

The Supernatural Burial of Christ

Luke 23:50-56

42-290

We come to the final paragraph in the twenty-third chapter of the Luke account of the life of our Lord Jesus. Let's open our Bibles to Luke chapter 23 and verses 50 through 56. This section of Luke's Gospel looks at the burial of Jesus. And, I guess counterintuitively, I've entitled it, "The Supernatural Burial of Jesus." That might be a little like an oxymoron, How can a burial be supernatural? We looked at the cross and we saw some supernatural elements there – the darkness, the earthquake, the rocks splitting, the rending of the temple curtain, the resurrection of the dead – miraculous, for sure. And certainly when we talk about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, that is a massive miracle, as He comes back from the dead and gives life to His own body. But in what sense is the burial of Jesus supernatural?

I suppose the burial of Jesus is not something you've considered a lot. We celebrate the death of Christ, and the resurrection of Christ, but the burial of Christ is as supernatural and as divinely wrought as anything else in the incarnation. In fact, the burial of Jesus is so important that all four Gospel writers talk about it, and they give detail; and the detail they give is related to the supernatural elements of His burial. The reality is this: that from the moment Jesus gave up His Spirit and His body was dead, He, alive, entered into the presence of God in paradise, from which He controlled every detail of His own burial. He not only planned His own funeral, He ran it. The divine pre-planned, prophesied, and powerfully executed features of the burial of the body of Jesus provide for us some very strong evidence for some very important realities, like the divine purpose of history, like the sovereignty of God in all things, like the authenticity of Scripture, and the veracity of the claims of Christ. His burial brings evidence, proof of all these realities. For those of you who may struggle with whether there's a divine purpose in history, whether God is sovereign over everything, whether the Scripture is true, and whether Christ is really who He claimed to be, there is enough in His burial to remove those kinds of questions.

Now, mark this in general. God moves in history in two ways, directly; he moves in history in two ways directly. One is miracles. A miracle is God accomplishing His purpose by interrupting and/or suspending natural law and process. He created the universe. He created the laws and the processes that sustain the universe. But rarely, extremely rarely, God interrupts those processes. God suspends those processes and does something that has no scientific explanation, that is purely, inexplicably, miraculous and supernatural. But it's very rare. You can count the miracles in the Old Testament - there are not many of them. After the ministry of Jesus and the apostles is completed, the rest of the New Testament shows very few miracles. There is a flurry of miracles, the likes of which never occurred in history, done by Jesus Christ to authenticate His messiahship, and done by His apostles to affirm and authenticate that they were the messengers of His gospel. But even as the New Testament moves away from the apostles, miracles fade out of the scene. They are very, very rare in all of human history. There was this great explosion of miracles around the time of Christ; the rest of the time, very rare.

In the very opposite fashion, providence goes on all the time, and that's the second thing I want you to understand. God works in the world through providence. That is not rare. In fact, there is never a millisecond in which it is not operating. Providence is another way that God works constantly in this world. Without interrupting the natural law, without suspending natural process, God accomplishes His purpose, by taking all of the infinite number of attitudes, expressions, acts, and behaviors of free human beings and spiritual beings who make choices and do things, and God takes them all and weaves them perfectly into His own purpose. This is a greater miracle than a miracle, and it goes on all the time. He weaves together all of the infinite behaviors of men and demons with meticulous precision to fulfill exactly His will. This is a far greater display of divine wisdom and a far greater display of divine power than a momentary interruption of the natural law.

And this is constant. This is going on all the time. It is a constant, relentless, and astounding display of wisdom and power, operating every split second, and taking everything that's done, everything that's said, every behavior, and weaving it perfectly into His own plan, so that the end is God has woven together a tapestry of redemptive history that looks at the end exactly the way it looked in the beginning, when He drew the plan. Now, you will see this many ways in the Scripture, nowhere better than in the burial of Jesus. God is acting here, Christ is acting here, the Holy Spirit is acting – the Trinity is active, and yet behind the scenes. In the burial of Jesus, you have actions by three groups of people. You have actions by neutral soldiers. You have actions by loving saints. And you have actions by hateful enemies – spiritual leaders, hateful sinners. The soldiers, the saints, and the sinners are all acting. One group is neutral, the other group is positive, the other group is negative. One really have nothing at stake, some have everything at stake because they love Him, and some have everything at stake because they hate Him. But whether you are in the neutral category, or whether you are in the loving category, or whether you're in the hating category, everything that is done fits together to effect the purposes of God.

