

Our Lord's Grave

Gospel of John

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Bible Text: John 19:38-42

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My text is taken from John 19 and verses 38 down to verse 42. And I want to speak with you on a subject that you don't typically hear being preached. But just as we finished singing the hymn *One Day*, it speaks there of dying, our Lord dying and being buried and then rising again. How important is the burial of the Lord Jesus Christ to the gospel message? We talk about his living, having to work out that perfect righteousness, his dying by which he paid the debt, his resurrection by which was proof that God had accepted his sacrifice and we speak of his ascension and his coming again all as part of his being the glorious Savior. But the question is: What of the grave? What of those three days and three nights that he would spend in the tomb? Is that significant? Does it have anything to teach us? That is the subject of this message.

But let's read this in John 19 beginning with verse 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. 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. 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. 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. There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand.¹

As I mentioned, we often—and myself included—speak of the life, the death, the resurrection, the ascension as being fundamental to our Lord's work of salvation. But here we want to consider what of his burial. What significance do these few verses have? Do we just fast forward over them? Do we just skip them? Well, no. We know that the Spirit of God had them put here and had John write of them. But not only John, but if you go and study every one of the gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke—all speak of our

¹ John 19:38-42.

Lord's burial and I have often said that even if something were mentioned once in the Scriptures it would be significant. It would be important. But for the Lord by the four writers of the gospels to speak of his burial how significant is it? But not only these four, but throughout the Scriptures we find this significant.

For example, look over into Acts chapter 13 as part of the gospel message of the apostles. In Acts chapter 13 and I put down verse two, but I don't believe that is the right verse there. It is actually over in Acts chapter 13 and beginning with verse 34 and on down.

And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David. Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.²

All right. So this Scripture here is significant when you consider the fact that he was to lie three days and three nights in a tomb. We know that how a dead body can easily quickly decay once life is taken from it. But here in the grave, here during this interval between his death on the cross and his resurrection, even this was significant to the Father in that during that time even with a lifeless body that it was not possible that he should see corruption, but that God would preserve him and raise him again. And you can see it is part of the gospel message because verse 38 the apostle declares:

"Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man..."³

...who came, lived, died, was buried and rose again, and in now way was he ever corrupted in his being as the sin bearer, whether it was from his birth and conception, whether it was in his life through that perfect obedience that he offered unto the Father, whether it was in his death, his soul was made an offering for sin, but it never says he was made sinful. He took the sin of his people, but he did not take their depravity. And even in his death here lay a dead body in the grave for three days and three nights and yet it was preserved by the Father.

And so through this:

"...this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins."⁴

It is all significant. But even more plainly, perhaps, over in 1 Corinthians chapter 15. Look in 1 Corinthians chapter 15. Here Paul is directed to write:

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye

² Acts 13:34-37.

³ Acts 13:38.

⁴ Ibid.

are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures... and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.⁵

Is that what your Bible says? Well, don't jump over the first part of verse four.

“And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.”⁶

That is the part we kid of scoot over real fast and think, ok, that is not significant, but it is. It is. And so let me just give you a few thoughts to consider as we come back here to John 19 and verse 38. The first thought that I would leave with you is that our Lord's grave and the details pertaining to it were prophesied of old, every detail as much as the details of the cross. So here we see in the grand scheme of redemption—some have referred to it as the golden chain of salvation—here is a link that is vital and indispensable in understanding of how it is that God is pleased to save sinners. And verse 38 says:

“And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews...”⁷

You say, “Well, where were the other disciples?”

They scattered. The shepherd had been smitten and the sheep scattered and how unlikely a person to have now come boldly and request the body of our Lord who was as described here a secret disciple for fear of the Jews. And not only Joseph of Arimathaea, but verse 39:

“And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night....”⁸

But now in the light of day makes manifest that he is, indeed, one of the Lord's. Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus.

You say, “Well, how is that significant?”

Well, if you go to Isaiah chapter 53 look in Isaiah chapter 53. Both of these were men of means. In their positions they had gathered to themselves quite a bit of wealth. And even as the Scriptures, as I read them declared that there was in the garden near the cross a new sepulcher wherein was never man yet laid, here was a sepulcher in God's purpose and will that was right near the cross and the owners of that sepulcher, the owner, Joseph of Arimathaea would have been one that owned that particular sepulcher, had bought it for he and his family and never been a body laid in it. It was a new sepulcher. And yet it

⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:1-4.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:4.

⁷ John 19:38.

