

Ministry of Grace Church

Matthew 27 – Part 2

Preface:

Last week, as we looked at the first part of Matthew chapter 27, we were told about the civil trials before Pilate, then Herod, then Pilate again. We learned that Pilate declared Jesus to be innocent at least 4 times and even Judas told the chief priests that he had betrayed an innocent man.

However, Pilate was unable to persuade the crowds that Jesus was not deserving of death. They repeatedly shouted, “Crucify Him. Crucify Him!” Wanting to release Him as part of the tradition, Pilate offered to release Jesus instead of the notorious prisoner, Barabbas. The chief priests and Pharisees convinced the crowds that they wanted Barabbas. So, Pilate released Barabbas and turned Jesus over to the Roman soldiers. Before taking Jesus to be crucified, however, they whipped Him, they spit on Him, they plucked out His beard, they mocked Him, and they beat Him with their fists. Then – they led Him out to be crucified. (Slide 2A)

The Crucifixion

Matthew 27:32-44

³²As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross. ³³And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), ³⁴they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. ³⁵And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. ³⁶Then they sat down and kept watch over him there. ³⁷And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.” ³⁸Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. ³⁹And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads ⁴⁰and saying, “You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” ⁴¹So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, ⁴²“He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. ⁴³He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” ⁴⁴And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

Mark 15:21-32 – ²¹And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross. ²²And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull). ²³And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. ²⁴And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. ²⁵And it was the third hour when they crucified him. ²⁶And the inscription of the charge against him read, “The King of the Jews.” ²⁷And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left. ²⁹And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and

rebuild it in three days, ³⁰save yourself, and come down from the cross!” ³¹So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. ³²Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.” Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.

Luke 23:26-43 – ²⁶And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. ²⁷And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. ²⁸But turning to them Jesus said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ ³⁰Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’ ³¹For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?” ³²Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. ³³And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁴And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” And they cast lots to divide his garments. ³⁵And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!” ³⁶The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine ³⁷and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” ³⁸There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.” ³⁹One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” ⁴⁰But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” ⁴²And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” ⁴³And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

John 19:16-27 – ¹⁶So he delivered him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus, ¹⁷and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. ¹⁸There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. ¹⁹Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” ²⁰Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. ²¹So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but rather, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’” ²²Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.” ²³When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, ²⁴so they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be.” This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, “They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.” So the soldiers did these things, ²⁵but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” ²⁷Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

Notes:

Roman crucifixions were usually done next to a well-travelled road so that those walking by would see the full effect of the crucifixion. This was done as a warning to every one of the consequences

of violating Roman law. We are accustomed to hearing about Jesus being crucified on a hill, often referred to as Calvary, but Calvary is never mentioned in the English translation of the Bible. In the four gospel accounts, it is referred to as *Golgotha*, meaning “a skull.” In Latin, however, it is *Calvarius*, (meaning “a bald head, or a skull”) which is where we get the name Calvary. So, even though Golgotha and Calvary both refer to a hill, possibly one resembling a skull, Jesus was probably not crucified “On a hill far away ...” (Slide 3A) He was probably crucified beside the road next to a hill.

Let’s see what we can learn about Jesus’ crucifixion from the Word of God. At least, let’s see if we can understand the order of events on the day of Jesus’ crucifixion. We can’t do this just from Matthew’s gospel account because, as we have noted several times before, he didn’t adhere to a strict chronological order in his writings. Here’s a rendering of the events of that fateful day:

Around nine o’clock in the morning (the third hour, by the Roman reckoning of time) they brought Jesus and the two criminals to Golgotha (Mark 15:35). There, the three were each stripped of their clothing and nailed to a cross. There is a difference of opinion here as to whether Jesus was stripped completely naked or whether they left His loincloth on. Bear in mind that the whole idea of crucifixion, as the Romans practiced it, was to inflict as much physical and psychological pain as possible. In fact, crucifixion was so degrading that it was never mentioned in polite society. It was intentionally degrading as well as painful. It’s why the condemned one had to carry his cross to the place of execution; it’s why the condemned one had to wear a description of his crime on a placard hanging around his neck until he was actually nailed to the cross and then this description was nailed above him on the cross; it’s why crucifixions were performed next to a well-travelled road where mocking and jeering were encouraged; and it’s why they were stripped naked and hung that way for all to see. Any and all self-respect and self-decency were systematically stripped away. Roman crucifixion took away everything possible from a person, including his life.

