Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Amazing Burial of Jesus, Part 2
Scripture: Matthew 27:62-66
Code: 2400

I invite you to open your Bible to Matthew chapter 27. We return to a text of Scripture which treats the amazing burial of Jesus Christ, the amazing burial of Jesus Christ. We're looking at Matthew 27 verses 57 through 66, a section we began last Lord's day and we'll complete this morning.

Now before we approach the passage itself, I want to speak of a very important issue that I think will increase our understanding greatly. One of the greatest and one of the most essential attributes of God, one which we must understand as Christians is that God is above all things sovereign. The old theologians used to call about the...call it the supremacy of God. We like to use the term the sovereignty of God. That is to say that God rules over all things, that God controls all things. Now that is an essential understanding. The ramifications of that are beyond our ability to grasp. Some of them we can't understand and perhaps even more of them we will understand when we've completed our lesson this morning. But the Bible teaches unequivocally that God is the supreme ruler in the universe. The one who created is the one who sustains. The one who ordained is the one who brings it to pass. The one who established the plan is the one who sees it to its fulfillment.

For example, listen to some of the testimony of the Scripture to the sovereignty of God. In 1 Chronicles chapter 29 verses 11 through 13 we read this, "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is Thine. Thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and Thou art exalted as head above all, both riches and honor come of Thee and Thou reignest over all. In Thine hand is power and might and in Thine hand it is to make great and to give strength unto all. Now therefore, our God, we thank Thee and praise Thy glorious name."

In 2 Chronicles and chapter 20 and verse 6 we read another example of the testimony of Scripture to the sovereignty of God. The writer says, "O Lord God of our fathers, art not Thou God in heaven and rulest not Thou over all the kingdoms of the nations and in Thine hand is there not power and might so that none is able to withstand Thee?"

And in Job chapter 23 verse 13 we read, "But He--speaking of God--is of one mind and who can turn Him? And what His soul desires He also does." In other words, God never vaccilates between opinions. He has one mind and no one can change it and no one can alter it.

In Psalm 115 and verse 3 it says, "But our God is in the heavens, He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased." In Psalm 135:6, "Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that He did in heaven and in the earth in the seas and in all the deep places."

In Proverbs 21:30 the Scripture says, "There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord." And in Isaiah 46:10 God says, "My counsel shall stand and I will do all My good pleasure."

And you might add to that a rather familiar word of Scripture from verse 35 in Daniel chapter 4 in which there it says, "God does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth and none can stay His hand or say unto Him, What are You doing?" No one can alter it and no one really can even question it.

In Ephesians 1:11, "He works all things according to the purpose of His own will."

Now all of these and a myriad more Scriptures tell us that God is sovereign. Now this is a marvelous truth to understand. Somebody is in charge, is what it's saying. The world and the universe and all that is going on with the millions and billions of isolated circumstances are not functioning at random. There is a design and a designer and a purpose and a goal and an objective and an intention in all of it.

Now to understand how God could take the almost infinite number of circumstances, attitudes and events that exist both in the natural and the demonic world and pull them all together to work out His own will is really beyond our comprehension. We cannot conceive of that. It's enough for us to figure out how a computer with identifiable data can come rapidly to a conclusion but to understand how the infinite mind of eternal God can collect, collate and bring to perfect harmony every isolated bit of data that exists in the entire universe and make it all work for His will is really beyond our understanding.

In order to get a small grasp on the reality of this truth, we need to do this. We need to understand that God basically rules in the world through two things. The first one is miracle. In other words, in order to accomplish His purpose there are times when He interrupts the natural stream. There are times when He interrupts the natural course of the flow of history. He interrupts it supernaturally. He acts in violation of natural law. He overrules natural law. He sets it aside. He invades with supernatural power to accomplish His will. There are times when He does that. In order to accomplish His goal He simply sets aside the natural flow and does things that are naturally scientifically inexplicable. There is no scientific explanation for a miracle.

Now Scripture is full of this kind of thing. Creation itself obviously was the first interruption in the status quo when God in a matter of a few days, six days, created all that exists. And then there was the incredible and miraculous event we know as the flood when God drowned the entire world except for the saving of eight souls and two of each kind of animal. And then we read in Scripture about the

plagues that came in Egypt and the death of the first born when God miraculously violated the course of nature, overruled the natural flow to get His people out of Egypt and into the promised land. And then we remember the miracle of the parting of the Red Sea for the people of Israel which sea then closed to drown the armies of Egypt. And then we remember that God brought water from a rock, miraculous, overruling the natural.