The soldiers did what they did because they were given the duty to do that, and that's what they always did. The saints did what they did because their hearts motivated them to do that. The spiritual leaders, the sinners of Israel, did what they did because they were driven by their ongoing hatred of Jesus Christ and wanted to prevent anything from going wrong with what they've already accomplished. But in any case, whatever the motives of the hearts that drive the behaviors, God is ordering all of it. Not in the fatalistic way, but in a massive expression of wisdom and power, by which the free choices of these people are woven together in a perfect tapestry for God to effect His purpose of displaying that He commands history, He is sovereign, the Scripture is true, and Christ is, in fact, God.

Now, let's look at these three categories as we think about the burial of Christ. Before we come to Luke 23, I remind you again of what I said. This is such an important event that Matthew writes about it, Mark writes about it, Luke writes about it and John writes about it. To start with, for point one, providence as seen in the action of the neutral soldiers. Let's go to John 19 - providence in the action of the neutral soldiers; we'll go to John 19. Before we get to the part that Luke talks about, we need to get kind of the chronological sequence here, and this section in John tells us what happens first. Verse 31, "The Jews, therefore" – when you see the expression "the Jews" in the Gospel of John, it almost always refers to the leaders of Israel. So this would be the Sanhedrin, those who wanted Jesus dead and had effected His death on the cross. It is not to be a demeaning statement of Jewish people as such, but "the Jews" John uses to represent these hateful spiritual leaders. "The Jews, therefore, because it was the Day of Preparation." That means the day of preparation for the

Passover; the Passover always falls on Nisan 14. This week Nisan 14 happened to be on a Saturday, which put it on a Sabbath, so because you have a Passover, and a Passover's on the Sabbath, it becomes a high day, it becomes an elevated Passover. And so "because it was a day of preparation, so that the body should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), they asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away."

Now, these fastidious, neurotically hypocritical Jews who lead the parade here are an amazing study in the difficulties of being a legalist, and the difficulties of being a hypocrite. They're so concerned that they not defile the high Sabbath day, the Passover Sabbath day, by having dead bodies or even living, crucified bodies hanging in the sky. They don't want those bodies up there, dead or alive. They want them down because they believe it will be a defilement for their celebration. And so they come to Pilate, which breaches their own scruples, to say the least, because earlier in John 18 it says, in the end of John 18, that when the Jews met with Pilate, Pilate came out to them because they wouldn't go into the Praetorium, because that would be to defile themselves. So they made Pilate come out, because that was a Gentile place. But here, and this is the very day of preparation for the Passover, they engage in some kind of a conversation with Pilate, and it doesn't say they made Pilate come out to them. We might assume that the issue was important enough for them that they would break one law of defilement in order to superficially keep another law of defilement. But nonetheless, they go to Pilate.

Now remember, Jesus gave up His life. Death is a surprise, except in the case of Jesus. It says at the end of verse 30, He "gave up His spirit." He had been on the cross only six hours. He had been put on the cross at 9:00, and He had given up His life at 3:00 in the afternoon. The normal time was two to three days. The two thieves were still alive, 'cause they were not in control of their own death the way Jesus was. All three, according to the Jews, would have desecrated the high Sabbath Passover day if left on the cross, dead or alive. The bodies need to come down. "They need to be dead, they need to be down or they'll pollute and defile our land."

They probably attach this to Deuteronomy 21:22 and 23, which talks about execution, and taking bodies down, and disposing of them appropriately. They wanted those bodies dead and down before Sabbath began, and it began about 6:00, when the sun went down. They don't mind murdering the Son of God, who has been declared to be innocent seven times, but they will scrupulously avoid some kind of traditional ceremonial defilement, while at the same time defiling themselves by even asking them to be protected from that defilement. And they're very familiar with crucifixion; as many as 30,000 Jews have been crucified at that time of history in the land of Israel, we are told. So they were very familiar with it, and bodies lingered for two or three days. However, if you wanted somebody to die very, very rapidly, in mere minutes, there was a means to do that – verse 31, "They asked Pilate that their legs might be broken."