This was actually the second time that Jesus has been stripped naked. The first time it was in front of soldiers. This time, however, it was in front of men and women (including Mary, His mother, and several other women who had ministered to him).

Much has been made over the years about the “seven sayings from the cross.” The German composer, Joseph Hyden, even wrote an oratorio about them. Personally, I don’t see any mystical significance to the seven sayings. However, it is informative to understand everything that Jesus said while He was giving His life and suffering for you and me.

While they were nailing Jesus to His cross, He made His first comments. He said, “**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.**” (Luke 23:34) Actually, the verb “said” is expressed in the imperfect tense, indicating past, ongoing action. It could be translated as either, “He began saying” or “He continued saying.” So, it appears that Jesus said this more than once. The cross was laid on the ground and Jesus was laid on top while His hands and feet were nailed to it. Then, the cross was raised up and dropped into a hole, perhaps a foot deep. The effect of this action would have been to jar and strain every muscle and tendon in his arms and upper body. Keep in mind that He was already weak from the scourging and beatings the soldiers inflicted on Him, too weak, in fact, to carry His own cross. After Jesus’ cross was dropped into the ground and secured, they offered Him wine mixed with gall. (Matthew 27:34) This was a stupefying drink that was given to those who were crucified. Its purpose was to numb their minds and numb their pain, thus prolonging the process, but Jesus refused to drink it. The inscription over Him read, “This is

Jesus of Nazareth, The King of the Jews.” (Matthew 27:37, Mark 15:26, Luke 23:38, John 19:19) It was written in Aramaic, Latin, and Greek so that virtually everyone walking by would be able to read it.

Once the crosses were in place, the soldiers divided the clothing. Jesus’ tunic was split up 4 ways and a piece given to each of the four soldiers guarding Him. His outer cloak, however, was not divided and they gambled to determine who would get it. (Slide 3B) (Matthew 27:35, Mark 15:24, Luke 23:34, John 19:23).

Next, we learn that the soldiers, as well as those passing by, mocked Jesus while He hung there. (Matthew 27:39-43, Mark 15:29-30, Luke 23:35-37) They said,

You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross. (Matthew 27:40)

The Chief Priests, Scribes, and the Elders also mocked Him and said,

He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, “I am the Son of God.” (Matthew 27:42-43)

One of the criminals who were hanged also railed at him, saying,

Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us! (Luke 23:39)

Yes, Jesus could have saved Himself by coming down from the cross. If He had, however, He would have been acting against the Father’s will and no one else in the whole world would ever be saved again.

But the second criminal responded to the first criminal, saying,

Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong. (Luke 23:40-41)

Notice, that this is a confession of the second criminal’s guilt. Then he said to Jesus,

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. (Luke 23:42)

Again, notice that this is his recognition of who Jesus is, the Messiah, the one who will bring God’s Kingdom to earth. This criminal has just humbled himself and asked for salvation from the one and only Son of God. And Jesus responded,

Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise. (Luke 23:43)

This is the second comment that Jesus made from the cross. But, let’s not miss the significance of this. Only believers go to Paradise. Therefore, we see that the second criminal recognized that Jesus was sinless and he believed that Jesus was the Messiah, who would one day usher in the Kingdom. Jesus proclaimed that this criminal was saved and would go to Paradise when he died. (Slide 4A)

Jesus then spoke for a third time from the cross, saying to His mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” and to John, the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” (John 19:26-27) This was His way of

telling John to take Mary into his household and care for her, which he did. This was Jesus' third comment from the cross. (Slide 4B)

The Death of Jesus

Matthew 27:45-56

⁴⁵Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. ⁴⁶And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" ⁴⁷And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, "This man is calling Elijah." ⁴⁸And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. ⁴⁹But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." ⁵⁰And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. ⁵¹And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. ⁵²The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, ⁵³and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. ⁵⁴When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!" ⁵⁵There were also many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, ⁵⁶among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

Mark 15:33-41 – ³³And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. ³⁴And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" ³⁵And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "Behold, he is calling Elijah." ³⁶And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." ³⁷And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. ³⁸And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. ³⁹And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" ⁴⁰There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. ⁴¹When he was in Galilee, they followed him and ministered to him, and there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem.