God provided manna from heaven and birds to eat when the people wanted flesh to eat. God on one occasion caused the sun to retreat and go backwards on a sundial. On another occasion He had the sun stand still, that is the earth stopped revolving and no one fell off. Supernaturally God controlled creation.

And then there was the time when the ground opened and swallowed all of those who rebelled against Him under the rebellion of Korah. The miracle was the ground opening and swallowing only those who had sinned and not the others.

Then there was the time when the walls of Jericho fell flat without any mechanical reason or physical phenomena to make that happen. Then there was the incredible miraculous strength of Samson by which he could kill 20,000 people. Then there was God turning stone and water into fire on Mount Carmel.

Then there was the time God made an axehead float and raised a dead boy and provided food for a widow. And a time when a donkey talked and a time when a chariot of fire caught in a whirlwind took a man to heaven without death, a man by the name of Elijah. And then there was the miracle of the divine handwriting on the wall in Belshazzar's feast and the closing of the mouths of lions and three men in a fiery furnace who did not burn and were not even singed. And then there was the miracle of a man in the belly of a great fish for three days who lived. And it goes on and on to the healings of Jesus and the raising of the dead and the miracles of the Apostles. There have been times when God has to bring about His eternal purposes done miraculous things which interrupt the flow of natural history. That we call miracle. And God does that as a means of maintaining His sovereign control over the events that are taking their place in the world.

So we understand that. Most people understand that if they understand anything about the Scripture. But there is a second factor that many people do not think about that is equally significant. God not only takes the world and the universe to its destiny by the use of miracles, but secondly, by the use of providence...providence. Now the word providence is not in the Bible. It's like the word trinity, trinity isn't in the Bible but the trinity is. Providence as a term isn't in the Bible but the providence of God is. It is a term to describe a very important way in which God controls things that are happening in the universe. Simply, it means this that God rather than overruling or interrupting or violating the natural course simply manipulates and uses all of the events that are happening to come to His own ends. On the one hand He interrupts those events, on the other hand He simply orchestrates them all, pulls

them all together to bring His predetermined conclusion to pass.

Now this is incredible. It seems to me that providence, if I can use a conundrum, providence is a greater miracle than a miracle. It seems to me that it would be easier if I were God to just say, "I'm not going to fool with trying to pull all this together, I'm just going to do it." And so the wonder of wonders to me is not just the miracle where God instantly invades and just interrupts and violates the flow of everything, to me the greater wonder is that God can take it all and still make it work for His will. That's astounding to me. The diversity of an innumerable number of events, circumstances and attitudes that occur within the limited freedom of men and demons and God pulls it all together to accomplish exactly what He wants done. Incredible not only to conceive that it can be done but to make it happen. But that is precisely what God does. So that the world with what we assume to be an almost infinite number of random choices is doing nothing more than acting out that which is predetermined by God. That is the sovereignty of God, the infinite mind of God. And that's why the Psalmist says He has power over all. I mean, you read the Bible and you will find that God uses the thunder and the lightning and the rain and the waters and the rivers and the hail and frost and the ice and the snow and the cold and the heat and the sunshine and the animals and the birds and the beasts and the nations, the governments, the kings, the princes, the rulers, the governors, He uses everything and everybody and He pulls it all together to accomplish exactly what He wants done.

And within this, all of these beings are making random choices, all of these things are functioning in a way that seems at least to them to be detached from any sovereign control. He sets the birth and death of every man. He sees all they do. He knows all they think. He hears all they say. He uses their good. He uses their bad. He uses the free choices of men. They are made to fit perfectly into His eternal purposes. Even the choices being made by fallen angels called demons are fitting perfectly into His purposes.

Proverbs 16:1 puts it this way. "The plans of the heart belong to man but the answer of the tongue is from Jehovah." Proverbs 19:21 says, "There are many devices in a man's heart but the counsel of Jehovah, that shall stand."