⁸ John 19:39.

was purposed of the Lord that our Lord should be buried there. And that is foretold here in Isaiah 53 and verse nine.

“And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.”⁹

Here is where we see, just as with the cross, that those men purposed to do what they would do with Christ did so willfully in their rebellion and yet even as Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, it was according to the foreknowledge and purpose of God that they did what they did. Here was a sepulcher that had previously been purchased with another purpose for Joseph of Arimathaea to use for he and his family and yet unbeknownst to him was foretold here in Isaiah 53:9 that the Lord would make his great not only with the wicked, but with the rich in his death.

Some would look at that and say, “How ironic.” Here our Lord lived in abject poverty throughout his life and yet when it came to his burial it was determined that he should be buried with the rich in a rich place, in a sepulcher that had never been used.

You might say, “Well, what does it mean there he made his grave with the wicked?”

When you consider that had not somebody come and claimed the body of the Lord Jesus Christ, you think about who he was numbered with. He was numbered with transgressors. There was a place to cast bodies that is the place of the skull. This is where they took criminals that had been crucified and just cast their bodies over the cliff into a common grave and that would have been our Lord’s determined end as far as men were concerned, because they sought to wash their hands of him. In fact, the religious men didn't even want to touch his body because they were busy about getting ready for their ceremony, the Passover. And yet our Lord purposed that in spite of the wickedness of those men and what they had determined that he would find his grave among the rich.

The point I want you to see in Isaiah 53:9 is that while Joseph of Arimathaea came and took the body of Jesus, being directed by the Lord to do so, notice in verse nine who the glory goes to. It wasn’t Joseph of Arimathaea. In verse nine of Isaiah 53:

“And he made his grave...”¹⁰

We see in this just as Christ in his life and in his death he said:

“No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.”¹¹

And so here we see in our Lord’s grave in every detail how it was purposed that it should be exactly as it was foretold.

⁹ Isaiah 53:9.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ John 10:18.

And just as I read in Acts 13, look back here in Psalm 16 and verse 10. What we read in Acts 13 was actually a fulfillment of verse 10 that his body should not see corruption. We read:

“For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell.”¹²

We are going to look at that word in a little bit. It doesn't mean in the hell of eternal condemnation. Christ in no way went to hell. But that word used there is actually a word which means the grave.

“For thou wilt not leave...”¹³

The literal translation would be: Because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your holy one see decay. You know, his body had just been taken and cast upon other ... a dung heap, a waste heap where other bodies had decayed and there were skulls all around. The likelihood of decay would have been even greater. Here not only was he placed in a tomb where no man had yet laid, but you can see there they took spices and wound it in linen clothes with those spices as the manner of the Jews is to bury to preserve the body. So in every way God the Father was working out his will with regard to the body of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But, secondly, in John 19 I would say this as a thought that we should retain and that is in our Lord's grave, in his burial we see the power of our Redeemer in drawing those to himself for whom he died. And I know this is a mystery, because here lay a dead body and for all practical purposes, as men considered that body, there was no more life. But as we know, the body is but a shell.

We were talking about this and Bob brought this up with our men during our time of reading before our worship service today and that is the soul lives forever. Just because the body is dead the soul is alive. We have got it backwards in our thinking. We often say we have a soul. No, we are a soul. We have a body.

And so even as in his life our Lord was directing all things pertaining to himself, even so in his death he did not stop being God just because he body laid there for three days and three nights in that grave. He continued as a living soul to direct all things as a divine being, as the divine being and even to this degree or point in drawing two unlikely sinners to himself, to identify with them all the while his body lay dead in that grave. What a mystery. What a wonderment. What a miracle. But that is what grace is.

When you think about this funeral there was no eulogy that was given. Our Lord didn't require one. And the likely—as you would consider—likely people that would attend his funeral weren't there. And two unlikely sinners that no one ever thought were the Lord's,

¹² Psalm 16:10.

¹³ Ibid.

because they were in secret, because of the fear of men drawn to him and yet they were the Lord's and it was in the Lord's time that he was pleased to make them manifest.

And this, again, shows us that we can never judge who the what and tare. We are horrible at that. We look at somebody and say, "Well, if there was ever a reprobate that one is a reprobate." Who are we to judge?

Or we proudly pronounce some to be the Lord's who aren't. We say, "Well, if ever that one was a Christian that one is." But who are you to judge that? It may have all been a façade. Scriptures tell us not to look on the outward, not to look on man's appearances. And here is a good example of that. Here one Joseph of Arimathaea it says very specifically who for fear of the Jews had been a disciple of Jesus. We don't know the heart, but the Lord does.