Luke 23:44-49 – ⁴⁴It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, ⁴⁵while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last. ⁴⁷Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, "Certainly this man was innocent!" ⁴⁸And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts. ⁴⁹And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things.

John 19:28-37 – ²⁸After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." ²⁹A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. ³⁰When Jesus had received the sour wine, he

said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. ³¹Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away. ³²So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. ³³But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. ³⁵He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe. ³⁶For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken.” ³⁷And again another Scripture says, “They will look on him whom they have pierced.”

Notes:

Remember, the crucifixion started at 9:00 in the morning (the third hour by Roman reckoning). According to Matthew’s account, there was darkness from the sixth hour (12:00 noon) until the ninth hour (3:00 PM). (Slide 5A) This was not the result of a solar eclipse and it was not the result of a sand storm as some liberal theologians would have us believe. This was a supernatural darkness for three hours just like the three days of darkness during the plagues on Egypt. There will be yet one more of these supernatural times of darkness as a result of the 5th bowl judgment being poured out toward the end of the Tribulation (Revelation 16:10-11).

At the end of this darkness, we are told that Jesus cried out “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” The meaning of which is, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” This perfectly fulfilled the prophecy of Psalms 22:1. Although we are never told specifically, it appears that during these three hours of darkness, the Father turned His face away from the Son (Slide 5B) because He was bearing the sins of all of mankind. This is the only time ever that the fellowship between God the Father and God the Son has been broken. Notice that it was sin that broke the fellowship between Father and Son. It is also sin that breaks the fellowship between God and a Christian and only confession can restore that fellowship. Jesus’ cry to the father was His fourth comment from the cross.

Apparently, it was immediately after this that Jesus made his fifth comment from the cross when He called out, “I thirst.” (John 19:28) Matthew tells us that someone then ran to get some vinegar on a sponge for Jesus. The fact that this person ran to get the sponge indicates that there was now light. Consider this, for the past three hours Jesus had been in the dark, separated from God, He had endured the excruciating pain of the Cross, and He had been thirsty. When you combine these three, you have an experience that can only be compared to Hell. Jesus went through this for you and me.

As soon as He had received the vinegar, Jesus declared His sixth comment from the cross, calling out in a loud voice, “It is finished.” (John 19:30) This is translated from the Greek word *tetelestai*, which had several meanings to the Greek speaking world in Jesus’ day:

- It is what a servant would say to his or her master after completing an assignment given to him or her, just as Jesus had completed doing His Father’s will.
- It is what a priest would say after examining a sacrificial lamb when he determined it was, in fact, without spot or blemish. Jesus perfectly fulfilled the requirements of the Passover Lamb of God.

- It is what a writer or an artist would proclaim when a manuscript or painting was done. (The death of Jesus on the cross completed the picture that God had been painting, the story He had been writing for years.)
- Perhaps the most significant use of this word by Jesus was that it was what a merchant would declare when a debt had been paid in full. Jesus had fully paid the sin debt for every human being who has ever lived.

There is a story told by Warren Wiersbe that brings this home:

There was once a rather eccentric evangelist named Alexander Wooten, who was approached by a flippant young man who asked, “What must I do to be saved?”

“It’s too late!” Wooten replied, and went about his work.

The young man became alarmed. “Do you mean that it’s too late for me to be saved?” he asked. “Is there nothing I can do?”

“Too late!” said Wooten. “*It’s already been done!* The only thing you can do is believe.”

But we’re not yet at the end of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. His seventh, and final, comment from the cross was, “**Father, into your hands I commit my spirit**” (Luke 12:46) And – Matthew makes it clear that he declared this with a loud voice! Remember last week I talked about who was responsible for taking Jesus’ life. Was it Judas? Was it the religious leaders? Was it the crowd of Jews at the trial by Pontius Pilate? Was it Pilate, himself? Was it every sinner who has ever lived?

In reality, it was all of these. And yet, it was none of these. In John’s gospel account we read:

For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.” (John 10:17-18)

Jesus was NOT killed. He voluntarily gave up His life, and He did it for your sake and mine. (Slide 6A) And – because He was guiltless, the spotless Lamb of God, He was able to take it up again three days later.