And Jeremiah in chapter 10 verse 23 said, "O Jehovah, I know that the way of man is not in himself, it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." Isn't that amazing? Men think they're doing what they want to do, the fact is they're fitting into a grander scheme that is being worked out by infinitely wise and holy God. Paul said to the Philippians, "It is God who works in you to will and to do of His own good pleasure." He controls everything, even sin...He allows some, He prevents some and limits all of it to His purpose.

In Proverbs we have so many other things, I was thinking of Proverbs 16 again and verse 9 which is a familiar text. "A man's heart devises his way but the Lord directs his steps." And I think of John 5:17 where Jesus says, "My Father works and I work." In other words, while He's on earth He's saying

we're still working. What are You doing? We're controlling everything to bring about the eternal plan. That is the sovereignty of God.

Now listen. To do that God uses on occasion the miracle which invades that natural flow, but most of the time with very isolated exceptions, God does not use miracles. They were existing in the time of the Elijah and Elisha, in the time of Moses before that, in the time of Christ, in the time of the Apostles and in only those four times in biblical redemptive history and the history of the church do we see miracles as any kind of norm. The rest of the time God uses providence...the pulling together of all the diverse elements.

Now let me give you some illustrations of this so you'll know what I'm talking about. And I'll use some biblical illustrations. You remember the story of Joseph? Joseph was one of 12 brothers. The brothers hated Joseph because Joseph was the favorite son. So they decided to get rid of Joseph. There were a group of Medianite traders heading to Egypt through their particular property and the land of Canaan. And so they decided to sell Joseph into slavery. So they sold Joseph to these traders who took him down to Egypt and made him a slave. He became a slave because of the whim of his brothers because of the hatred of his brothers. There was no miracle in that. It was just an act that the brothers did thinking they were responding to their own emotions and their own needs and their own best interests and so forth.

So he goes to Egypt. Where does he end up? He ends up serving a man named Potiphar. Potiphar has a wife who likes the way Joseph looks. And so she decides that she wants to seduce Joseph, Joseph won't have a thing to do with it. He runs. She grabs his coat and accuses him falsely of intending to rape her. He is then thrown into jail. He is in jail because of this woman and because everybody believed her lies. In jail he comes across another prisoner. This other prisoner has a dream. He interprets the dream. The Pharaoh has a dream and the Pharaoh says, "Who can interpret my dream?" And somebody says there's a guy in jail who can interpret your dreams. So he comes to the Pharaoh, interprets the Pharaoh's dream, the Pharaoh makes him Prime Minister of Egypt.

So far no miracles. The decision of the brothers, the decision of Potiphar's wife, the decision of the guy in the jail, the decision of Pharaoh, he has gone from being sold into slavery to being the second man in Egypt under the Pharaoh, he is the Prime Minister of Egypt.

You say, "Is that important?" Yeah it is because he has a plan. The Pharaoh's dream said there would be seven years of plenty and seven years of famine, so during the seven years of plenty Joseph collects 20 percent tax from everybody of all their grain and all that they have and stores it away to feed his nation during the seven years of famine. During the seven years of famine, what happens? The people living up in his homeland don't have any supply, they haven't prepared for this. So they all pack up and come to Egypt to beg for some food from Egypt. Who do you think they're

going to have to come to to beg for it? Joseph. So here comes Joseph's family to him to get food.

You say, "Is that important?" Yes it's important. You say, "What happens if Joseph's family die?" Then you lose the 12 tribes of Israel, folks. And so they come to Joseph to beg him for some provision. And what happens is recorded in the forty- fifth chapter of Genesis in verse 4, "Joseph said to his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. They came near and he said, I am Joseph your brother whom you sold into Egypt." That's a long way from where they thought he would be. For these...then in verse 5 he says, "Now therefore be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that you sold me here...listen to this...for God did send me before you to preserve life."

Now listen, God could have just picked up Joseph, taken him in a cloud, dropped him into Egypt and made him Prime Minister instantaneously. Didn't do that. That would have been a what? That would have been a miracle. God didn't use a miracle, He used providence. A whole lot of random choices by a whole lot of people did nothing but work out God's perfect plan. "For these two years has the famine been in the land and yet there are five years in which there shall neither be plowing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance, so now it was not you that sent me here but God." Isn't that great.

And in chapter 50 he says, "You meant it for evil but God meant it for...what?...for good," chapter 50 verse 20. And here is God in a sequence of random events working out His purpose. And what was His purpose? To preserve the twelve sons to preserve the twelve tribes of Israel. And He does it through providence. No miracle.