This involved, according to historians, taking a huge iron mallet and smashing both legs, splintering with crushing blows - a gruesome, gruesome act which made death almost immediate, partly because of additional shock to the shock of crucifixion, partly because of additional blood loss to the blood loss of crucifixion, but mostly because of asphyxiation, because the only way a crucified person could survive would be to push up with legs and pull up with the arms, aiding the legs pushing, to be able to catch breath. And once they could no longer push up, their lungs would be crushed, and they would be unable to breathe. This would bring death immediately. They don't want Jesus on that cross, they want Him dead and down. It serves their purpose not to defile their Sabbath. What they didn't know was He was dead, and God wanted Him dead and down also. And

they were simply the means of effecting the purposes of God – they, for all the wrong reasons.

Well, Pilate, who has been utterly intimidated by the Jews, gives them permission. Verse 32, “The soldiers therefore came, broke the legs of the first man and of the other man who was crucified with him because they were still alive” – as crucified victims normally would be. “But coming to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they didn’t break His legs.” Now, the soldiers are experts at death. They know a dead body when they see one. This is what they do. This is their profession. They are executioners. They kill people. They know dead people when they see them. He is truly dead. You say, “Why are you making an issue out of that?” Because one of the oldest of all heresies that denies the resurrection is the idea that Jesus never really was dead. He went into a semi-coma, they took Him into the tomb, and lying in the tomb, in the coolness of the tomb, and with the aromatic spices all around His body, He was revived, and came out of His coma, and walked out. And if the only testimony that He was dead was, say, the testimony of John, which is given in verse 35: “He who had seen has born witness, and his witness is true, and he knows he’s telling the truth that you also may believe” – John referring to himself. If all we had was the testimony of John, then the critics might say, “Well, after all, John is a biased witness, we can’t really trust him.” But here is the testimony of some indifferent, neutral soldiers, who just killed people for a living, and they know a dead person when they see one. They’ve got nothing at stake in this issue. He is dead, and they know He’s dead, and because He’s dead, they do not break His legs.

As one final act, sealing that He is dead, verse 34: “One of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear” – ran a spear into His side – “and immediately there came out blood and water.” This is obviously an indication that He was dead; blood gushing out of His side, along with lymphatic fluid that’s contained in the pericardium around the heart, could indicate that His heart burst. That literally, by His own will, He burst His own heart, and it came gushing out His side. This would be consistent with Psalm 69 and verse 20. In that Psalm 69 there are references to the cross, to Jesus being thirsty, and being given vinegar to drink. And then it says in verse 20, “Reproach has broken My heart.” And maybe the heartbreaking was not simply an emotional kind of heart-breaking, but an actual rupturing of the heart. So He is truly dead.

Why is this important? John says, “I was there, I saw it, I bore witness, I’m telling the truth that you may believe.” And why did this happen? Verse 36, “These things came to pass that the Scripture might be fulfilled, ‘Not a bone of Him shall be broken.’” Psalm 34:20, Psalm 34:20 - hundreds and hundreds of years before, in describing the death of Messiah, it was stated that not a bone of Him shall be broken. This was necessary, dear friends, because in Exodus 12:46 it says that a Passover lamb cannot have a broken bone. The Passover lamb was a lamb without blemish, and without spot, and without a broken bone. And the prophecy was that when Messiah comes and offers the ultimate sacrifice, not a bone of Him will be broken. And here it is fulfilled. And that’s not all. Verse 37, John writes, “And again another Scripture says, ‘They shall look on Him whom they’ – What? – “pierced” (Zechariah 12:10). Zechariah said someday the Jews “will look on Him whom they have pierced” (Zechariah 12:10). The actions of the soldiers on the body of Christ were under divine control, to authenticate the promises of Scripture, and therefore validate the claims of Jesus Christ to be the fulfillment of those promises - also to affirm His death, which then affirms the reality of His resurrection. He can’t rise from the dead unless He’s dead. We know He’s dead, and prophecy is fulfilled even at His death. The hypocritical Jews, the Roman governor, Pilate, who is so intimidated, the soldiers, move with a measure of freedom, doing whatever they want to do, and yet the will of God is done.

So Jesus controlled not only His own death, but the handling of His own body as it's hanging on the cross. I guess, in the words of Peter, "He was put to death in the flesh, but alive in the spirit." His body was hanging there, but He was alive and controlling everything. So the action of these indifferent soldiers God providentially uses to fulfill Scripture, showing the veracity of Scripture, and the authenticity of Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of Scripture, and also validating the resurrection by affirming that He was, in fact, dead, by indifferent witnesses. Now, that sets us up to go back to Luke 23 and verse 50.

