

The Great Sayings in the Gospels
170 - The Burial and Resurrection of Jesus Christ 01
Matt 27:57-66, Luke 22:55,56

Matt 27:57-66

- 57 When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathaea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple:
58 He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered.
59 And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth,
60 And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed.
61 And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre.

Luke 23:55-56

- 55 And the women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulchre, and how his body was laid.
56 And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the sabbath day according to the commandment.
- 62 Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate,
63 Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again.
64 Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first.
65 Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can.
66 So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch. KJV

Introduction:

We have remarked a couple of times recently concerning the questions that surround which day Jesus actually was crucified. We note here that some people were working really quickly and some were doing some really odd things if indeed this was Friday afternoon after 3 P.M. Remember that the Jewish Sabbath began at 6 P.M. on Friday and anyone doing work after that time was in violation of the Law of God and subject to being stoned for this violation. Jesus had been criticized, if you remember, for merely picking some grain and eating it on the Sabbath day. The Jews had leveled charges against Him for healing on that day. The rules were very rigid and very definite. One could not light a fire or cook any food. No physical labor of any kind was to be done except that which was absolutely necessary. An animal that fell into a ditch could be helped out and if one needed water, he could be led to get a drink. But all activity was severely limited. One could walk a short distance, but somewhat less than a mile. He could eat but only if the food were already prepared. And, in the days of Jesus, synagogue attendance was almost

mandatory, especially if one wanted to be considered a good Jew.

So look at the quick work that was supposedly done:

Joseph was or heard that Jesus was dead,
he went to Pilate and requested an audience (never an immediate thing)
the request was presented to Pilate who was surprised to hear that Jesus was dead,
The centurion was sent for and questioned about the death
when it was affirmed Joseph was given permission to take Jesus' body down
He and Nicodemus, taking linen and spices, returned to the cross (over a mile, and maybe
two from Pilate's judgment hall)
there they disassembled the cross, removed the spikes, and carried His body to the tomb
nearby.
The body was carefully wound, with the spices and properly laid out
the stone, a very heavy one, was rolled across the entrance
the women who had watched the entire thing returned home and prepared spices to bring
back after the Sabbath.

And all of this, supposedly, between 3 and 6 P.M.

Odd, and almost unbelievable behavior **On the Sabbath**:

The chief priests (who should have been busy at the temple) and the Pharisees made a trip to Pilate to ask for a guard for the tomb.

Being granted their wish, they went to the tomb, an unclean place for them to touch, where they 'sealed' it, place some kind of official documentation on it, and gave instructions to the soldiers

It really stretches the imagination to think that this all fits with a Friday death and burial.

In any case, our Savior was buried just as had been prophesied, in a wealthy man's tomb even though he had been executed together with wicked men.

Isa 53:12

12 Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. KJV

Then, there are those who speculate on where Jesus went and what He was doing while His body was in the grave.

Even though the scriptures make no comment on these three days other than noting the activities of the Jews and His disciples, some cannot help themselves.

There is an odd sounding verse in 1 Peter that some have taken to mean that He was doing something very difficult to explain.

1 Peter 3:18-20

18 For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might

- bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:
- 19 By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;
 - 20 Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.

Now, admittedly, this is a peculiar statement and one very difficult to comprehend. But did Jesus really go to preach to the spirits of people long dead who had lived such wicked lives that God had determined to destroy the whole race except for Noah and his family? And what was the preaching to be about and with what hopeful outcome? Were they now going to believe even though they had openly rebelled against Him while on earth and had refused the preaching of Noah? Why should they had another chance when billions since then have gone directly into torment who died in unbelief? If God had a purpose to save them, why did He not send the Holy Spirit to convict them of sin and draw them to Himself in the first place?

What Peter was doing here was introducing the analogy of the ark and the salvation of the believers. As the ark was delivered from the water, we, in a figure, are delivered through the waters of baptism. The same spirit that proclaimed repentance to those before the flood but without attending grace has proclaimed the message through Christ to us who have been made recipients of the graces of repentance and faith unto salvation.

