

The Burial Of Christ

Having voluntarily given up His spirit the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross. This fact was verified by the centurion tasked with the Saviour's execution, and reported to Pilate at his request. Pilate had been approached by Joseph of Arimathaea, a member of the Sanhedrin but secretly a follower of Christ, to have the Lord's body delivered to him that it might be given a suitable burial.

Vain righteousness

John tells us that behind the scenes there was now an urgency on the part of the Jews to have the executions completed and the bodies of Jesus and the two criminals removed. The Passover Sabbath was approaching and there were religious laws concerning dead bodies hanging overnight. The Jews had condemned Christ unjustly with no shame but now they could not tolerate His body to remain on the cross for fear of being ceremonially polluted. They swallowed a camel but strained at a gnat!

Not a bone broken

Accordingly, the legs of the two thieves crucified with the Lord were broken to hasten their end, but when Jesus was seen to be dead already a soldier merely took his spear and pierced the Saviour's side. Prophecy had declared no bone of the Lord's body would be broken, symbolising that not one member of Christ's mystical body, the church, will ever be lost. From the Lord's pierced side came forth blood and water, symbolising the outpouring of God's mercy and grace upon His people.

Pilate spites the Jews

Pilate allowed the body of the Lord Jesus to be taken by Joseph for burial. Joseph was joined by Nicodemus, another Pharisee. Between them they bestowed upon the Lord a reverential, if speedy burial. Joseph bought fine linen with which to wrap the Lord's body. Nicodemus bought a large quantity of spices, a mixture of myrrh and aloes. The Lord was laid in Joseph's own newly hewn tomb in a garden close to Calvary. John tells us, 'Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury'.

Joseph and Nicodemus

The involvement of Joseph and Nicodemus in the burial of the Saviour is a delightful example of God's sovereign mercy and evidence of divine providence. These two men were graciously called to salvation from amongst the ranks of the scribes and Pharisees. Now that the atonement of God's elect was complete the body of the Son of God would be honoured. It was destined for glory and Christ's body would not be cast aside as might a common criminal.

Fitted for their task

The Lord Jesus would have the best funeral money could buy. His body would be respected, tended, and prepared for His resurrection with suitable care and attention by senior members of the Jewish elite. The Lord God prepared Joseph and Nicodemus and equipped them for their task. He ordered and appointed that they possessed faith in Christ. He decreed they should demonstrate their love of the Lord in His burial. By overruling providence He gave them boldness to honour their Saviour in death, as they had not confidence enough to render in His life.

Men of substance

They also had means of access to Pilate by their social station as well as the financial wealth to provide the tomb, the linen, perfumes and manpower quickly and efficiently to fulfil their role. When the Lord's other disciples had forsaken Him in fear, these two secret followers stepped into the gap, according to the will of God. By this means the words of Isaiah were literally accomplished in a wonderful way, 'he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death'. Jesus of Nazareth was crucified between two thieves and buried in the tomb of Joseph, the honourable counsellor.

True Sabbath rest

We rarely think of a grave as a place of beauty or attraction, yet without doubt the Lord has sweetened the prospect of the grave for all believers. Christ's body rested on the Sabbath day, after a day and night of abuse and trauma. Just as

the Lord rested after His work of creation now the Saviour rested after His work of redemption. We honour the Sabbath day by remembering the Saviour's rest from all His work, and our resting in Him.

Christ's perfumed bed

Now the Saviour lay undisturbed in peace and stillness. He was removed from the uproar and mockery of the Jews and detached from the pain and suffering of this world. The Lord Jesus Christ disarmed death and freed His children from all fear of the grave. The clean fine linen that wrapped His body and the fragrant perfume with which He was anointed portray the peace and pleasantness that will attend our own time of waiting for our resurrection. Our bodies, our bones, our very dust is under the protective care of our Saviour and King.

The grave has lost its victory

Brothers and sisters, we do not need to dread what awaits us at the end of our lives. The Saviour has gone this way before us and graced the grave with His presence. By entering the grave Himself, taking His rest and savouring its peace before rising from it, He has provided us with a pattern for our own deaths, and dispelled the darkness with which Satan had previously shrouded our mortality.

Christ holds the key to our grave

When we die our souls will go immediately into the presence of our Saviour and our bodies will return to dust whence they came. However, our dust shall not be lost. It shall be kept and preserved for it shall be required again on the resurrection morning. Our grave is simply a waiting room for our bodies of flesh until our own resurrection and ascension. By honouring the experience of burial and the state of death with His own body, our Saviour has softened, warmed and scented our own stay there.

Amen

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