Another most beautiful picture of providence is Naomi who had a son and his...her son rather violated the law of God, breached the law of God by marrying a pagan Moabitist woman by the name of Ruth. And he took off, married Ruth, went to live in Moabite country, violating God's law he died probably as a divine judgment along with his brother who did the same thing and married Orpah. And when God took their lives, probably as I said, as a divine judgment, Ruth was left with Naomi her mother- in-law who was a Jewess. And Ruth at that point because of the testimony of Naomi said to her in chapter 1 verse 16, "Thy people shall be my people and thy God my God." Through the testimony of Naomi she came to faith in the true God. What happened was there was a sin, God overruled the sin. Out of that sin brought Ruth to meet Naomi. Out of that meeting brought Ruth to know the true God. Naomi took Ruth back to the land. She was gleaning in the field of a man named Boaz who was related to her dead husband. That man under Jewish law took her as his wife. She became the grandmother of David. She was put in the Messianic line. No miracle, just providence. God controlling everybody's choices and all the events.

And perhaps even the most graphic of all providential illustrations in the Old Testament is the story of Esther. I don't know if you've ever thought of this, if you've read the book of Esther and kept this in mind, but the name of God is never mentioned in the entire book of Esther. It is the only book in the

Bible that doesn't mention God in any way. And yet the main character in the book of Esther is God. There are no miracles in the book of Esther but God is at work in a way that is even beyond the miraculous, it is an unbelievable series of providential events orchestrated by God to bring about His will. Now His will in the book of Esther is to preserve the nation Israel. But there is a man in the kingdom there who wants them eliminated. He wants all the Jews annihilated because he despises the worship of the true God, his name is Haman. Haman is a high official. He has the ear of the king. And the king is impressed by Haman who flatters him and so forth and so on. And Haman has this plot to get rid of the Jews.

Well the plot hasn't even come to the knowledge of everybody when the book begins. What happens in the beginning of the book is the king's wife Vashti is deposed. And he wants to replace the queen. He wants a new queen. Now we don't know whether this was his only queen or whether it was a queen of concubinage but anyway he wanted a queen and he wanted the most beautiful girl. And so there was a man, a Jew, who kept the gate there. Must have had some responsibility in the palace by the name of Mordecai. He was a foster father to a girl named Esther. And Esther was a beautiful girl. And Mordecai realized or Mordecai, whatever you want to call him, realized that this might be a wonderful opportunity for her to live in that kind of situation and also to have good influence for his people. So he entered her in the queen's beauty contest and she won.

So, he took her...that is the king...as his queen. So now Esther is queen. And once that's established then the plot begins to thicken. Nobody really knows she's Jewish. Haman then plots this annihilation of all the Jewish people which, of course, would create great problems with the plan of God in the Persian Empire there, about 483 B.C. So he persuades the king to stamp an edict to annihilate all the Jews, which the king does. And he himself sought to kill Mordecai who was sort of the representative Jew truly devoted to God.

At that point Esther found out about the plot. So Esther is now in a position to influence the king. So she goes to the king and really lays it on. I mean, she is...if she was ever beautiful, she was beautiful that day. She really put on all the stuff and went in and begged him on behalf of her people. And the king favored Esther and Mordecai, spared all the Jewish people, made Mordecai the Prime Minister and hanged Haman on the gallows he build himself for the Jewish people and preserved the nation Israel. There isn't a miracle in the book and the name of God isn't mentioned and God is in control of every single event. This is how God controls history through providence.

But, I believe you'll never in any account of Scripture see the providence of God anymore graphically then you'll see it in the scene we're in right now, let's go to Matthew chapter 27. That was just the introduction. The greatest illustration without question, the greatest illustration of the sovereignty of God and the providence of God is in the death of Jesus Christ. That's the greatest illustration.