I am reminded of the great damage that has been done, at least from the human perspective, to the Church of Jesus Christ, to the gospel message, and ultimately to the world by the useless and destructive workings of the human mind speculating about things that lead ultimately to false doctrine, confusion, and the perversion of the truths of God.

Paul rightly warned Timothy to avoid such things.

1 Tim 6:3-5

- 3 If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness;
- 4 He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings,
- 5 Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.

2 Tim 2:23

- 23 But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes.

Gnosticism, docetism, Arianism, Pelagianism, denial of the Trinity, the worship of saints, syncretism, and all of the cults can be traced to men speculating beyond the revelation of God and then creating doctrines based on their speculations. The scriptures are chock full of information, real information, godly and profound revelation and instruction, that one could not master fully in 1000 lifetimes, so where is the time and energy to be spending on questioning and dreaming about things unrevealed?

Jesus was in the tomb. He had committed His spirit to the Father and breathed out in human death. The truth is that we have no revelation of what Jesus Himself was doing while His body was in the tomb. It is unimportant information for us or God would have revealed it. He was away and out of sight, seemingly defeated with every thing He had said, taught, and prophesied in question. He Himself was in question. How could He, the Son of God that He claimed to be, allow Himself to be killed and all of the work He had done to be destroyed?

One wonders at the questions that must have been going through the minds of His disciples as they sat quietly resting on that last Sabbath they would spend before the Resurrection.

Why didn't Jesus let us crown Him King when the people were ready to do it?

Did He truly not have the power to deliver Himself from the Jews and the Romans?

How could He have died Who had the power to raise the dead and heal the sick?

We left everything to follow Him, now what is going to become of us?

Are the Jews coming after us as soon as the Sabbath is over? Will we be crucified too?

And, then, we, standing at a distance from the event, knowing how it all worked out, wonder why the Lord would allow His people to go through such torment and loss for three days since He was going to ultimately rise from the dead? He could certainly have done more to comfort and assure them than He did, couldn't He? He could have sent angels to speak to them about the matter as He had done for Mary, Joseph, the Shepherds, and possibly the Magi at the beginning of His earthly life.

We would do well, the next time that God sends us some difficult situation, to remember those three days of darkness that the disciples endured as the body of Jesus lay in the tomb.

Ps 30:4-5

4 Sing unto the LORD, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness.

5 For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.

We can only imagine how the Jewish leaders must have been feeling.

They seemed to be more worried about His resurrection and more intensely remembering it than Jesus' own disciples.

Did any of them actually imagine that He might rise again?

The death of Christ also reminds us that profound events sometimes send the seemingly faithful into apostasy and sometimes raise up seeming cowards to acts of heroism.

Both Judas and Peter, surely for different reasons, were put in the position of denying Christ when put to the test.

We all would like to believe it of ourselves that if worst came to worst we would stand fast with Jesus, suffer whatever persecution might be associated with being His disciple and even die for Him if it came to that.

But, we do not really know do we? If someone was standing with a gun to our head and demanding a testimony of our faith, could we give it? Surely we know that we would absolutely need God's grace to do so, that apart from Him sustaining us we would deny Him.

Joseph and Nicodemus, on the other hand, were motivated to rise up and identify themselves with a seemingly defeated Jesus purely out of love and devotion.

They showed the courage we hope that we can muster if our faith were truly tested. Both were men of great status but also men whose status depended to some degree on being held in respect by the very people who had murdered their Savior. To identify with Him meant being rejected by them and that had kept both of them quiet for some time.

But now, His body was going to be cast into the garbage dump with those of the two thieves unless they acted quickly. There was no time to dally caught between the two camps any more. If Jesus was going to receive a proper burial it was their responsibility to do it. No one asked them and certainly no one pressured them to act. What they did was to respond to a motivation that is often known within Christian circles and rarely outside of them. The need called for action and their ability made them the instruments of choice.

