

The Burial

Last 24 Hours of Christ

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This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the gospel of John 19. As you're turning to John 19, I realize that today is a day that we traditionally celebrate what we know as Palm Sunday. This is the day where we celebrate that Jesus Christ was surrounded by tens of thousands of people declaring that he was not only the Messiah but the one who had been prophesied for not only years but for decades, for centuries, and for millennia. But today, rather than being at the beginning of what we know as the Passion Week, we're actually going to be at the end of the final day of the life and the ministry of Jesus Christ.

If you're a guest or visitor with us, I want to welcome you to the end of the journey. Today is where we've walked through 24 hours of time, we've been introduced to several individuals, characters and scenarios but today we come to what looks like the end but next week we come back and we realize it was not the end. Today we look at the burial of Jesus Christ and I want you to think in terms of the last 24 hours of who was surrounding Jesus in the scenario. 24 hours earlier, he was in an upper room and he was surrounded by his apostles, many of which said that, "We would never deny you. We would never abandon you. Wherever you go we most assuredly will do so." 18 hours earlier, he was in the garden of Gethsemane, he was surrounded by 500 soldiers who took him by way of weapon to Caiaphas, the high priest's establishment. 12 hours earlier, he was on the steps of Pilate's palace. He was surrounded by people that said, "Crucify him! Crucify him! May his blood be on our children from this generation forever." Six hours earlier, he was surrounded by darkness, the depth of darkness on Mount Calvary. Today, he has breathed his last breath, his physical body lay limp upon the cross, and none of those individuals that we know of were surrounding him. In fact, we're about to be introduced to two men, one that you will know from previous gospel conversation, one who may be new to your story and the biblical story. He's surrounded by two men, two men of great wealth and great, shall we say, prestige within their community, but the two men who were willing to go forth with what had to happen.

Today as we turn to chapter 19, verse 38 of the gospel of John, Jesus Christ, the coming King of kings and the Lord of lords is going to be buried in a borrowed tomb. It says,

38 And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus. 39 And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. 40 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. 41 Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. 42 There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand.

It is a part of the story of all stories. We cannot celebrate the resurrection next week if we do not have a proper burial this week. And so as we've done in previous weeks, I want to walk through very simple but strategic questions involving the story.

We have to begin with the "when." When is Jesus buried? Well, beginning in verse 38 it says, "And after this." This is obviously important because "after this" means all the prophecies had been fulfilled, all the blood had been spilled, all the statements had been made. In fact, you get the idea because the sabbath day is looming that people are actually beginning to vacate the premises. Remember, twice in 24 hours the Bible said "And they watched him." It's much like today if you go to a sporting event, the stadium is packed, people are cheering either for and/or against but once the game's over, people begin to file out and the stadium quickly draws empty.

Mount Calvary has experienced the same thing but I want you to notice that it talks about the sabbath day, the day of preparation, and I'm not here to get into a debate of the chronology nor to dispel the traditions that we hold so dearly, but I want you to go back to verse 31 of John 19 and I want to show you something very interesting about the "when." It says, "The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day)." You may or may not be familiar but what we know as Passover was celebrated synonymously with the feast of Unleavened Bread and the feast of Unleavened Bread, according to the Old Testament, had a sabbath day to begin and to end the celebration. We oftentimes, rightfully so, just read the word "sabbath day" and we assume that traditional weekly sabbath that we're so familiar with but the Bible makes it clear that this was no regular sabbath day. This was the feast of Unleavened Bread. This was Passover. This is important, in a moment, because that day wasn't just about getting the bodies off before the sun went down, it was making sure they had enough time to get home to celebrate the most important meal of the year. This was the Passover. This was Unleavened Bread. It wasn't just "a regular day on the calendar."

Then we have the "who." Joseph of Arimathea. He's a name that's synonymous with the story but what's intriguing about him is this: he hasn't been mentioned anywhere in the gospels until now and he's mentioned in all four of them. It says that he was a secret disciple, fearful of the Jews. Then we have Nicodemus, the one who three years ago we

were introduced to him when by night he came to Jesus inquiring, "What does it look like to have eternal life?" That famous story, "You must be born again." And let me share with you some of the commonalities of these two men.