God used all of the human and Satanic forces to kill His Son to accomplish His redemptive purpose, didn't He? There was...the death of Christ was not a miracle. Oh, there were miracles surrounding it...the earthquake, the darkness, the rocks splitting, the tombs opening, people coming alive, there were miracles around it...the tearing of the veil from top to bottom. But the cross itself and the crucifixion of Christ and His death and His burial was non-miraculous. But God controlled everything. God controlled the hated of the Jews. God controlled the hostility of the Romans toward the Jews. God controlled even the defection of the disciples. He controlled every element...the betrayal of Judas, the denial of Peter, every piece of that entire scene was controlled by God, so much so that Jesus even rode into the city on the very day that Daniel prophesied He would do it. Jesus rode into the city the very day everyone else was selecting their Passover lamb, He coming as the true Passover lamb. He died on the very day that the Passover lambs were slaughtered. Every single detail was covered. And all by the free choice of men, they thought, and all by the solicitation of demons moving on the hearts of evil men to accomplish this. And in truth when it's all said and done it's all the work of God. There are no miracles in the trial of Christ, there are no miracles on the cross and there are no miracles in the burial, but there is providence and God is controlling every detail.

Listen to Acts 4:27 and 28, most amazing text. "For of a truth against Thy holy child Jesus whom Thou hast anointed both Herod and Pontius Pilate with the nations and the people of Israel were gathered together." He says Herod was against Him, Pilate was against Him, the Jews were against Him, the Gentiles were against Him. They were all against Thy holy child Jesus whom Thou hast anointed, and they were all against Him to do what what? Verse 28, "To do whatever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done." Isn't it amazing? They just did what God laid out for them to do and they did it with their own independent choices within the framework of their sin and yet worked out the perfect plan of God.

It's a staggering thing to understand the providence of God. He uses the plotting of evil men. He uses the hatred of the leaders, the fickle affection of the crowd, the deception of the disciples, the execution of the Romans, every piece of the puzzle to bring about His own perfect will. It's like Psalm 76:10 says, "Surely the wrath of men shall praise Him."

Now with that theological perception as a background, let me go to the text now and just sort of briefly mention what we saw last time and then go to the newer part that we haven't looked at. In the burial of Christ we have the providence of God at work. We first see it with fulfilled prophecy in verses 57 to 60. And the man God uses to do this is a man named Joseph of Arimathea. Now what you need to know is there were two prophecies about the death...about the burial of Christ. There were two prophecies about the burial of Christ. Let me remind you what they were. The first one was Isaiah 53:9 and in Isaiah 53:9 the Scripture says this, "His grave was assigned to be with wicked men, but He was with a rich man in His death." He was supposed to be thrown with the criminals but He wound up with a rich man in His death. The prophet said He would be with a rich man in His death.

The second prophecy of His death is in Matthew 12:40 and that is that as Jonah was three days in the belly of the great fish, so the Son of Man will be three days in the earth before His resurrection. Two prophecies then...with a rich man in His death and three days buried.

Now notice verse 57, "When the evening...this is the evening of Friday...was come there came a...what? What kind of man?...a rich man." Why did he come? Well, he thought he wanted to come. It was in his heart to come. He had prior been a secret disciple and having seen Jesus die and having love for Jesus and affection for Him, the one who is secret is now willing to take a stand for Christ, not even for a living Christ but for a dead Christ. He's going to sacrifice all his relationships. He's a member of the Sanhedrin, he's going to forfeit that, his social status, his business, he'll be cut off in every way. But his affection for the now dead Christ pulls his heart so much that he wants Him to have a proper place of burial. So a rich man comes, just as Isaiah said.

His name, Joseph. His town, Arimathea. He was also discipled by Jesus. He had been a follower, even though a secret one. He went to Pilate and begged the body of Jesus. And Pilate commanded the body to be delivered. Now why would Pilate do that? I mean, I would think Pilate would say, "Leave that body there, I want that to mock the Jews as long as possible and I know it's the Passover and they want it taken down, but the fact that they want it taken down is good reason to leave it up there." He despised those who had intimidated him so much. But he doesn't do that. He says, "No, you can have it. Take it down." Is that important? Yes. The Jews had come earlier and said get those bodies off the cross before the Sabbath, we don't want them hanging up there on the Sabbath which is the Passover, which is a very high Sabbath. We want the bodies down. The Jews begged to have the bodies down. Joseph wanted the body down. Pilate said take it down. The real reason it had to come down was Jesus had to be in the grave on Friday so He could be there Friday, Saturday and Sunday. That's what the prophet said, that's what God wanted. And all these people acting on their own were really working out God's providential plan perfectly.

