

"Were You There When Jesus Was Laid in the Tomb?"—  
John 19:38-42

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, "Were You There When Jesus Was Laid in the Tomb?", is John 19:38-42 → *After 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. Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. 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 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 because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.*

This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Dealing with the burden of grief in the midst of the business of the grave is very difficult. Upon Jesus' death, Luke 23:48 tells us that *all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts.* Among those watching

were also the women who had *followed Him and ministered to Him* during His earthly ministry. (cf. Mark 15:41) Now what? Do they just walk away so the Roman soldiers can dump his body into the pit with all the other rotting bodies? That was the usual “burial” for those crucified. How long these followers of Jesus tarried at the foot of the cross, possibly wondering what would happen to His body, we are not told. Would there be any dignified respect shown for their Savior in His death?

A man by the name of *Joseph of Arimathea* appears on the scene, who *asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus*. Mark 15:43 describes him as *a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God*. This was the same *council* (i.e. the Sanhedrin) who had condemned Jesus worthy of death. Luke 23:50-51 describes Joseph as *a good and righteous man . . . who had not consented to their decision and action*. John 12:42-43 tells us that many *of the authorities believed in Jesus, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God*.

Could Joseph have been numbered with these *authorities*, being described in our text as a secret *disciple of Jesus*? Apparently, if he had “found” *the kingdom of God* in Jesus and placed his faith in Him it wasn’t made public until this point. Not only was Joseph publicly confessing His

faith in Jesus by this “funeral action” on his part but, being a wealthy man (cf. Matthew 27:57), he was also fulfilling God’s Word from Isaiah 53:9. Referring to Jesus’ burial there it says: *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.*

Who else was present when Jesus was laid in the tomb? We run into a man by the name of *Nicodemus*, described in verse 39 of our text as the *Nicodemus . . . who earlier had come to Jesus by night*. (cf. John 3) It was Nicodemus to whom Jesus spoke those well-known words of the Scriptures from John 3:16 → *For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life*. Following this discussion with Jesus, Nicodemus, also a member of the council which wanted to kill Jesus, actually came to His defense and was accused of being Jesus’ follower by them. (cf. John 7:50-52) Apparently the Holy Spirit worked faith through Jesus’ teaching as he also openly associated with Jesus through this “funeral action” in His burial.

Who else was present when Jesus was laid in the tomb? Luke 23:55-56 tells us that *the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments* with which to anoint Jesus’ body after the Sabbath Day rest. Imagine the comfort and relief that may have come

to the friends of Jesus who stood by Him through all of this when they saw these men step forward **for Jesus**.

Were you there when Jesus was laid in the tomb? Actually you join Joseph, Nicodemus and the women at that tomb based upon Jesus' promise in John 12:32, where He said: *And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw **all people** to Myself*. We see Jesus' words so vividly fulfilled by the actions of these two "secret" disciples of Jesus in connection with His burial and fulfilled in your presence here this evening.

While most of Jesus' disciples ran away, Jesus "drew out" these two men to provide a burial for Himself as they acted by faith. It is possible that the followers who stayed close to Him viewed His burial and grave sympathetically. Finally, someone was willing to perform an act of decency in the midst of so much injustice, cruelty and abuse! Finally, He would have a final resting place with a lack of suffering in His grave! At this point they still did not understand His words about rising from the dead on the third day.

This same Jesus on the cross draws you to Himself, the Holy Spirit convicting you of your sins which put Him on that cross, with the desire that you repent and openly confess Him as Lord and Savior in your life today. The Holy Spirit-wrought faith also gives you a completely different view of Jesus' burial and grave. Jesus' burial, as well as your burial, are

not just the final part of death. To those who are in fellowship with Jesus the grave becomes something quite different. It is not an end but a beginning. It is not a permanent resting place but a temporary stay-over.

If you truly believe the words of Romans 6:3-4 then you too were with Jesus in that tomb. There it says: *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized **into His death? We were buried therefore with Him** by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.* Did you notice the words: **We were buried . . . with Him** by baptism into death? In your baptism the Holy Spirit worked faith in Jesus Christ in you, connecting you to His death and resurrection for the forgiveness of your sins! You were there when Jesus was laid in the tomb when you were baptized!

Thus, even though dealing with the burden of grief in the midst of the business of the grave is very difficult from our human point of view, it is not hopeless from our faith point of view. We do not fear the grave or view it as the final event in our life. Neither do we see the grave as the end of suffering for an individual. Rather, we know Jesus and the victory of the grave which He won for us! Our resurrection from the dead on the Last Day to receive a new, glorified body within which we live physically in Christ's presence in the new heavens and the new earth is the final event in the Christian's life! Meanwhile, in this life, our primary desire is

for Jesus to return while we are still alive to take us to be with Him in heaven.

Our text says that Joseph and Nicodemus *took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews*. Even in the midst of such preparations peoples' bodies still decayed. Such preparations on their part had no bearing on Jesus' body avoiding decay according to God's plan. Jesus was "wrapped" with the promises of God's Word for you! Placing your complete trust in Jesus Who won the victory over the grave **for you** is that with which you are "wrapped" and empowered by the Holy Spirit to confess openly and boldly before all people in the words of 1 Corinthians 15:57 →

*Thanks be to God,*

*Who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

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