Now, we certainly know that God was at work, motivating and calling these men to duty so that the remaining scriptures might be fulfilled, but I am certain that it did not seem that way to them. Joseph and Nicodemus were committing social and possibly financial suicide to bury a man they must have thought could not be killed and could not die. Yet the theological quandary did not prevent them from acting.

I am reminded of a great contrast that is recorded in the ministry of Elijah the prophet. Ahab and Jezebel had led Israel away from God and into profound worship of Baal and Asherah. God called Elijah to challenge them and he arranged a great public event on Mt. Carmel where he challenged the false prophets to call down fire from their gods out of heaven to consume a sacrifice. He said something to the people that forever sticks as a universal challenge to those caught between two contrasting and antagonistic worlds.

1 Kings 18:21

21 And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.

Both Nicodemus and Joseph were seemingly members of the Sanhedrin. Were they present at

the trial? It is not recorded whether they were or not. Certainly neither of them had sided with the decision to murder Jesus. Maybe that moment had been the last straw for both of them. Maybe they had stood a ways off there at the cross and witnessed the events of Jesus' death? Did they discuss the burial then? Did they make the decision there to take care of Him if no one else did? Had they sent servants to gather what would be necessary? Here again is information that we are not given but we also must acknowledge that these things were not done in a vacuum. There had to be some communication between the men.

But, most of all, there had to have come that moment which every child of God knows all too well, than moment when one steps out of the shadows and fully identifies himself with Jesus Christ and sets himself squarely in the target area for all who oppose the gospel.

They had come to the end of holding their faith in secret and to themselves. The day had come when they could be silent no more, when they were no longer willing to abide behind their professional shield and worry more about what it would cost to identify with Jesus than what it would cost not to do so.

They had, no doubt, heard Jesus teach on the topic of choosing which master one would obey and of the impossibility of serving two.

Luke 16:13

13 No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

And, to one degree or another, they both had been trying to serve both. They had held their positions up until this very minute and now the day of choosing had come. To their credit and to the testimony of the Grace of God, they had chosen wisely.

Often the choice to serve Christ, even today, costs dearly. Christians in our culture have largely avoided that cost for a long time but those in other places have not been nearly so fortunate. There are believers languishing in prisons in North Korea and China right now. Very likely there are other places as well. The governments of the world and much of the secular press conspire to keep these stories from us lest we understand that the whole world system in which we live is an enemy of Jesus Christ and His people.

The day of choosing is swiftly approaching for Christians in America. I truly believe that we will see the story that played out on the small stage at the death of Jesus played upon a much larger stage here. Already the major denominations have showed their colors. They will bend to every pressure and play the part of Judas at the slightest provocation.

The conservative denominations have remained somewhat faithful, at least as far as their public face is concerned, but even some of the most conservative have been crumbling from within for a long time. In a real day of choosing many of their individual churches and pastors will be courageous but I fear that the institutions themselves will collapse.

Where are you going to stand in the Day of Choosing? When loyalty to Christ means that your

bank account, your house, and all of your benefits are seized by the government, which has listed you as belonging to a 'hate group' because you support a New Testament church?

I am sure that Judases will be everywhere but I also think that we will see Joseph and Nicodemus come out of the woodwork to stand with Christ and with His people. Often in the history of Europe there were lesser wealthy men and noblemen who provided shelter for persecuted people. Everyone was not protected for sure but many were. God used them not only to provide protection but often to provide money and resources for the spread of the gospel.

I am not looking forward to that Day for sure. I tend to avoid suffering like everyone else but I do often pray that when the time comes we will all be found faithful to our Lord as Nicodemus and Joseph were there at His cross and His burial.

2 Tim 4:1-4

- 1 I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;
- 2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.
- 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;
- 4 And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

The time of choosing is upon us. May God grant us grace to be a Joseph or a Nicodemus and not a Judas.