1. They were very wealthy men. You say, "Well, how do we know they were wealthy?" Well, when you have your own garden and you have your own tomb, in today's world it's kind of like having a street named after you. Have you ever thought about that? If you have a street named after you, you're either wealthy, well-known or dead. These men are both alive. He has a tomb that is named after him. He's a very wealthy man. Nicodemus brings 100 pounds of ointment with him. You do remember that when Mary anointed the feet of Jesus, Judas talked about a year's worth. We know she wasn't carrying 100 pounds. So this could have been a lifetime worth of resources, 100 pounds of equipment and necessary items. Wealthy men. Well-connected men. Who did they go to see about the body? They go to the Sanhedrin? No. They went to Pilate himself, "May we have the body?" But more importantly, they were men of what I would call great renown. Arimathea, a specific name. It's almost as if you mentioned those names sometimes in a community and everybody knows who you're connected to or who you're talking about. And then there's Nicodemus. Now we just have his first name in scripture but history tells us that more likely than not his name legally was Nicodemus ben Gurion. Now that may not strike a bell with you unless you've flown into Tel Aviv, Israel today. It's the Ben Gurion Airport. These men renowned, wealthy, and known. That's going to fit into the equation in just a minute.

Where does it happen? Notice what the Bible says, and there next to was a garden. Now this may not seem important to you but oftentimes when it comes to this week whether it be Palm Sunday, whether it be the crucifixion, even the resurrection, oftentimes and I don't think we mean to, I think sometimes it's unconscious, that "tradition of man" seems to usurp just the simple Bible teaching. When it says there was a "garden," if you've been to what we know as the Holy Land, there's actually a "debate." I don't think it's a debate. The world says there's a debate on where the actual tomb of Jesus is. Traditionally the tomb is in the middle of Jerusalem. There are several problems with that. 1. The Bible said he would be crucified outside the city gates. 2. Simon of Cyrene walked down a street outside of the city, not inside the city. And third, there's no garden anywhere there. But if you go to what we know as Golgotha, Mount Calvary, the place of the skull, and you were to face it as if it were due north, it's actually west of the Temple Mount, do you know what you'll discover? About 75-100 yards to the left there's a garden and there's a tomb that today remains empty right as the Bible spoke.

So today when Jesus Christ is buried, we have a unique set of individuals who are going to partake with the proceedings. His body lay lifeless and will be placed in a tomb that nobody has ever been buried in before so what actually took place? And this, just for the sake of information, this is where we're going to spend the majority of our time today because we've got to focus on what's happening here. We're not going to read between the lines, we're just going to allow what is written to come forth to us. It is a very particular burial. Notice what it says, not only did Nicodemus bring 100 pounds of ointment, which is beyond more than enough, but notice verse 40, "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." These two men would have done this hundreds of times in their life. They knew exactly how to do so. They knew the procedure. They knew the items. Notice they didn't have what we would jokingly call a committee meeting to say, "What do we need to bring to the burial?" They knew what to bring because this is how you "do it."

I want to focus your attention not on this tomb but the tomb of Lazarus. Back in John 11, you know the story well. Lazarus, beloved of Jesus, his two sisters, Mary and Martha, almost his adopted family, so to speak. We know the story that they make their way to the graveside and Jesus begins to speak about the fact that he's going to be raised from the dead. His sister argues, one of my favorite statements in the Bible, "Lord, behold he stinketh." And then he says, "Lazarus, come forth." Well, that's usually where we write the songs, sing the anthems, and celebrate, but you might be surprised that, "Lazarus, come forth," is not the last statement Jesus made to Lazarus. In fact, after he came forth he made this statement, "Remove the burial cloths."