We now come to the actual removal of the body from the cross. The fluid has gushed out of His side, He is still hanging there. When the Jewish leaders went to Pilate and asked that this be done, as I just read you, Pilate sent the soldiers to do it. They used that method called crucifraction, or *crucifragium*; they didn't do it to Jesus. Pilate doesn't know that yet when somebody else comes to visit him, verse 50. "Behold, a man named Joseph, who was a member of the Council, a good and righteous man (he had not consented to their plan and action), a man from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who was waiting for the kingdom of God, this man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus." Now we see a loving saint; not just indifferent, neutral soldiers, but a loving saint, and providence works through him. What motivated this man? He had a lot at stake, a lot at stake. He's a member of the Council; he's a member of the Sanhedrin. He's one of 70 - the most elite people of the nation, plus the high priest, a total of 71 - who belongs to the supreme court of Israel. We don't know whether he's a priest or a lay person; it was made up of both. But all of a sudden, he comes out of nowhere. We never meet him anywhere else, before or after. And yet he's so important that Matthew identifies him, Mark identifies him, Luke identifies him, and John identifies him. It's an amazing thing. A man named Joseph, a member of the Council. This is his only appearance in Scripture, and it is a marvelous appearance. And there's enough detail given to us to tell us that this man, this man is good, in the right sense, and righteous, in the true sense.

His story is brief, but his story is wonderful. It is a story of salvation. It is an unexpected, somewhat shocking testimony of faith in Christ, set against the rejection of the whole nation, and set against the hostility of the rest of the Council. At least one out of the 71 believed in Jesus. He's like the thief on the cross in the fact that he is saved, but he's unlike them. The thief is an outcast, the centurion is a Gentile outcast, but he's on the inside. This is a soul rescued from the elite leaders of Israel. This is one of the few noble, and the few mighty, and the few prominent that are saved. The lone dissenter, "a good and righteous man," Luke says, the good in the right sense of spiritual goodness, and righteous (*dikaïos*, same word used, same exact word used in verse 47 of Christ). "Certainly this Man was righteous." Jesus was righteous and Joseph was righteous. Jesus was righteous by nature, and Joseph was righteous by grace, right? But it was the same righteousness. If you're righteous, you have the same righteousness as God does, as Christ does. That's what Paul says in Philippians chapter 3, that he had a righteousness not of his own, but the righteousness of God, imputed to him through faith in Jesus Christ. So, Joseph is as righteous as Jesus is righteous, only in Joseph's case it's a gift of grace. In Jesus' case, it's part of His essential nature. Both righteous: one by nature, one by grace.

There were a few like this in Israel. If you were to go back to the beginning of Luke, verse 5 of chapter 1, the first two people that are identified in the history of Christ are Zacharias and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist, the forerunner to Christ. It says in verse 5 of Luke 1, "In the days of Herod, king of Judah, there was a certain priest named Zacharias of the division of Abijah, who had a wife from the daughters of Aaron; her name was Elizabeth. They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord." See, they would

have been like Joseph, righteous and good, meaning obedient.

Or chapter 2, verse 25, “There was a man in Jerusalem” - remember, when Jesus was taken into the temple for His ceremonial presentation – “a man there named Simeon. This man was righteous and devout.” There are those two things again; having been made righteous, he becomes obedient. He, too, is one looking for the consolation of Israel, looking for the Redeemer, looking for redemption, looking for the kingdom, like Zacharias and Elizabeth were. Down in verse 37, you meet a widow named Anna, and “she never left the temple, serving night and day with fasting and prayers. At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for redemption in Jerusalem.”

There were these people in the midst of this apostate nation who were good and righteous - devout, obedient people looking for the kingdom; looking, therefore, for the King; looking for redemption; looking, therefore, for the Redeemer. These were the true believers. These were the remnant. And, folks, just as a footnote at this point, I tell you this: redemptive history moves through the history of the remnant believers; the rest of the people in this world are incidental.

Redemptive history moves only through the redeemed, and the redeemed are always that remnant. This is the flow of God’s purpose continuing through this generation. And even though Israel was apostate, there were those people who believed. There was a remnant, and the remnant is always the continuity in redemptive history. And somehow Joseph of Arimathea was part of that, and he had come to affirm his faith in Christ.