So, Joseph when he had taken the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, laid it in his own new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock and rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulcher and left. It was done. Was that important? Why is that there? Oh yes it's important. That's not a miracle, that may be a greater miracle than a miracle. God worked out all those details to get Jesus into the grave before the day was over so that He would be there a part of Friday to fulfill the prophecy. And so we see the providence of God working to proclaim the deity of Christ through the fulfillment of prophecy even in His burial.

Now the second way we see the providence of God here is through the two women in verse 61. If Joseph was used to show the deity of Christ through fulfilled prophecy, they're used to show it through first-hand testimony.

And then finally, and we come to verse 62. The third group that God providentially orders in the scene to bring about the amazing burial of Jesus Christ are the chief priests and the Pharisees. And they provide in this testimony to the deity of Christ what I think to be as forceful as any proof of His resurrection anywhere in the Scripture. Let me show you how it unfolds, verse 62. "Now the next day that followed the day of the preparation," that's a long way to say Saturday or Sabbath, this is Passover day now. The day of the preparation is Friday, it's always Friday, you can't make it any other thing in Jewish chronology, it is always Friday. It was the term for Friday because that was the day they prepared for the Sabbath. All their meal planning and everything else had to be done for Sabbath because they couldn't do it on the Sabbath. So the next day, that's the day that follows Friday which is Saturday.

It's Saturday now. It's the Sabbath. It's not just any Sabbath, it's the Passover Sabbath, the holiest day of all the Jewish calendar. "And the chief priests and the Pharisees came together unto Pilate." Now this is amazing...chief priests and Pharisees, by the way, represent the Sanhedrin, the ruling body. That particular combination, chief priests and Pharisees, only appears one other place, that's in Matthew 21:45, it's an uncommon kind of combination. Chief priests were Sadducees and the Pharisees, of course, were their theological enemies and opponents, but they could agree on one thing and that was they wanted to make sure they eliminated the movement around Jesus Christ. It wasn't enough to have Him dead, they weren't done yet. They were afraid of one more thing. And so they get together in a small group and they come to Pilate.

And the question that immediately comes in your mind is if they went unto Pilate, they went into the praetorium. Yes, I don't have any question that they went into the praetorium to see Pilate. The day before on Friday when they brought Jesus to Pilate, they sent Jesus in and wouldn't go in because they didn't want to be defiled for the Sabbath by going into a Gentile dwelling. That was because they were in a Jewish crowd. Apparently they're able to come in a more clandestined way and as long as there is no Jews around to see that they're violating the scruples, they go right in to Pilate. Plus this is of such great concern to them, they're really not concerned with the legalism

In other words, murderers don't have a high priority for ceremony. I mean, if you're going to violate that law, you're not going to worry about what you're doing with the minimal kind of thing. And they hated Jesus so much, they hated Jesus more than they loved their own law. And so they violate that.

And what is their request? Verse 63, "Saying, Sir, or lord...term of dignity and honor...we remember that that deceiver said while He was yet alive after three days I will rise again." Listen, we're afraid of this guy. Not of Him, but what might happen because He said after three days I will rise. Notice what they call Him, "that deceiver." They push Him out at arm's length. They use a pronoun "that" which indicates He's far removed from them. And a word that calls Him a seducer of the people, that deceiver, that one who deceives the people. They have such contempt for Christ. Their hostility,

hatred, and brutality extends even beyond His death. They're still identifying Him with these ungracious epithets. And the thing they're concerned about is that He said after three days I will rise again.

And when did He say that? Oh, He said that to them back in chapter 12 earlier. They said we want a sign, remember chapter 12 verse 38 to 41, we want a sign, we want to see you do a magic trick, we want to see a miracle, do something for us. He said you're not going to get any sign but the sign of Jonah, verse 40, "As Jonah was three days, three nights in the belly of the great fish, so shall the Son of Man be three days, three nights in the heart of the earth." In other words, they understood what He was saying. He says He's going to be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth just like Jonah was. Jonah went in and Jonah what? Came out. They knew what He was saying. He was saying I'm going to go into the ground, be buried and rise. The disciples didn't even understand it. The disciples thought He was talking mystically, spiritually, figuratively. They didn't understand that He was actually talking about a real death and a real resurrection. But the Jews didn't think about the mystical, spiritual, physical thing because they didn't believe He was the Messiah anyway, they thought He was just an impostor who was going to try to pull something off which obviously He couldn't do. But the fact that He said He was going to do it, the disciples must have thought He was supposed to do it and they might even try to pull it off themselves. So their concern was Jesus had said He was only going to be three days in the earth.