Earthquake

If you read through the Bible carefully, you will notice that God occasionally uses earthquakes and related geologic phenomena in the execution of His plan for mankind. You may recall that the judgment of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram during the desert wanderings was accomplished by the earth opening its mouth and swallowing them alive down into Sheol. Also, in Ezekiel’s description of the battle of Gog and Magog in chapters 38 and 39, he talks about a great earthquake that causes the defeat of Gog and his armies. In the book of Revelation, there are a number of earthquakes that accompany God’s pouring out of His wrath. So, it should come as no surprise that upon the death of Jesus, there was an earthquake.

As soon as the earthquake occurred, the Centurion at the cross declared, “**Truly this was the Son of God!**”

But, that’s not all that happened when Jesus died. We also read that the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. So, what’s the significance of that? First of all, the veil was torn from

the top to the bottom, not from the bottom to the top. Only God could have accomplished it this way. This veil was woven material that was about 4 inches (a handbreadth) thick. Its purpose was to prevent anyone except the High Priest from entering, or even seeing into, the Holy of Holies, and the High Priest could only do this one day a year, and only if he was carrying the blood of the sacrificial lamb. The Holy of Holies is where the ark of the covenant was. It was covered by the mercy seat which is where it is said that God resided.

Now that Jesus has completed His assignment of perfectly doing the Father's will by shedding His innocent blood, everyone can have access to God. There is no need for the veil anymore.

But this still isn't all that happened when Jesus gave up His life. Matthew tells us that,

The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. (Matthew 27:52-53)

We have to look at this carefully to understand what it says. It says that when the earthquake occurred, the tombs were opened. The bodies did not go into the city then. It was not until, "after his resurrection" that they actually came out of their graves and went into the city. But, let's not get ahead of ourselves.

Matthew does not give any information about what happened next, but John does. The day Jesus was crucified was called the day of Preparation. This means that the following day was a Sabbath. By Jewish law, dead bodies needed to be disposed of before the Sabbath began. However, touching a dead body would defile a Jew for 24 hours. Since it was nearing sundown (the beginning of the Sabbath), the Jewish leaders requested that Pilate have the soldiers break the legs of those on the crosses. This action would quickly bring on death, since those being crucified could not push up with their feet to breath. They would, therefore, quickly suffocate.

But, when the soldiers came to Jesus to break His legs, they found that He was already dead. So, even though the soldiers had been commanded to break the legs, they disobeyed and did not break Jesus' legs. (Slide 6B) This was in fulfillment of the requirements of the Passover Lamb:

It shall be eaten in one house; you shall not take any of the flesh outside the house, and you shall not break any of its bones. (Exodus 12:46)

Instead, one of the soldiers thrust his spear into Jesus' side. This was in direct violation of the process of the Roman crucifixion, but it, too, was a fulfillment of scripture:

And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn. (Zechariah 12:10)

Jesus, the eternal Word of God, the Son of God who came to earth and took on human flesh had now surrendered His earthly life for the sake of undeserving sinners; the life of the Godly has been given for the lives of the ungodly. It would be tragic, if it weren't so lovingly beautiful.

Jesus is Buried

Matthew 27:57-61

⁵⁷When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. ⁵⁸He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. ⁵⁹And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud ⁶⁰and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away. ⁶¹Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

Mark 15:42-47 – ⁴²And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, ⁴³Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁴⁴Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died. And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. ⁴⁵And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph. ⁴⁶And Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. ⁴⁷Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus saw where he was laid.

Luke 23:50-56 – ⁵⁰Now there was a man named Joseph, from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man, ⁵¹who had not consented to their decision and action; and he was looking for the kingdom of God. ⁵²This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁵³Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb cut in stone, where no one had ever yet been laid. ⁵⁴It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. ⁵⁵The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid. ⁵⁶Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

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

Notes:

After Jesus died, a Pharisee by the name of Joseph (a rich man from Arimathea) went to Pilate to request Jesus' body. This was very unusual because most criminals who were crucified were either dumped into a shallow grave or they were tossed into the trash fire that was always burning in the Valley of the Sons of Ben Hinnom. This valley and the trash fire were referred to as Gehenna, which became a pseudonym for Hell.