How do you know that, just because it says he was good and righteous? Because Matthew says he was a disciple of Jesus Christ, a disciple of Jesus Christ, as he definitely had committed himself to Christ. He had somehow been able to follow Christ. He had somehow been able to listen to Christ and be convinced by Christ. And then John tells us, most interestingly, “a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one for fear of the Jews.” Wow. Now, the Bible doesn’t particularly exalt secret disciples. In fact, you have an illustration of secret disciples in John 12, verses 42 and 43, who were not really true believers. They were secret only in the sense that they were drawn and attracted to Jesus, but they weren’t the real thing. This was the real thing. He just hadn’t quite yet overcome the intimidation of being a member of the Sanhedrin, who were involved in bringing about the death of Christ, and he hadn’t gotten to the place where he had enough courage to rise up and say he was a lover and a believer in Jesus Christ. He’s cowardly for the moment.

But at least, according to verse 51, “he hadn’t consented to their plan and action.” He may not have shown up when the vote was taken, or he wandered off into a corner. But his love for Christ was in his dissent, if not in his open confession. He was horrified by what they were doing, what they were discussing. He was devastated by what they did to Jesus. It was horrific for him, a man who had been given righteousness by God for his true faith. He was a truly righteous man, and it showed up in his obedience under the title of his goodness. He was looking for the kingdom of God. He was into the redemption of God, looking for the Messiah, who would bring the kingdom. You can’t have a kingdom without a king. He was from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, probably in Judea; we don’t know where. Some associate it with Ramathaim-zophim, which was the home of Samuel; some with a town near Lydda, but we have no idea where it was. They knew where it was, and he may be identified as Joseph of Arimathea because he became a believer, and this is for the church later on to be able to identify who he was. He was waiting for the kingdom of God; so was Zacharias and Elizabeth; so were Simeon and Anna; so was John the Baptist. He was a Jew who was a true Jew;

he was a believing Jew; and he would have been heartbroken.

Why did he ask for the body of Jesus? Why did he want to expose himself? Well, maybe he was tired of hiding himself. Maybe he felt it was the least he could do for his Messiah, to step up. Maybe he believed in the promise of Jesus, that He would rise again. If he was a disciple of Jesus, and a follower of Jesus, he'd heard Him say it. Maybe he wanted to be sure, like the thief. Remember, the thief said, "Remember me when You come into Your kingdom." So the thief on the cross understood that because Jesus was dying didn't mean it was the end; he was still the King and would have a kingdom. He certainly must have believed at least what the thief believed, and he knew that if he didn't step up and declare his faith in Christ in this hour of crisis, he might not be accepted into that kingdom. And he, unlike the thief, has an opportunity to demonstrate his love. The thief didn't have an opportunity to demonstrate his love to Christ, because he didn't live long enough; this man did. Was he willing to take a public stand for Christ? What could he do? How could he do it? Well, the noblest thing he could think to do would be to remove from Jesus the final indignity, which was this: that Jesus would be thrown in a pit with all the crucified criminals. That's what was done as the final desecration of those who were deemed to be outcasts.

Mark 15:43 puts it this way: "He gathered up courage and went in before Pilate." That took a lot of courage. I'll tell you why. The Jews were in there talking to Pilate. Very likely, it's a very small place, everybody knew them, everybody knew him. The Jews were in there talking to Pilate; they said, "We want you to go break their legs so the bodies come down." They've asked Pilate. Pilate sends the soldiers; the soldiers haven't reported to him what's happened yet. And while these Jews who asked for that are coming out, Joseph's coming in. We don't know whether they met in the street. Maybe. We don't know whether they glanced into each other's eyes. The Jewish leaders wondered what Joseph was going in to see Pilate about, but it didn't matter anymore. He couldn't stay secret about his faith. He sums up all the courage he has in his heart, and he goes to see Pilate, thus defiling himself; but that was nothing other than what the leaders had done. And John 19:38 says it was just after they asked that the legs be broken, it was just after that that Joseph shows up. And when he goes in, if you look at John's Gospel, and he asks, Pilate doesn't know what's happened yet, because they haven't come back to report whether Jesus is dead in fact. So Pilate has to wait for information before he can release the body.