And so, in verse 64 they say, "Command, therefore...and they're commanding Pilate to command, they still have him under their control, he's intimidated by them for fear they will report him to Caesar if there's another conflict, so they say...Command, therefore, that the grave be made secure until the third day." And you'll notice that in 12:40 it was three days and three nights. In verse 63 it's after three days. And in verse 64 it's until the third day so that we say all those phrases mean the same thing, not three full 24-hour periods but any part of three days, any part of Friday, any part of Saturday, any part of Sunday, as we pointed out last time.

So, in verse 63 they say you better make that grave secure. And here's why, "Lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away and say to the people, He's risen from the dead." Now they're not afraid He'll rise, they're afraid that the disciples will fabricate a resurrection to keep the movement alive. That's what they're afraid of. The irony of it is the disciples had no such thought. The disciples couldn't get their own heads together. They're afraid. They're off somewhere, we don't know where they are...hiding. They don't even understand the reality of a resurrection, they're thinking of it mystically, figuratively, spiritually. They don't understand the real death and the real resurrection as happening, even though Jesus said to them over and over and over and over. It's just amazing how many times He said it. You read Matthew 16:21, you read Matthew 17:23, you read Matthew chapter 20 I think it's verse 19. You go to Mark and you see the same thing. In fact in Mark it's even more astounding. In the eighth chapter of Mark and verse 31, "He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, be rejected by the elders, by the chief priests, scribes, be killed and

after three days rise again." And Peter rebuked Him. What are You talking about? Stop that talk.

Then in Mark 9 verse 9, "He came down the mountain after the transfiguration. He said, Don't tell anybody what you've seen until the Son of Man is risen from the dead." Verse 10, "And they kept that saying to themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean."

Listen, you don't have to be Phi Beta Kappa to know what that means, I understand that. It means He's going to rise from the dead. But, see, they couldn't handle that, the physical thing, because they couldn't handle that He would ever die. So they were...it was mystical to them.

Then down in the same chapter, verse 31, "He taught His disciples and said to them, The Son of Man is delivered to the hands of men, they'll kill Him. And after He's killed He'll rise the third day. But they understood not that saying and were afraid to ask Him." They just didn't understand it. Chapter 10 verse 33, we go to Jerusalem, "The Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests, the scribes, they'll condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles. They'll mock Him, scourge Him, spit on Him, kill Him, the third day He'll rise again." They still don't get the message. They still do not understand what He's really talking about. They're in the dark about it. In fact in John 20 verse 9 it says, "When they came into the empty tomb, as yet they knew not the Scripture that He must rise again from the dead." Boy, what blockheads. It just never occurred that He was speaking about a real death and a real resurrection. The Jews, of course, thought He was claiming that which He couldn't pull off, but they were afraid the disciples would have thought just like they did, that He really meant that and so to keep their movement alive they would come and steal the body.

So to prevent that, they go to Pilate and they say, "We want a guard and we want that guard put on the grave so that the disciples are unable to come and steal away the body." Or else...the end of verse 64, "The last error shall be worse than the first." Or the last deception...that deceiver who will be allowed another deception and it will be worse than the first one. What was the first deception? On Monday, Palm Sunday as we call it, but it's a Monday, the triumphal entry. He comes riding into the city on the colt, the foal of an ass, the garments and the branches and everything is thrown at His feet. Jesus comes riding into the city, hosanna, hosanna, halleluiah to the Son of David, you know, and blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord. They were giving Him all the Messianic accolades as He came into the city and the Jews saw that as a tremendous deception. The whole crowd, the whole city has gone out to Jesus. They're deceived. They think He's the Messiah.

Listen, what they're saying to Pilate is this, "If you think that caused an uproar and you think that caused a problem, you just watch what happens if the disciples are able to fabricate the fact that He rose from the dead. If they can fabricate a resurrection by stealing His body and teaching everywhere that He rose from the dead, you will have something far worse than you had on Monday. And if you think that was a threat to Jewish authority and Roman rule, you don't know anything as to what it will be like if they can fabricate a resurrection." So they say give us a guard so we can make

sure they don't steal His body.

