

A Tomb in the Garden
John 19:38-42

Well, we come to the end of this amazing chapter and section that began when it chronicled the apprehending of Jesus in Garden, and now it ends with Jesus back in a garden for his burial. It is incredible that the Bible begins also in a Garden where man had sinned, and the penalty upon him and his offspring would be death. And now we have the one who tasted death for all of us being placed in a Garden. With so many Old Testament allusions through this gospel, John couldn't have missed this little detail. Listen to what A.W. Pink writes about this, **"Beautifully suggestive is the reference to the "garden." It was in a "garden" that the first Adam sowed the seed which issued in death; so here, in a "garden" was sown the Seed which was to bear much fruit in immortal life."** We have seen the one who controlled all of these events is none other than God. And now we come to Jesus being placed in a tomb.

And we have to think about the tomb and the burial of Jesus for the very reason that Scripture places such an emphasis on it. We see the burial of Christ and the necessity of it was taught to the early church, and it forms what we call the gospel message. Listen to what Paul delivered to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, **"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures."** Do you see the elements of the gospel — that he died, was buried, and was raised on the third day. So we understand the importance of the death of Christ and also the resurrection of Christ, but do we understand the importance of his burial? All the gospels mention the burial of Jesus, and we see here that there are such details of what Joseph and Nicodemus did, that you have to conclude it is important. But here is the question — why is the burial important and why is it so vital to our faith and salvation?

And we will seek to answer those questions. And one of the things that I want to highlight is the placing of Jesus in the tomb. Because here is where we should be so encouraged. We fear so many things in our lives. And if you have a little age behind you — you have gone to a number of what we call funerals. And that is where we, in one way or another, bury or say good bye or honour a person in death. And a survey was taken a number of years ago of what people fear, and number one on the list was public speaking, and second was death. That means people would rather be in a coffin than doing what I am doing at this moment. But I think if people were honest and not panicky about the moment of speaking in front of people, their the greatest fear is death. And if you can destroy the fear of death, if you can see and revel in the fullness of all that Jesus has done for us let me say that we can really live lives of such love and devotion and security to Christ.

If you are controlled by something else than you cannot live those lives for Christ that we ought to live. Think of it, we are one day closer to our death and departing from this world than we were yesterday. Now is that a curse or a blessing to you? The hour glass of your life cannot be stopped. Save the coming of the Lord Jesus you will die. Your lifeless body will be handled in someway and somehow and be put in the ground. Again, it is amazing how many people go through what is called a midlife crisis. And

midlife and old age are something, because you look at the years and you realize that most of your life is behind. At some point in your life it is so easy to stop looking forward. When younger we looked forward to career, family, education, places we wanted to visit, experiences we wanted to have in life. There seems so much life ahead of you. And we accomplished some of those things, but when we get to a certain age we start to look back more than look forward.

And it can be stifling and paralyzing. The many things you enjoyed, maybe raising kids or the joy of youth or whatever you will never enjoy again. It can end in bitterness and frustration. But there should be such a joy in aging as a believer. And why, with all the problems and limitations that come with age? And the reason why is because of the man who was placed in the tomb. His death and burial guarantee the glory that I will not remain in the grave or the ground. His death causes me not to look back but whatever age I am to look forward with such joy, expectancy and anticipation. Yes, gloriously, I am one day closer to being with the one who came out of the tomb. But for that to happen he had to be placed in the tomb. So are you looking forward? Are you seeing the blessed hope through the One who was buried? I want us to look at verses 40-42, see the details and why they are given, and then see if we can draw some conclusions that will really strengthen our faith and eliminate the fear of death. We have a faith no matter what our age or circumstances that is always looking forward.

1. We need to see the burial of Jesus. Vv. 40-42.

The details here are common but they are still details of what they did with the dead body of Jesus. And the reason we have these details and the laying of the body of Jesus in the grave is to emphasize the death of Jesus. This is what you do not to the living but to the dead. And it is incredible how much detail. And we live in a world where people want to ignore death, get it as far away from their thinking as they can. Funerals are becoming more and more a thing of the past. And if they have them at all, they call them celebrations of life. They try to ignore the truth. This person has died and you will never be in their presence again, at least this side of eternity. Death is painful, and it is unnatural. It was not part of the original creation. We feel the pain of death and we feel the pain of that separation. We feel it acutely at a burial or funeral.