Mark 15:43 to 45 says that Pilate had to send to find out what had happened. That's how close these things happened. They asked that this be done. They're leaving, he's coming. He asked for the body. Pilate hasn't gotten word and it's very nearby. You do remember, don't you, that all of this happened in a very, very close area? In fact, Pilate has to summon the centurion to come back and tell him whether in fact these men are dead. What is motivating this man? Well, you say, "It's his love for Christ; he wants to spare Him the final indignity." Well, that's true. It's his desire to rise above a guilty conscience, because he's been a secret disciple and it's eating away at him, and he finally wants to declare his faith in an open way. He understands Deuteronomy 21:22 and 23, that people need appropriate burial, even if they are people who have been punished – certainly an innocent man. He doesn't want Jesus thrown in the body dump with the rest of the riff-raff. He had some history, knowing that there are some occasions written in Roman history in which Romans would give to a family the corpse of an executed criminal. On some rare occasions they would do that, and so maybe he thought that could happen.

Maybe he thought Pilate would do it because Jesus had been declared innocent so many times. Maybe, if he had a conscience that was plaguing him because of the secrecy, Pilate even had a

worse conscience plaguing him, because he had executed an innocent man, and maybe he could give Pilate at least one final opportunity to do with this man something that was kind. Maybe all of that is true, but that's not what moved him. Now there's another little piece of the story you need to know about him; he was rich. Matthew 27:57 says he was a rich man. Matthew 27:60 says he owned a tomb, and the tomb was his own tomb where he was going to place his family members, and himself would be placed there as well. So he had his own tomb, and he was a very rich man. The tomb had never yet been occupied, so he must have been a relatively young person, and everybody in his family was alive. So here's a rich man with his own tomb in which no one has ever been placed. He's the perfect person to come and say, "Let me have the body; I have a tomb," and it would have been the most appropriate tomb for King Jesus, a tomb in which no one else had ever been lain.

What was really behind this was the purpose of God. Turn to Isaiah 53, Isaiah 53, which talks about how Jesus was crucified for us, "smitten by God and afflicted," verse 4; "pierced through for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities," et cetera. "God caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him," verse 6; verse 7, He's "like a lamb led to slaughter, like a sheep, silent before its shearers, didn't open his mouth." He goes on to talk about that. Then verse 9, "His grave was assigned with wicked men." Sure, he is supposed to be thrown in the dump with the rest of the criminals in the pit. "Yet He was with a rich man in his death." How remarkable is that? How remarkable is that? His grave was planned to be with the wicked, but He was buried with the rich. Joseph is doing what he's doing freely, motivated by the love of his heart and the desire to come out of the shadows. He is hurrying, not because he fears violating the Sabbath – he's already defiled himself by going to Pilate. He's already further going to defile himself by handling a dead body. He is being driven on in this enterprise by his own free motivations and choices, but behind the scenes it's determined by God, so that Jesus will fulfill Isaiah 53:9 and not be thrown in a body pile with criminals, but be in a grave with the rich. He moved at divine speed in a divine direction, not just giving Christ a proper, honorable burial, but by fulfilling Isaiah 53:9.

There's something else here. Go back to Matthew 12:40, Matthew 12:40. And here's another prophecy concerning the burial of Jesus, given by Jesus Himself. So you have an Old Testament prophecy, Isaiah 53:9, and a New Testament prophecy, Matthew 12:40. Jesus says, "As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be there, be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" – "the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." A day and a night simply stood for a day, any part of a day. You can show that from many texts in the Old Testament. Jesus says, "I will be three days in the grave," a portion of three days in the grave. He had to be in the grave Friday, had to be in the grave Saturday, had to be in the grave Sunday – a part of Friday, a part of Sunday and all of Saturday would qualify, which meant that Jesus needed to be buried before sundown, so that He would be there a portion of Friday.

So again, turning back to Luke's Gospel, Joseph being moved by God in the direction of getting the body of Jesus off the cross; nobody else volunteered. There wasn't any kind of argument about who was going to get the body of Christ. If it wasn't Joseph, it wouldn't have been anybody. And He would have been thrown in a criminal dump, and Isaiah 53 would have been wrong. And they might not have done it on the Sabbath; that might not have been the kind of action that was taken to make sure that He was there on Friday as well as Saturday and Sunday. But God knows all of that.