Joseph was assisted by Nicodemus, the Pharisee who had come to Jesus by night. Both of these men, although they were Pharisees, (Slide 7A) were believers in Jesus as the Messiah and apparently had not gone along with the rest of the Sanhedrin when they condemned Jesus. However, they had

kept their allegiance to Jesus a secret for fear of repercussions from the religious leaders. Now, as an act of faith, they openly performed for Jesus what nobody else was willing to do and their deed of love is forever recorded in God's Holy Word. These two were also different from the rest of the Pharisees and Scribes in that they were not hypocritical keepers of the law. They were not concerned about being defiled by a dead body on the day of Preparation before the Passover celebration. James would say that they proved their faith by their works.

Joseph and Nicodemus took Jesus' body, wrapped it in a burial cloth, and laid it in a new tomb that Joseph had recently cut out of the rock. Some believe that Joseph had prepared the tomb for himself, but others believe that he knew that Jesus' death was coming, since Jesus had talked about it a number of times, and he prepared it specifically for Jesus. Either way, these two men performed a kindness to Jesus that no one else was willing to do and they did it at their own peril of reputation and possibly of life itself.

The Guard at the Tomb

Matthew 27:62-66

⁶²The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate ⁶³and said, "Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.' ⁶⁴Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first." ⁶⁵Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can." ⁶⁶So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.

Notes:

What a contrast between the pair of believers, Joseph and Nicodemus, and the remainder of the Sanhedrin! Joseph and Nicodemus lived in faith. The remainder of the Sanhedrin lived in fear! But, what about the 11 disciples? They were living in fear too, weren't they? They were living in fear because of unbelief! We will find them in a couple of days hiding because of their fear. They had already forgotten what Jesus had told them several times, that he would be killed, but that He would rise again from the dead.

The members of the Sanhedrin, on the other hand, remembered what Jesus had taught. Although they didn't believe what Jesus had said (they referred to Him as an imposter), they were afraid that Jesus' disciples would try to steal the body away and claim that He had risen. (Slide 7B) Pilate listened to them and honored their request by assigning a Roman guard and authorizing the sealing of the tomb.

It is at this point that we should step back and look with awe at the sovereignty of God. The Sanhedrin were afraid of a lie regarding the resurrection. And yet, by their actions, they made it impossible to blame the scaredy-cat disciples and they unwittingly provided irrefutable evidence for the truth that would be proclaimed. The disciples couldn't possibly come and steal the body now that the Roman guard had been assigned. The truth of the resurrection would now be undeniable, although they would still deny it. God used their unbelief to solidify the belief of millions of future believers.

So What?

We are all familiar with the 23rd Psalm. Most of us could recite it by memory. Let's recite it together: (Slide 8)

A Psalm of David. The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. (Slide 9) You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever. (Psalms 23:1-6)

But, what about the one just before it, the 22nd Psalm. Do you know what it is about? Without the 22nd Psalm, the 23rd Psalm would not have any meaning! Here, let me read it for you: (Slide 10)

To the choirmaster: according to The Doe of the Dawn. A Psalm of David.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest. Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. To you they cried and were rescued; in you they trusted and were not put to shame. But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; "He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!" Yet you are he who took me from the womb; you made me trust you at my mother's breasts. On you was I cast from my birth, and from my mother's womb you have been my God. Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help. Many bulls encompass me; strong bulls of Bashan surround me; they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death. For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet— I can count all my bones— they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots. But you, O LORD, do not be far off! O you my help, come quickly to my aid! Deliver my soul from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dog! Save me from the mouth of the lion! You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen! I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you: You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel! For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him. From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will perform before those who fear him. The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD! May your hearts live forever! All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you. For kingship belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations. All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship; before him

shall bow all who go down to the dust, even the one who could not keep himself alive. Posterity shall serve him; it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation; they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, that he has done it. (Psalms 22:1-31)

This is an amazing description of the crucifixion of Jesus the Messiah. Many who had studied the Scriptures for years had missed it. They could not fathom that their Messiah, the conquering King, would die such an ignominious death. They didn't know who it was talking about, but surely it couldn't be their Messiah, could it?

Now What?

Today we know better. And yet – there are still countless non-believers who would deny that Jesus ever existed, let alone that He died on a cross. It is our job to tell the world about His death on the cross. But, even more than that, it is our Job to tell people that He didn't stay dead.

My friends – it may be Friday, but Sunday's comin'!

Let's pray.

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