But here is the importance of the burial of Christ. His burial guarantees that my burial will not have the last word. And that has always been the glory for those who are believers. So let's work through these verses and details given. Look at verse 40, **“So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.”** Now some have objected to the strips being used because Mark says there was one linen cloth that was used. But there are various answers to this. They could have used both, or one linen cloth could speak of the totality of the cloths that was used. But the Jews did not embalm the body but they packed the spices in around the body in these linen strips and they packed them underneath and all around. Now again, the idea of doing this dignity was to cut down on the smell of rotting flesh. And why are these details so important? And the reason why they are so important is they verify the death of Jesus. You do not take a person who is living and bound him tightly with linen cloths and then lay him in a tomb.

In a few verses ahead in the narrative we read in John 20:7, **“and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself.”** Think of it, there is a cloth put over his face, and why? It would certainly make breathing difficult. And the reason why is he is dead. And these details are so important, and everything that these two men do is important because they certify Jesus is dead. And our faith is so wrapped up in the substitutionary death of Jesus that these Scriptural accounts go out of their way to verify he really did die. This is not a fake death. The soldiers verifying he was death, even the sword thrust through his side, and now the details of his body being prepared for burial are so necessary.

But the narrative continues, look at verse 41, **“Now 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.”** So there was a garden nearby, and in that garden we find there is a new tomb where no one was ever buried. They would carve these out of stone. There would be a inner chamber and then what almost look like shelves with boxes. The body would be laid out on a slab and then later the bones would be collected and put in the box and on the shelf. There was a large stone put in front of the entrance and usually slid in place. That was to protect it from robbers seeking to steal the spices.

Amazing isn't it? Why again these details? These details are so necessary because they help verify the resurrection. It is to indicate beyond any doubt that the tomb is empty. The tomb is nearby. It is in the vicinity of Jerusalem. It is easily accessible. It is a tomb that has never been used before, in fact, it is Joseph's tomb. He takes Jesus here as an honour. Since it is new, there is no confusion if this is the body of Jesus or another. It is near enough that the religious leaders can go to Pilate and request a guard be placed by the entrance that his disciples do not come and steal the body of Jesus away. There are no secret passage ways, and since the seal of Pilate is placed on it, the body is secure. And all these details are given to say the body is secure, and by giving all those details, they end up actually verifying Jesus' victory over the grave and over the last enemy, which is death. It is in the Garden where man died, now it is in the Garden where death is conquered, where the sting of death is dealt its death blow. It is where the last Adam is not forced from the Garden but emerges from the Garden as the ultimate victor.

Now look at the last verse in this chapter, **“So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.”** It was the Day of Preparation, in other words, the sun was about to set and the Sabbath was going to begin. Jesus has to be placed in the Tomb now if he is going to be there three days. And the tomb is close at hand to place him in. Now why these details? And they are important. When I was first preparing this sermon people all over the world were mourning the death of one who was known as the Prince of Death, none other than Ozzy Osborne. The streets of Birmingham England were packed with thousands and thousands as the black hulk drove through the streets. Millions watched and mourned online. And it was an elaborate funeral, fitting for a king.

Amazing who and what people celebrate. But the reason why the haste and the putting of Jesus in the grave is recorded here is it is away from the public eye. Here is the most glorious person who ever lived, and there are two men that put him in the tomb. There is no public funeral, no public mourning of thousands and thousands. And

this truly is the last humiliation of Jesus. He became obedient till death even the death on the cross. And the whole goal was shame and humiliation. And the death of a notorious criminal in Roman law was ultimately there was to be no remembrance of him. Here, there is to be no remembrance of Jesus. The One who came from the glory of heaven where angels adored and sang his constant praises is now laid in a tomb. I mean how much further can you go? And again, we realize this humbling was for us. He humbled himself, so that we shall never be forgotten. Not because of how special or valuable we are but because of the One who was humble and forgotten for us — the One who occupied that grave.

But also, when he is buried it is the beginning of his exaltation. He is buried in a rich man's tomb. All these spices spoke of the glory of the One who gave his life. He truly is none other than the King of kings. I am always amazed at passages like this, you look at them and think there is not much here. But on further reflection we end up being in awe of the one who went into the grave. And so as we think about his burial let me give a few more reflections, and hopefully help us all look at death differently, and look to the future that we are closer than ever of being with Christ.

2. We need to see some applications of the burial of Jesus.

One is that it is obvious that this fulfilled many of the words of Jesus and the prophecies that were spoke of him. Once again, it confirmed that Jesus is none other than the Lord of glory. Very early on in the ministry of Christ the Jews demanded a sign. Listen to what Jesus said in Matthew 12:39-40, **“But he answered them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.’**” Here is a prophecy of Jesus. Jesus indicates that Jonah suffered a kind of death. There was no way that he could conquer that death. But it is not just this aspect of Jonah's life that prefigured the work and glory of Christ but also his ministry. He came to preach to sinners of the coming wrath of God. And in their sin and wickedness they repented. And listen to what Jesus says in that passage in Matthew, Matthew 12:41, **“The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.”** He needs to be put in that grave for those three days so that when he comes out we would know that someone so much greater than Jonah is here. Oh, if we could see and just savour something of the glory of Christ, and the immensity of him being placed in that grave.