And so here comes this one man, out of nowhere. He's given permission, Pilate sends the centurion

– they send the centurion back, and tells Pilate yes, He’s dead. And so he says to Joseph, who is waiting for this information, “You can have the body.” He consented to give him the body. And verse 53 then picks it up. “He took it down.” Mark 15:46 says he did it himself – did it himself with his own hands. The cross would be laid on the ground. He would be pulling the hands over the heads of the nails, and pulling the feet gently over the heads of the nails, of the nail that went through both feet. He would be pulling the thorns out of the dead brow. And then he would wash the body from top to bottom, all the sweat, and the dirt, and the dust that accumulated in the blood would all be washed. And there he was by himself, washing the body of his King. It must have been heartsick moments, unbelievable moments for him.

Then it says, “By himself he wrapped it in a linen cloth.” He had bought that linen cloth previously, and he wrapped Jesus in it himself, according to Mark 15:46. Jews did not embalm, like the Egyptians did, for example. They simply wrapped the body in strips of cloth, and sprinkled powdered fragrance in there, to sort of overpower the stench of decaying flesh. That’s why in the grave of Lazarus, you remember, his sister said his body stinks in just a few days. He didn’t have any spices. None of the writers say he had any spices. He just had cloth.

But somebody else showed up. Turn to chapter 19 of John – and we’re almost finished, so hang in there. John 19, somebody else showed up. Verse 38, “And after these things, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus. Pilate granted permission. He came, therefore, and took away His body.” Verse 39, “And Nicodemus” – remember him? Nicodemus who came to Jesus by night in the third chapter, and got the great gospel presentation about being born again. Nicodemus came, Nicodemus who didn’t believe on that occasion, and who was warned that he would be condemned if he didn’t believe. That was one of the harshest conversations Jesus ever had with a spiritual leader. He has now made up his mind and also become a follower of Jesus. He had first come to Him by night. He brings “a mixture of myrrh and aloes, a hundred pound weight.” Best calculation that I can do is about 65 pounds; that would be fit for a king, for this man’s got some means as well. He shows up.

And the first question I asked was, “Where’s Peter? Where’s Andrew? Where are the disciples?” These are absolute strangers. This is this one guy who had made no previous commitment to Christ, at least recorded on the pages of Scripture, and somebody who comes out of nowhere, namely Joseph. But they’re the real deal.

Myrrh is a fragrant, gummy resin that’s made in a powdered form – very, very strong fragrance. And aloes you’re more familiar with. It comes from the leaves of the sandalwood tree and also is an aromatic powder. And they mix all of that so that they would literally overpower the stench with other fragrance, and they would just dump it in great quantities in between the strips as they wrap the body and then put a cloth over them. By the way, the Shroud of Turin is a fraud – just a footnote – and there’s a lot of evidence to indicate that. But they would put some kind of a garment, usually a linen cloth, over the strips that they wrapped.

They then, back to verse 53, “they laid Him in a tomb.” It would be Joseph’s own tomb, cut into the rock, “where no one had ever lain,” fit for a king. Now, He has been assigned to die and be thrown with the wicked, yet He is with the rich in His death. And the prophecy of Isaiah 53 is fulfilled, and Jesus’ own prophecy of Matthew 12:40 is fulfilled, because it’s still Friday, and He’s now wrapped, powdered, and in the grave. And John 19:41 says this grave happened to be in a garden – happened to be in a garden. Here are these two men. I don’t know if they knew each other. I don’t

know how Nicodemus found out what Joseph was doing. Maybe Nicodemus was also on the Council, I don't know. Maybe he was close to Joseph, or they knew a mutual friend. But they come in order that what was prophesied might take place, and in order that He might be three days in the heart of the earth. It was common to put shelves in these kinds of graves, and you'd put a lot of people in there, and once the flesh completely deteriorated and all you had were the bones collected on the shelf, you put them in a little box called an ossuary. Of course, Jesus never saw that, because His flesh didn't see corruption.

What a funeral. No hymns sung. No prayer prayed. No sermon preached. Yet no one was ever buried more lovingly, more generously. Even Asa, whose body was laid in a bed in 2 Chronicles 16, even Asa didn't have as rich a burial as Jesus did at the hands of two men. And all these actions of these two men were superintended by God. This is so important.

Verse 54, "It was the Preparation Day." It was still Friday; Sabbath was about to begin. He's in the ground on Friday. Then we meet some other loving people; now, the women, who had come with Him out of Galilee: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, the two Marys. We've met them, they were there at the cross, "standing at a distance," according to verse 49. They followed Him out of Galilee and served Him in every way they could. They come following Joseph. They saw the tomb and how His body was laid.