Verse 65, "Pilate said to them, You have a guard." Or it may be imperative...Take a guard. Either way it's the same thing. He gave them a Roman guard. "Go your way and make it as secure as you can." And it's just...he wants to brush it off. He's had enough of the whole thing. He just says here's your guard, get out of here and make that grave as secure as you possibly can.

And then verse 66, "So they went and made the grave, or sepulcher, secure, sealing the stone and setting a guard." Now sealing the stone doesn't mean they sealed it with glue or something. What that means is that they probably put some wax on the stone and some wax on the wall of the cave and ran some string and sealed the wax so that if anybody moved the stone, they would have to break the string and they would know it was violated. And that wax may have been stamped with a Roman imprimatur so that they would know they were violating Roman law. It was a way to make sure there was nothing done to take the body out. And then they set in front of the grave a group of Roman soldiers, very secure.

Now get this. This is all the work of the chief priests and the Pharisees and Pilate and the soldiers. No miracles, no miracles. But you say, "What significance does it have?" Oh, it has all the significance in the world. You see what they're doing? You see what they're doing? There are people today who still want to say, "Oh, if the body of Jesus was gone the disciples stole it." Listen, God made sure that a whole lot of pagans, a whole lot of people who rejected and hated Jesus Christ set it up so that there was no way possible for the disciples to steal His body or anybody else either. And if that in fact is the case, the only way He could have come out of there was by what? Resurrection. So again He uses the wrath of men to praise Him. The Jewish leaders by their hatred of Jesus, Pilate by his scorn and indifference, wanting to slough it all off, make it secure.

Do you know what would have happened if there was no guard and no seal? Nobody was watching the tomb and all of a sudden we were trying to preach a message that Jesus rose from the dead and somebody would say, "Don't give me that, it never happened. They just took His body and somebody took on His identity and somebody who looked like Him made a few appearances and so forth and so forth and so forth." But the unbelieving world itself made sure that there's no other explanation for the absent body of Jesus Christ except a resurrection. If no seal and no guard, the resurrection could have been explained as a grave robbery. But not after this. And the wrath of these Christ haters has led them to secure that grave to the extent that there's no other explanation than a resurrection. And later on, by the way, we'll see in chapter 28 the soldiers were bribed to deny the resurrection....which is another testimony to its reality.

Do you see how God is working in everything? He used Joseph of Arimathea providentially to fulfill prophecy. He used the two Marys providentially to give first-hand testimony to the resurrection. And He used the chief priests and the Pharisees providentially to give forceful proof that Jesus indeed

rose from the dead.

Now listen carefully. How does this relate to you and me? Do you know this verse? "For we know that all things work together for...what?...good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." Does that come to you with new meaning now? Do you understand what that says? All things are controlled by God to work together to fulfill His eternal purpose for His own beloved children which is their good. I mean, that is a marvelous thing. This idea of God's sovereignty and God's providence is not some distant doctrine only for theologians. I mean, this is where the rubber meets the road, folks. It's when you can't explain the trouble you're going through that you need to understand the providential power of a sovereign God who takes every bit of the diverse data of the universe and controls it all for your good and His glory and eternal purpose. Is that comforting? It doesn't matter what it is. It doesn't matter what it is. And He demonstrated His ability to do it in the death and burial of Jesus Christ...glorious thing.

Whatever happens in your life, whatever you can't understand, whatever you struggle with, whatever doesn't make sense, whatever trials you may be going through to make it very personal to me, it all fits. It's unquestioned, it all fits. I ask no questions. This is it. This is part of it. God is doing it. He's at work. It's for His glory. It's for our good. He's in control. He hasn't abandoned His throne. And our hope and our confidence is in the God who providentially and if need by miraculously controls all things to His own intended and eternal purpose. Let's pray.

Our Father, it is our testimony that You are indeed a glorious God...a God who controls all things by the word of His power. We thank You, O God, for the fact that nothing happens outside the framework of Your eternal purpose. You are sovereign in everything, everything. That is why the Apostle Paul says, "In everything, give thanks for this is the will of God concerning you." It all moves together for Your glory and the good of Your beloved children. We praise You for Your infinite mind to make it all happen according to plan. And may we rejoice no matter what it is to know that the plan is unaltered and that we are moving on that path toward that perfect fulfillment. Thank You, Father, for that confidence, for Christ's sake. Amen.

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