But I do know this. What this teaches us is that regardless of where man is in his state right now, if he is the Lord's, the Lord will draw him out and he will identify with the Lord in truth before men. And we know it is the Lord because it wasn't in a time of convenience. When you think about all the people who had cried, "Crucify him, crucify him," and washed their hands of Christ, it was at this moment that the Lord caused this one Joseph of Arimathaea to identify with. It is not... it wasn't in the comfort of the times. It was when it mattered that he set forth and besought Pilate, unlike Peter even at this time who before that little maiden around the fire had denied the Lord before the cock crew. Here was Joseph of Arimathaea when the fire was still hot presenting himself to Pilate and saying, "Give me the body." And Pilate gave him leave and he came therefore and took the body.

And the same with Nicodemus. Nicodemus where it says which first came to Jesus by night. And there is a lot of significance even that word by night. Perhaps even in the darkness of the hour or in the darkness of his own heart. I know a lot of people criticize Nicodemus for coming at night to see the Lord, but it was the Lord that drew him. Otherwise he would not have come.

In the same year... no matter how long it took for Nicodemus to publicly identify with the Lord Jesus Christ, the fact is he did identify with him. And he was brought from the night into the light and stood with Joseph of Arimathaea in helping take the body and bringing the mixture of myrrh and aloes and bearing our Lord. It speaks there about a hundred pounds of spices. That is a lot and it is costly, very costly. And yet it was what the Lord purposed that he should dedicate to the preservation of the body of our Lord.

It reminds me of that woman that anointed our Lord's feet and announced his death. You look over in Mark chapter 14. This would be something, again, that most people would just pass by and not consider significant. And yet the Lord drew attention to it. Remember here when our Lord was at Bethany in Mark 14:

After two days was the feast of the passover, and of unleavened bread: and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take him by craft,

and put him to death. But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar of the people.¹⁴

That is interesting, because that was that Passover, but the Lord had purposed that it be on the feast day that he would be delivered up.

And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head. And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her. And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always. She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.¹⁵

I see a parallel between what she did as one of the Lord's drawn to him, anointing his body and Nicodemus who although apparently was not the Lord's raised in religion, the Jewish religion and yet he was just like the apostle Paul. That when it pleased God to reveal Christ in him came and identified with him. And it says that they took him, verse 41, in a new sepulcher in John 19, wherein was never man yet laid.

I believe that, again, we have a picture here of all things being made new. You know, unlike Adam of old that fell in the garden, here we find the story of redemption being established in a new garden as it says there, verse 41.

"Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulcher."¹⁶

I believe it would have been the same garden where he interceded on behalf of his own when he was yet alive. He would have been able to look to that place where he would soon be crucified and a lot of significance even in that, the garden and the new sepulcher wherein no man had laid.

But it also is a fulfillment even in Old Testament prophecy. Again, I love the beauty and connection between the New and the Old Testament. If you will look back in Numbers chapter 19 here is a little gem that you may never have considered before, but in Numbers chapter 19 and upon the offering up the sacrifice of the heifer for the sin of the people, the one who would take the ashes and here, again, we see our Lord being buried.

¹⁴ Mark 14:1-2.

¹⁵ Mark 14:3-9.

¹⁶ John 19:41.

This is after his death. So after the offering of the sacrifice, Numbers 19 and verse nine says:

“And a man that is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and lay them up without the camp in a clean place, and it shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for a water of separation: it is a purification for sin.”¹⁷

How closely the Scriptures parallel the... even the disposing, if you will, of the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, not just to be cast anywhere, but that even as the heifer previously slain, our Lord previously slain, now the ashes, so to speak, the dead body being taken and laid outside the camp in a clean place.

But, thirdly, I would have you to consider this that in our Lord's grave is proof that he actually died, not just swooned, not just in a coma as some, you know, it has happened where they have been pronounced dead and suddenly when they are getting ready to deal with the body all of the sudden they see movement and they would say, “Whoa, wait a minute. They are not dead.”

You know, in fulfillment of the Scriptures it was necessary that Christ die. It wasn't just blood shed, but it had to be blood shed unto death. And the fact that he would lay three days and three nights in the grave and that his body would be wound in linen clothes with spices and put in the sepulcher, all of this is purposeful to show us that our Lord was, indeed, dead. He was buried. You don't bury someone alive. He was buried. He died. And our Lord himself declared that he would be in the grave three days and three nights.