Now why would that be important? Let me ask you a question: if you were buried the way they buried Jesus and you came back alive, how are you going to breathe? Hundred pounds of ointment wrapped in linen. In fact, when we read the resurrection story, notice that when Peter and John made their way into the empty tomb, they found the napkin folded on the side, and the body was prepared a certain way, the head was prepared a certain way, but with all of the ointments and with all of the preparation it would have been sealed, don't think mummification such as Egypt, think of reverence for the creation of God.

Now why is this so important that we deal with the particulars? You may or may not be familiar but there's a lot of theories out there that Jesus Christ really didn't actually die. If you want the formal terminology, they call it "swooning," but they even allude to folks like the Apostle Paul. Remember, the Apostle Paul was stoned five times and the Bible says several of those times they thought he was dead. They actually drug his body out of the city prepared to bury him and all of a sudden he wakes up. I would have loved to have been at the scene when that occurred, particularly the second time. You say, "Why do you say the second time?" Because I can just see the Apostle Paul coming to and going, "Seriously, guys, again?" But nonetheless, we, in our culture, have called it a wake. Are they really deceased or is life still present? You see, the way, the very particular way that Jesus was buried means there is no conceivable way he was alive for three days and three nights. There's no way.

Now we know that the sword went into his side, we know that water and blood fell, we know he said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." If that was not enough, can you imagine being wrapped up in this for three days? The reason this is important is just like you can't be found until you're lost, you can't have a resurrection until you have a death, and we know that because these two men who were secret disciples, this isn't the big three, Peter, James and John, this isn't John and the four women, these are not the ones that people expected to be there. The fact that they did so according to the manner of the Jews means there is no question about this physical body being actually deceased.

But it's also a picture, it's a picture of what it looks like to believe. Nicodemus, probably outside of Jesus Christ he's my favorite character in all of the Bible. He's the one in John 3, it says that he came to Jesus by night. It's really a picture of being curious. You say, "What do you mean curious?" Well, he came by night which was not unusual because in those days when the families would go to bed, the politicians, the philosophers, the theologians, the movers and the shakers in the community would gather on the rooftops there in the Middle East and they would pontificate and debate and discuss the matters of the day. You say, "Why do you believe that Nicodemus was curious?" Because Jesus didn't go to Nicodemus, Nicodemus went to Jesus. This was right after he had overturned the tables and he said, "How can I know that I have eternal life?" Jesus made this great statement, "You must be born again." He said, "How do I enter into my mother's womb? I don't get this." They debate back and forth and finally verse 11 of John 3 Jesus makes this profound statement, "How can you, a master of Israel, not know these things?" Nicodemus remained silent and five verses later, do you remember what Jesus said? "For God so loved the world he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." Probably the first verse we teach out children out of the womb and here was the theologian of Israel that heard it first with his ears.

He was curious and then we get to chapter 7 of the gospel of John, and I think we see that he was convicted. I think he got convicted about that conversation because these same men that claimed that Jesus had blasphemed, these same men who claimed that Jesus was in error, he defended Jesus to. They wanted to put him to trial even in chapter 7 and Nicodemus speaks up and he says, "Whoa, guys," he says, "you know, we even have due process here. How can we condemn a man who we've not heard out?" Do you remember what they said to him? "Are you also one of his disciples?" You see, Nicodemus goes from hearing the message to really being convicted, "Maybe there's something to this."

And then I believe here in chapter 19, if you want to use our word today, I think Nicodemus was converted. You say, "Why do you believe he was converted?" Because he was there. How many people weren't there? Think about the tens of the thousands at Palm Sunday when they thought Jesus was going to kick the Romans out, they got real excited. When they saw him breathe his last breath, not so much. This was the one who he had visited three years previous. This was the one who he had defended in the halls of the politicians. And this is the one that he would be willing to give up 100 pounds of ointment to bury his body.

