provided food and sustenance and substance, and so forth. And these two dear ladies remained.

There were other ladies there. There were many who attended to the linen and touched His body and handled Him and wrapped Him and placed Him in the grave. And they all left. And I guess from verse 60 we conclude, too, that Joseph left, he departed. And only two ladies were left...Mary of Magdala and Mary this mother of James and Joses and wife of Cleophas. And they are sitting, and the Greek says, opposite the sepulcher. And they're just sitting there in deep sorrow, in deep agony. And if Joseph of Arimathea is used by God to confirm the deity of Christ through fulfilled prophecy, these two are used to confirm the deity of Christ through first-hand testimony...first-hand testimony. It's so powerful...so powerful...these lingering women...

You say, "What's the significance of verse 61?" Go down to chapter 28 verse 1 and see. The end of the Sabbath, okay now we're early Sunday morning. The Sabbath day comes to end at 6 A.M., it goes from really a...the Sabbath that they're looking at comes to an end in the morning, the dawn of the first day of the week. The end of the Sabbath, it begins to dawn toward the first day of the week. And here comes Mary Magdalene and that other Mary to see the sepulcher. They've been there. They come to get a closer look. "Behold, there's a great earthquake, an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, came, rolled back the stone from the door and sat on it. His countenance was like lightning, his raiment white as snow, and for fear of him the keepers did shake and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said to the women, Don't be afraid."

Now they really got in on something, didn't they? I want you to know they didn't hear about the resurrection, they saw it. You want to know something? There are only two eye witnesses to the resurrection. There are only two human eye witnesses, two Marys...boy, what a testimony of God's special gracious place for women. The disciples, I hate to tell you this, were second-hand witnesses.

They were first-hand witnesses of the risen Christ, they were second-hand witnesses of the resurrection. They were there. They felt the ground shake. They received communication from a dazzling brilliant angel whose garment was white as snow and whose face was like lightning. I mean, can't you imagine how it was for the rest of their life? "O Mary, tell us...I mean, tell us about it. I mean, what was it like when Jesus came out of the grave." We do not worship someone that someone hopes came out of the grave, we have first-hand eye witnesses and they went and spread the message.

And the angel said, "Don't be afraid. I know you seek Jesus who was crucified. He's not here, He's risen. Come and see the place. Now go and tell the disciples He's risen." And they became the priority witnesses, the first-hand testimony was given by two women to the resurrection of Christ. They ran out of that place, verse 8 says, they ran to bring the disciples word.

And then amazing, verse 9, "And as they went to tell His disciples, behold...what? I mean, this is it, right?...Jesus met them...Jesus met them and they worshiped." And in verse 10 He says, "Go tell My brethren." First-hand witnesses. How marvelous, how glorious. Even in His burial, God had a couple of women who couldn't quite leave the grave. Oh, they might have left for a time on the Sabbath day, but they came back that third day, maybe hoping against hope in the dawn that what He said would really come to pass. And it did and they saw it. And God honored their faith, however feeble it may have been, it was certainly stronger than others who should have been there. And they became those who gave testimony. They became the ones who spoke the word of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and could say we were there and we saw it. And in Mark 16:9 when Jesus had risen on the first day, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene and she went and told those who had been with Him. They were the first witnesses.

Listen, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not a hoax, there were folks who saw it...incredible folks. Not people who had something to gain, not the disciples of Jesus that someone might think must have fabricated it to carry on their particular program. These were women. These weren't the disciples, they were disciples of Jesus in one sense, but certainly not the ones that the world would assume would be the ones to fabricate the resurrection. In fact the truth is the disciples were a little reluctant to even believe them. And Thomas was reluctant to believe when he heard as well from them after they had come to believe. So God gave us some first-hand eye witnesses who spread the word of the resurrection. Through first-hand testimony and through fulfilled prophecy even in the burial of Christ, God is at work vindicating Jesus Christ as His Son.

There's a third group and I can't tell you how unbelievably fascinating this is. God uses now the chief priests and the Pharisees to verify the deity of Jesus Christ. You say, "How does He do that?" Come back next Sunday morning and I'm going to tell you but we don't have time for that this morning. It is the most amazing thing. They are so concerned that the disciples are going to steal the body that they set the situation up to prove the resurrection really happened. And God causes the wrath of

men to praise Him and we'll see that next Lord's day.

Father, we thank You that we have been able this morning to come to worship You. We worship You in our prayers. We worship you in our songs. And we worship You even in the study of the Word for how it lifts our hearts in adoring praise to You for the Word insights our praise. We praise You for controlling history, for saying something would be true and hundreds of years later making it true, having it come to pass even as it was said, for the truthfulness of the Old Testament, the truthfulness of the New Testament, for the way that history is sovereignly controlled by Your all powerful hand, we thank You. We thank You that Jesus even in his burial is affirmed as the one who fulfills all prophecy, the one who is indeed the Christ, the Son of the living God. We thank You for the testimony born on the pages of the gospel of Matthew. We thank you that whether it's a secret disciple like Joseph or whether it's passionate devoted loving dedicated disciples like the two Marys, or whether it's hatefilled vengeance ridden men like the chief priests and Pharisees, they're all a part of a scene in which everything and everyone affirms the deity of Jesus Christ. We thank You for how You control not only Your own but all others as well to bring about Your own holy purpose. We bless Your name, we worship You as the sovereign God who works all things according to the counsel of His own will and we praise You for the salvation You give us in the risen Christ. We pray in His name. Amen.

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