If you look in Matthew chapter 12 and verse four this was part of his teaching concerning what awaited him. You know, the Pharisees demanded a sign. They wanted a miracle. They wanted something miraculous to speak of. It is like this week, well, the last two weeks I have seen on the news one was a little nine year old boy that supposedly died and went to heaven and came back and how he has written a book and his dad happens to be a preacher which is interesting parallel connection, because his dad was going around promoting him and this book, a lot of self interest in this thing. But then they also had a doctor that supposedly had been Agnostic up to the point of him, he says, dying and going to heaven and coming back. But, you know, the one thing that listened for that I didn't hear in either testimony even though a book has been written was they talked about people they saw and beings they saw and experiences they had, but not a one of them said anything of Christ, not a one.

That, to me tells me that it wasn't a trip to heaven that they took. It was a delusion like many today. They are deluded in their thinking. And like so many even in Christ's day wanting a sign. You know, here is one the Scriptures testify that did die and was buried and raised again, ascended on high and yet people will not believe him. They don't believe his Word, but they will take the word of someone else that comes along and professes it.

¹⁷ Numbers 19:9.

And the Lord identified the problem, verse 39.

But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.¹⁸

A very clear testimony that it was the Lord's purpose that he should be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Now you do the math. There are religions today that speak of good Friday and they say that our Lord was crucified on Friday and raised again on Sunday. Well, there is no way in this earth you are going to be able to come up with being able to fit three days and three nights into Friday through Sunday. He was crucified in the afternoon. So what do you do? You count Saturday as a day. And it says first thing in the dawning of the first day of the week when the women came he was already risen. So that is only one day. And even if you count Friday night and Saturday night that is just two nights. No way it fits.

Men have taken their own persuasions and imposed them here upon the Word. It is not a general three days and three nights. The Lord said he would be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Well, in order for that to be you would have to go all the way back to Wednesday where it was Wednesday afternoon of the week that the Lord would have been delivered up and his body laid in the grave. And now you count Wednesday night, Thursday night and Friday night. That is three nights. And you would count Thursday all day, Friday all day and Saturday all day. That is three days and three nights. So what does that leave us? Well, remember the Jewish day began at six in the evening and went all the way to six the next day. So the first day of the week for a Jewish calendar would have been starting at 6 PM Saturday night. Every indication is that our Lord laid in that grave from Wednesday night all the way through Friday night all day Thursday, Friday and Saturday but come Saturday night, which would have been the sabbath, the Jewish sabbath our Lord was raised.

Just as he was crucified on the Passover, he would have been raised on the sabbath. Christ our sabbath.

I believe every detail even the three days and three nights.

You say, "Why did he have to wait that long?"

Because it was purposed that he should raise again on the sabbath. Christ our sabbath. And when you look at certain verses of Scripture we see the significance of that.

For example, in Colossians chapter two look I Colossians chapter two and I will bring this to a close. Colossians chapter two. Here we read.

¹⁸ Matthew 12:39-40.

Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.¹⁹

All right. In every detail whether at the holy day, all of the Passovers, all of those holy days Christ fulfilled and even the sabbath day, Christ would have fulfilled in being raised on that sabbath. But what we see is that in our Lord's grave he was not inactive. All the while fulfilling all that was prophesied concerning him, but also in drawing to himself such as Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus. This was all a part of his complete work of redemption that he came to do. And you know, that is why back here in John chapter 19 it is not the end of the story even as the Scripture, the chapter ends in verse 42.

“There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day.”²⁰

That would have been a Wednesday and by 6 PM Wednesday he would have been off the cross and buried and then the next day Thursday would have been the Passover. It would have been a high day as the Scriptures describe it. So no servile work was done. The Friday the women would have gone and prepared spices themselves and if the market place would have been open, but then they went home.

You say, “Well, why didn't they go immediately to the tomb?”

Well, by 6 PM there was another sabbath, it was the regular sabbath that they were to rest in. But then at the end of the week when that sabbath was complete they went to that tomb early in the morning, Sunday. And it wasn't that Christ raised early in the morning, but when they got there they found the tomb, what? Empty, already empty. And as Bob read, you know:

“Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen.”²¹

We serve a risen Savior. And he is the victor and he is the glorious one and he is the one to whom all the honor and the glory belongs.

All right. Mike...

¹⁹ Colossians 2:16-17.

²⁰ John 19:42.

²¹ Luke 24:5-6.