The other glorious fulfillment that we see in this passage is in the Suffering Servant passage in Isaiah. Isaiah 53:9, **“And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.”** Here is the amazing thing, there were three burial plots — common graves that were prepared that day. Two of them were occupied, but one of them was not. The man on the middle cross was buried in another place, in a rich man's tomb. And this truth is so startling because this just does not happen especially when the grave would have already been prepared. Think of all the various details that have to come to pass. Joseph of Arimathea is not from Jerusalem, but moves here,

and now this is home, so much so that he has a tomb carved out of the rock, no doubt for he and his family. He became a secret follower of Christ, but now through his death he comes out as a believer just when God had ordained that he might do this dignity for Jesus in death, and verify his death and resurrection, and bring to pass the promises and prophecies concerning Jesus in death.

Now think of what an encouragement that this unlikely prophecy comes to pass. It indicates not only the absolute sovereignty of God but also the assurance that every promise of God — every promise of Christ — is yea and amen in him. We can bank on it — the promises that are ours in this life and the promises of our glorious inheritance with the saints. Our God truly is truly an awesome and amazing God.

The other thing we can take away from this text and all these details that are given about the handling of the body of Jesus is the value God places on our bodies. God has made us both material and immaterial. He has made us flesh and spirit. We ought to realize that our last state is not a disembodied state where we have no body. Why? God's original creation is he made us both material and immaterial. He created man out of the dust of the ground and then breathed life into him. And I love the way this narrative describes the handling of the body. Look again at the beginning of verse 40, **“So they took the body of Jesus.”** Notice the possessive. It is the body of Jesus. This is the same body now, although marvellously altered, that he has after his resurrection. To be truly human means that we have both the physical and the spiritual. God has given us a body and there is a dignity in that dual part of humanity. If not, the resurrection makes no sense. So think of what Jesus does. He goes in the grave first. He goes in first, and he is the first to plant his feet in the other direction in order to come out. This really is the completion of the process of the new humanity. And because our lives, both body and spirit are tied with Jesus — it guarantees that we will be with Jesus one day not just in spirit but also in body. We shall be like him.

Richard Phillips writes in his excellent commentary, **“Christ entered the grave not as a private person but as the covenant head of all his people. Just as his death exhausted the curse of sin against believers, so also his entering the grave has claimed it as the sleep chamber for those awaiting the resurrection. His resurrection is the ground of our certain hope to triumph over death and the grave. Paul exclaims, ‘Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep’ (1 Cor. 15:20).”** He also quotes John Flavel as writing, **“the grave received, but could not destroy Jesus Christ: death swallowed him, as the whale did Jonah his type, but could not digest him when it had swallowed him, but quickly delivered him up again.”**

Think again of why people fear death today. Death is the end of all hopes. It is the end of everything individuals live for and hope for, experienced and enjoyed in this life. It is the loss of all. And although they hope for some sort of life after this life, because of our sin against an awesome God, there is another death, and that is under the just and awful hand of our eternal God and it never ends. You can see why people should fear death. And if you are outside of Christ, if you never have trusted the One who went into the grave and came out — today is the day to trust and follow Him. He can and does take away not only the fear of death but the sting of death.

And think of what Christ going into the grave means for us as believers. The more we see every aspect of his work, including his burial, the more our confidence grows in Christ and that we will be with him. We will be with him in spirit when we are separated from this body but one day there will be a union and we will be with him in body and spirit. Paul says I would rather depart this world and be with Christ, and yet there is something superior and that is: being in this earthly and then glorified body with Christ. But imagine having that attitude and heart of wanting to be with Christ. And it is not that Paul's life was all drab and suffering and trials. There was so much good and rejoicing in his life with other believers. He truly did live for Christ and rejoiced in Christ. But he had such a clear view of Christ's life, death, burial, and resurrection, that it gave him such confidence in the promises of Christ. He had been freed from the fear of death to live for another and look forward, not backward. He could confidently and enthusiastically proclaim, "**For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.**" How about you? Don't you want to be free from the fear of death? Look to the death and burial of another, and the hope it gives us as believers. This hope not only changes my destiny it changes who I am in the present. I don't look back in regret but look so excitedly forward. You are one day closer to meeting your Maker. What kind of emotion does that engender in you? Oh Christian, there really is so much hope in Christ. See the glory of the One who went into the grave. But he didn't stay there! And neither will you!