

THE BURIAL OF JESUS

Matthew 27:57-66

God rules this world through two interrelated means:

- *Miracles*
- *Providence*

In order to accomplish His purposes, God sometimes supernaturally interrupts the natural process that He Himself has ordained and ordered. In doing so, He overrules what we commonly call *natural law*, thereby accomplishing what is scientifically unexplainable. Such divine interruption is called a *miracle*.

The second way in which God executes His will is through divine *providence*. *Providence* refers to God's ability to operate through normal and natural processes to accomplish His purpose and plan. God is able to take normal events and circumstances and cause them all to work together in meticulous precision to perfectly fulfill His divine will.

- **Joseph**...his *brothers*, the *pit*, *Potiphar*, *prison*, *Pharaoh*.
- **Esther**...*King Ahasuerus*, *Mordecai* (foster-father), *Haman* (evil).
- **Ruth**...*Naomi* (mother-in-law), *Boaz* (kinsman redeemer)...lineage of the Messiah.

Through *miracles*, God interrupts and overrules the operation of normal and natural processes and events...whereas through *providence* He takes them as they are and orchestrates them to accomplish His predetermined will.

Nowhere in Scripture is God's incredible and amazing *providence* more evident than in Jesus' burial. Although an interesting story, the burial of Jesus seems somewhat mundane and ordinary compared to His dramatic and substantive death and resurrection. Yet even His burial provides its own demonstrations of God's sovereign control. There were no miracles in the *trial* of Christ...or in His *crucifixion*...or in His *burial*...but the *providence* of God controlled every detail.

His burial is often passed over quickly in commentaries, sermons, and Bible studies as being simply a necessary event between His death and resurrection. There's a strong tendency to rush immediately from His death to His resurrection...mentioning His burial only in passing. Yet, Matthew's account of His burial conveys several astounding truths that give remarkable testimony to the predetermined plan and purpose of God.

I. THE REQUEST: (vs. 57-58)

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus (vs. 57)...

When it was evening...Refers to the time period from 3:00 PM until 6:00 PM, which was considered by the Jews to be *the end of the day* and *the beginning of evening*.

It was about the *ninth hour*...3:00 PM...when Jesus spoke His last words from the cross and "*yielded up His spirit*" (vs. 46-50). There are *two reasons* why it was imperative that Jesus die before the end of the day...*Friday*.

- First, because the **Sabbath** began at 6:00 PM, He had to be taken down from the cross before then, and prepared for burial in order to not *profane* the Sabbath.

This particular Sabbath was especially holy because it was also the high day of the **Passover** feast. It would have been extremely defiling for dead bodies to be hanging on crosses just outside the north wall of Jerusalem, possibly in sight of the Temple, on such a high holy day.

- Second, He had to be buried before the end of that day, **Friday**, in order to be in the earth *three separate days* before His resurrection. *Friday*, *Saturday*, and *Sunday*...*Resurrection Day*.

John explained that because it was *a day of preparation* for the **Passover**, and because they couldn't leave a body hanging on a cross without defiling such a holy day, the Jewish leaders went to **Pilate** and requested that he have the legs of the three being crucified broken in order to hasten their death.

"Then the Jews, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away."

~John 19:31

By having the **Romans** break the legs of the three men it would insure quick death. In such cases a large wooden mallet was used to shatter the legs of a victim, making it impossible for him to raise himself in order to breathe. Although the added pain would be

excruciating, it was short-lived, because death resulted quickly from suffocation.

After breaking the legs of the two men on either side of Jesus, the soldiers saw that Jesus was already dead. Consequently...

“One of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.”

~John 19:34

Once again, Scripture was fulfilled...

“He keeps all his bones, not one of them is broken.”

~Psalm 34:20

Precisely as prophesied...***no bone in Jesus’ body was broken, and His side was pierced.***

Arimathea...A prominent Jewish town east of **Joppa** in **Judea**.

Joseph...He was a member of the **Sanhedrin**, but hadn’t agreed with the council’s decision to crucify Jesus. Instead, he was one who had been looking for the kingdom of God and was a secret believer in Jesus. To have made his allegiance to Christ public not only would have cost him his place in the **Sanhedrin** but would have jeopardized his economic, social, and family welfare as well.