You say, "Well what's the point of telling us that?" They're still stunned. They don't know what to make out of it. They don't help these two men. They just watch. They go in and they see it. Why is that important? Because one of the second great accusations against the resurrection of Jesus Christ is that the women in the morning went to the wrong tomb. The reason they thought Jesus was raised was they went to a tomb that was the wrong tomb; there was nobody there because there never had been anybody there – and this precludes that possibility. They knew exactly where Jesus was buried. They went there when they buried Him there, and they saw how He was buried. So the idea that they went to the wrong tomb is ludicrous. So the free actions of these women, independent of any knowledge of anything, helps to thwart a horrible lie about the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Well, they're so moved. They saw what these two men did. They felt bad. So in verse 30 – verse 56 – "They returned and prepared spices and perfumes." They couldn't let those two men be the only ones who anointed the body of Jesus. So they went back on that Friday in whatever time was left, maybe an hour or so, and they got the spices, and they mixed their own set of spices. They were not going to be outdone by strangers. And on the Sabbath they rested, according to the commandment. They were dutiful, God-fearing, Scripture-loving, obedient Jewish ladies, and they kept the Sabbath, because Exodus 20:10 told them to keep the Sabbath holy and not do any work on the Sabbath. So they prepared all the spices on Friday night before the Sabbath, rested on the Sabbath, and then verse 1 of 24, "On the first day of the week at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices they had prepared." Boy, did they get a shock. They knew exactly where to go, didn't they, because they had been there on Friday? Whether you are a neutral soldier or a loving saint, God's in control of everything for His own purposes.

Finally, in just a minute, quickly, what about the hateful spiritual leaders; does God use what they do? Absolutely. Turn to Matthew 27, and we'll wrap it up there. Matthew 27:62, I'll just read this to you and make a comment. "On the next day" – which is the one after the Preparation, this would be, what, Saturday now, okay? Saturday; Jesus is in the grave – "the chief priests and the Pharisees gather together with Pilate." They really don't mind defiling themselves, according to their own

standards. So they go to meet with Pilate on Saturday, the Sabbath, Passover, and they say, “Sir, we remember that when He was still alive, that deceiver said, ‘After three days I’m going to rise again.’” Notice how they describe Him, as a what? – deceiver. “Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, lest the disciples come and steal Him away, say to the people, ‘He’s risen from the dead,’ and the last deception will be worse than the first.”

They’re afraid that the disciples are going to come and steal His body. What they don’t know is the disciples wouldn’t do that. First of all, they’re not that stupid; you don’t steal a dead body and then pretend it’s alive and go give your life as a martyr for the cause of a lie. Furthermore, they didn’t expect Him to rise, sad to say. But they were afraid that the disciples would come and steal His body, and so they said, “Look, Pilate, we’ve got to have a Roman guard on that grave.” Pilate said in verse 65, “You have a guard, go make it as secure as you know how.” They were licking their chops. Boy, we have put an end to that possibility. “They went and made the grave secure. Along with the guard they set a seal on the stone.” They couldn’t break the seal, the Roman seal. They were protecting the disciples from stealing the body. Witlessly, they had just dispelled another lie about the resurrection, that the disciples came and stole the body, which historically has been another lie about the resurrection - which is also ludicrous and impossible. And they saw to it in their own hateful way. So in an effort to prevent a lie, they discredited a far greater lie – that Jesus did not rise.

God reigns, friends, and He works in every situation to accomplish His purpose. You see it in the case of the burial of Jesus Christ; His purposes are fulfilled. “And all of this is written,” John says, “that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, and believing, might have life in His name.”

Father, we thank You again for the glory of this account in all its richness, the burial of Christ. How powerful indeed it is. O Lord, this is but a microcosm of how You control everything, all the time, relentlessly; miracles, they are rare; providence never ceases, as You orchestrate everything with infinite wisdom and precision to achieve Your own ends, to Your own glory, and to the benefit of those who know You and love You. Thank You for this. Thank You for letting us see that Christ, though He was dead in the flesh, was alive in the spirit, bringing to pass every detail, fulfilling Scripture, thus authenticating His messiahship, demonstrating that You are the ruler of history and the sovereign God over all lives, whether they are indifferent, whether they are believers, or whether they are hateful non-believers. You rule over all to accomplish Your purpose. We rejoice in the knowledge of the truth that Jesus is in fact the only Savior, and we confess Him as our Lord and Savior, to Your glory and our everlasting joy, in His name. Amen.

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