Well, this may not seem that significant of a picture until we look at the prophetic element of it, and as we've walked through the last 24 hours, obviously we have seen that the scenes and the personnel and all these folks kind of project this forward not just to our day but future days, but I want to deal with the prophetic in this story, not the prophetic of 2,000 years later, not the prophetic of what you and I call the Second Coming, but how about the prophetic of just a couple of hours after this event. I'm going to quote, reference a verse for you this morning that Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea would have had absolutely memorized and they would have lived it out probably hundreds of times in their life and you and I never give a single thought to it. The book of Numbers, oh yeah,

that's the favorite Baptist book there, Numbers 9:6, it's the John 3:16, no, it's not and do you know why you don't know what it says? Because you don't have any reason to go there. Numbers 9:6 makes this statement that if an individual handles the body of a deceased person within a certain time period prior to the Passover meal, they are disqualified from participating.

Now can I share with you how prophetic that is? The moment that Joseph and Nicodemus touched his lifeless body, they were making a grand statement about who they had become because it probably took a couple of hours to get it all settled. I mean, after all, you've got 100 pounds of ointment, all this linen, you've got to get him in the tomb, and for the biblical record, there's nobody there to help, they're doing it all themselves. I want you to imagine the scene with me. They go home and awaiting for each of them is the entirety of their family, most likely their wife, their children, potentially even their grandchildren, cousins, aunts, nephews, whomever. These were wealthy men who had resources, Passover is a big deal. I mean, think about it in terms of, in our culture, where are we having Thanksgiving, okay? Everybody, let me speak Southern, e'rbody is comin'. And they walk in. Where is everybody expecting them to sit? The head of the table. Every year these would be the two men who would lead their family into remembering the exodus as they took of the items to eat, as they read the scripture about God's provision and bringing life in the midst of death, yet that night both of them knew they couldn't sit at the head of the table anymore. They had been scripturally disqualified. I want you to imagine the scene with me. Both of these men go and sit in a place nobody expects them to sit. There's kind of some confusion and probably it would have been one of the kids, maybe one of the grandkids and I imagine it something like this, "Poppa," I don't know what they called Nicodemus, "Pops, Poppa," I don't know, "aren't you in the wrong seat?" No, son. I'm in the right seat. "Why aren't you where you normally are?" And then he would have to share, "Well, I can't lead tonight because I've touched a deceased body." Can you imagine what it would have looked like around the room because everybody there surely would have known who passed away. It wasn't uncommon in those days for the entire family to "be disqualified" because of a funeral and just celebrate it days later. But they didn't know and can you imagine the scene when someone asked, "Who?" And out of their mouth, "Jesus of Nazareth." The same man that potentially people in that room said, "Crucify him."

You talk about prophetic, go to John 20 and keep going until you get to Revelation 22 and you find Nicodemus or Joseph of Arimathea again. They're never mentioned. Why is it prophetic? Because Jesus said in Luke 9, "If any man come after me, let him take up his cross." I've been in the empty tomb but I haven't been there with these two guys, but I can only imagine what the conversation would have gone like. Can you imagine one of them turning to the other and saying, "How long do you think it'll take? How many more hours do you think we actually have? Do you think they'll actually bury us properly as we've done him?" The reason I believe these two men were converted is because the Bible never records them again much like it never records Lazarus because in John 12 it says, "They sought his life because of his testimony for Jesus." The prophetic here was the fact that to gain eternal life literally for these two men meant the losing of their own.

So why, why is this story so important for us? Allow me to just summarize it very briefly. It's very particular, the facts. The facts matter. The fact is that Jesus fulfilled every prophecy. The fact is Jesus made the statements he needed to make. The fact is he breathed his last breath. The fact is that he shed his blood. And the fact is that he was actually dead. Every single fact, every single prophecy, everything was fulfilled in him. It's important to us. The "why" factor is we don't have to say, "Well, I know the Bible says this but it kind of went down like that." No, it happened just like the Bible said whether it was the darkness for three hours or the fulfillment of the prophecy, "I thirst," on the cross.

