

"The Stone of Burial"—Matthew 27:64-66

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, "The Stone of Burial", is Matthew 27:64-66 → The Pharisees said to Pilate: "*Order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples go and steal Him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first.*" Pilate said to them, "*You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can.*" So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard. This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

During His earthly ministry Jesus asked His disciples about the people's perceptions of Him. People were coming up with all kinds of answers as they tried to "figure Him out." Some thought He was Elijah or Jeremiah or another prophet. (cf. Matthew 16:13-14) King Herod came to the conclusion that Jesus was John the Baptizer raised from the dead and figured that was why these miraculous powers were at work in Him. (cf. Matthew 14:2) In the events of Jesus' burial conclusions about the Person & Work of Jesus surfaced, focused on the stone of burial.

Our text tells us that following Jesus' death and burial, the religious leaders were still kind of "nervous" about Him. Why? They had accomplished their goals of having Him killed and "out of their hair." This uneasy feeling accompanies anyone who wants a Christ on their own terms and according to their own perceptions. These Pharisees recognized Jesus was powerful. John 3:2 records the Pharisee Nicodemus' perspective of Jesus: *Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.* At the same time, the majority of the Pharisees chose to understand Him apart from the written promises of the Old Testament Scriptures. Matthew 12:24 records their perception of Jesus' healing ministry: *It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.* When you understand Jesus in your own way what will you do with His power, especially when it doesn't work for your own perceptions and expectations?

Unfortunately people still hold to a perception of God and Jesus based upon their own conclusions, imaginations, experiences and desires—even Christians. They too get really nervous whenever you challenge their perceptions with the written Word of God. They become defensive, rolling a stone over their ears and hearts so that they will not have to deal with a Jesus that doesn't conform to their concepts of Him. The sealed stone over the

entrance to the tomb of Jesus can picture hearts which are hardened in their own perceptions and ideas of who Jesus is and how He should function in their lives. People think He should always act on my behalf in a favorable manner; He should never allow bad things to happen to me; He should understand me and tolerate me by never condemning my sin but loving me and letting me do whatever I want. Instead, faith will listen to God's Word and pray **on the basis of that written Word** as Jesus taught us to pray: *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* "Lord, let Your will revealed in Your written Word be done in my heart and life today."

Our text tells us *the chief priests and the Pharisees* were so "nervous" about the dead Jesus that they requested Pilate to secure the tomb to make sure *His disciples* wouldn't *steal Him away and tell the people, "He has risen from the dead," and the last fraud . . . be worse than the first.* (verse 64) Verse 66 tells us that *they . . . made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.* Sealing the stone of burial at the tomb of Jesus reflected their delusion of thinking they were still in control of Jesus and His disciples.

However, what does the written Word of God tell you:

- Isaiah 53:10 → *It was the will of the LORD to crush Him; He has put Him to grief; when His soul makes an offering for guilt.* His suffering, death and burial was Yahweh's doing.

- John 10:18 → Jesus said: *No one takes My life from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from My Father. Jesus **willingly** laid down His life **for you!***
- Acts 2:23 → *This Jesus was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. It happened according to the LORD's orchestration.*

What makes anyone think they can control Jesus or have the corner on Who He is or what He does? Only those who live under the delusions of their own perceptions of His Person & Work apart from the revealed will of God in the written Scriptures.

Jesus' death, burial and resurrection was more about **your** death, burial and resurrection so that you could be freed from the power death forever, both spiritual and physical, through faith in Him! His death also brought many to an expression of faith in Him. The very fact that Jesus received a burial was because the Holy Spirit broke down the stony delusions to two men's perceptions of Jesus. After His death *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. (John 19:38-42) Who would bury Jesus? His disciples certainly were in no shape to do so. They simply ran for their lives! But now Joseph and Nicodemus openly confessed their faith in Jesus by coming forward to give Him a proper burial!

Recognizing Jesus' death and burial as necessary for the forgiveness of your sins brings you to a submissive trust in Him. It frees you from desperately trying control Jesus, bringing you into His controlling grace. It causes you to confess openly and freely with the apostle Paul in the words of Galatians 2:20 → *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ Who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me.* Faith in Jesus as revealed in the written Word of God confesses the reason the stone of burial was removed from the tomb—not so that Jesus could get out (which is a false perception of Jesus) but **so that we could get in and witness the victory over death which He accomplished for us!**

You were connected to Jesus' death, burial and resurrection in your baptism for the express purpose of walking *in newness of life*! Romans 6:4 says: *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.* You continue to be connected to Jesus' death, burial and resurrection everyday as you lay your own perceptions of Him at the foot of the cross, repent of your sins and receive the absolution of His written Word: *Take heart . . . your sins are forgiven.* (cf. Matthew 9:2)

This newness of life is reflected in openly confessing your faith in Christ to others. It is reflected by your willingness to receive God's Word, study it and believe what it says. It is displayed in the desire for God's will to be accomplished in your life in spite of your own personal desires and expectations. It is expressed in praise, worship and thanks that the stone has been rolled away from the tomb so that you can *walk in newness of life* now and eternally! Amen.