“And a man named Joseph, who was a member of the Council, a good and righteous man (he had not consented to their plan and action), a man from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who was waiting for the kingdom of God; this man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.”

~Luke 23:50-52

“After these things Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate granted permission. So he came and took away His body.”

~John 19:38

This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him (vs. 58)...

Pilate was surprised that Jesus was already dead...but when the death was verified by the centurion, he granted **Joseph’s** request for the body.

“Pilate wondered if He was dead by this time, and summoning the centurion, he questioned him as to whether He was already dead. And ascertaining this from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph.”

~Mark 15:44-45

It needs to be noted that **Joseph** wasn’t going to be able to partake in the **Passover** celebration because he had **defiled** himself. **First**, he had gone into the **Praetorium** to see **Pilate**. He then handled the dead body of Jesus. Both were considered defining acts.

II. **THE RESPECT:** (vs. 59-61)

And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth (vs. 59)...

John reported that **Joseph** was assisted in the burial by **Nicodemus** ...also a member of the **Sanhedrin**. These two men **took the body** of Jesus, and following Jewish burial customs of the time, wrapped the body in strips of **linen** with a mixture of **myrrh** and **aloes**... ***spices used in burial.***

“Nicodemus, who had first come to Him by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.”

~John 19:39-40

This procedure was done rapidly in order to be completed before the Sabbath began at nightfall.

And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and went away (vs. 60)...

Joseph placed the wrapped body **in his own new tomb**...cut out of the **rock** near the place of crucifixion. Why **Joseph** of **Arimathea** would have owned a tomb in **Jerusalem** can’t be determined. It is possible that Jesus had made arrangements ahead of time with him and he had purchased the tomb especially for this occasion.

After placing the body in the **tomb**, **Joseph** and **Nicodemus** secured the tomb by **rolling a large stone against** the tomb’s **entrance**.

And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the grave (vs. 61)...

Matthew noted that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary...Mary, the mother of *James the less* and *Joseph* (Mark 15:47)...sat across from the tomb, no doubt in mourning. What's interesting is these women accompanied Jesus' body right up to the minute it was buried...whereas Jesus' disciples had all abandoned Him (Matthew 26:56).

III. THE REPORT: (vs. 62-66)

Now on the next day, the day after the preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate, and said, "Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I am to rise again.'" (vs. 62-63)...

It's surprising that a group of unbelievers would remember Jesus' prediction that He would **rise again on the third day**, while the believing disciples seemingly forgot.

The very **next day** after His death...*on the Sabbath*...**the chief priests and the Pharisees** went to **Pilate** and informed him of Jesus' words. While *they didn't believe in Jesus*...they feared that His disciples might come and *steal the body* and attempt to *fabricate a resurrection lie*. Even in His death, Christ's enemies despised Him so vehemently that they would not utter His name... only referring to Him as **that deceiver**.

Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, otherwise His disciples may come and steal Him away and say to the people, "He has risen from the dead," and the last deception will be worse than the first. (vs. 64)...

They feared that if the **disciples** were able to **steal** the body and fabricate a lie that **He had risen from the dead**...that the **deception** would **be worse** than anything that Jesus had accomplished during His life. The Resurrection was the one thing these leaders feared... so they suggested the tomb **be made secure until the third day**.

Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go, make it as secure as you know how." (vs. 65)...

Pilate agreed with their suggestion and ordered that **a guard** be sent to the tomb and to make it **as secure as possible**.

And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone (vs. 66)...

The *Roman guard* not only *sealed the tomb*...presumably with the official Roman seal and with a cord and wax, which if tampered with, could be detected...but also continued to keep a **guard** at the scene until the third day. Their presence made stealing the body impossible.

LESSONS WE CAN LEARN:

- When we can't see why we are going through trials, testing, trouble, and conflicts...we need to hold on to the certainty that God's **sovereign, providential** power enlists every circumstance and happening for His **glory** and for our **good** (Romans 8:28).