But it's also a picture, it's a picture of what faith looks like. You see, Nicodemus, these two men really are our story 2,000 years ago. When we first hear the message of Jesus Christ, we're curious, are we not? Is it really true? Can one man's death and resurrection really absolve me of my sin? And you do know that today the overwhelming majority of people when they hear the gospel don't respond the first time. In fact, nowadays it takes typically about two dozen presentations before because we're contemplating this but there comes a point where we get convicted, where we realize that if the story of Jesus is really true, if the Bible is really right, then I've got a problem because I can't fix this sin problem on my own. Nicodemus was a master of Israel and he couldn't fix it. So there comes a point in conversion, the Bible says whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. In John 19, the book of Romans hadn't been written, the resurrection hadn't occurred but I've got just a funny feeling that when these two guys put that body in the tomb, they had marked themselves as true believers.

And what's the prophetic? There's fact and there's faith and, last but not least, there's feeling. There's no record that Joseph and Nicodemus felt good about the situation. They were probably fearful. The same goes for us. You know, one of the questions when I lead somebody to the Lord, one of the first questions I ask is, "How do you feel now?" Do you know what most people say? "I don't feel much different." That's okay. You say, "Why?" Because 1 John 5:12 and 13 says, "He that has the Son has life, he that has not the Son hath not life. I write these things not so that you will feel different but that you may know that you have eternal life." I don't know what feelings Nicodemus and Joseph had when they walked out or when they walked into their family, but the feelings didn't matter because they had exhibited faith based on the facts.

Today, you and I have the opportunity to do the same. There's no guarantee that when we believe, that the world will recognize us well. There's no guarantee the feelings will be as we would hope that they would be, but one thing we do know is this, Joseph and Nicodemus' names are still written down for us as an example for us about what it looks like. The facts are true. Faith must be exhibited. Feelings are optional because the last time I checked, nobody goes to heaven on feelings, we go to heaven on our faith of the facts.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Maybe this morning you're here in person, maybe you're watching online or even listening on the radio, and maybe today is that day where the Spirit of God took the word of God through two individuals you may

have never heard of in your life and showed you that you're in the exact same position they were here in John 19. Maybe today is the day you've been curious for a while, maybe you've even been convicted for some season, but maybe today is the day where conversion takes place. It literally is not the handling of a deceased body, it's what Romans 10:13 says, "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Today maybe you're that individual calling on the name of the Lord, that's a heart's cry. This isn't about saying a certain set of phrases the right way or scripting it out, it's not about passing a test or jumping through a hoop, or even passing a course. It simply means crying out that you've got a sin problem that only Jesus can solve. Maybe today you're that individual and let me encourage you just to cry out, maybe your heart's cry would go a little something like this. "God, today I realize I'm just like these two guys. I've got a sin problem that no amount of fame, no amount of money, no amount of prestige can fix but, God, I believe that Jesus Christ is the only one who's capable of solving this problem. God, I believe, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he came and he was born on my behalf. God, I believe he lived a sinless life on my behalf. God, I believe that today as we study his burial, that all the pain, all the punishment, all the mocking, God, he took, God, he took what I rightfully deserve for me and, God, I believe that three days later when he rose from the grave he actually made it possible and feasible for my soul to be saved and for my sins to be forgiven. God, today I don't know all the nuances, God, I'm not even clear about all the details, I just know I've got a sin problem that Jesus can solve. In the best way I know how, I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me. I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our head still bowed and our eyes still closed, in a moment I'm going to pray for us and we're going to stand and sing together and I want to invite you, those of you who had that conversation with the Lord just to step out and step forward. We'd love to pray with you, to pray for you. We'd love just to spend some time celebrating what God has done in your life but I also realize that there's many of us here that that decision happened years ago, and for some of us it may have happened decades ago, maybe today is not about stepping out and stepping forward, maybe today is like Nicodemus and Joseph, maybe today is about when we leave here it's going back to those whom we know, it's going back to those who we work with, going back to those who we have relationships with, and them asking, "So why do you look so different? Why are you not doing what we knew you to do earlier? What has happened in your life." Maybe today is not about your initial faith, maybe today is about living it out once we depart in a few moments.

Lord Jesus, as we come to this time of decision, thank you, God, thank you for the examples that we read in scripture today but more importantly thank you that you were willing to shed your blood, you were willing to come back from the dead to redeem us, to forgive us, and to save us. God, today may we simply respond to you appropriately. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.