

Mark 15:42-47 — The Burial Of Jesus

November 15, 2020

Open your Bibles to Mark 15. Our study will begin in Mark 15:42. I don't care if you are using a paper Bible or a phone Bible. Either is fine with me. I just want you to have a copy of God's Word in front of you that you can follow with your eyes as we read it together.

As I said in previous weeks, while it feels like the COVID pandemic and recent political unrest are the most important events in world history because the news tells us this is the most important election in the history of our country, at CrossWinds, we are studying what are truly the most important events in the history of the world. That is the crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. For the last two weeks, we studied the crucifixion and death of Jesus. Today, we study the burial of Jesus. Next week will be the most exciting message in the entire Gospel of Mark, which is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is going to be a great Sunday you don't want to miss.

Today, we are between the amazing death of Jesus and the amazing resurrection of Jesus. We are examining the burial of Jesus. Unfortunately, many people gloss over these brief verses. Even in my research for this message, there is not much written about Jesus' burial. In some ways, that is understandable. Jesus' crucifixion was a graphic event, especially when we learn the level of suffering a crucified and scourged person endured. Jesus' death was also engaging. It had numerous miraculous elements to it. The darkness of God's wrath covered the land for three hours. The curtain of the temple was torn in half by the hand of God at Jesus' death. There was an earthquake that split rocks

when Jesus died. Dead saints came back to life and began walking around town. At first, it looked like a zombie attack. That was crazy stuff. Of course, the resurrection of Jesus, by definition, was supernatural and exciting.

Then we have sitting in the middle between the exciting death of Jesus and the exciting resurrection of Jesus the rather ordinary and mundane burial of Jesus that reads like nothing more than a chronology of facts similar to an article in the newspaper. Are these verses about Jesus' burial nothing more than a garden variety obituary that we can read in a newspaper or is there something more going on just under the surface of the text?

This morning, I want to propose that God was just as much at work in the ordinary events of Jesus' burial as he was in the supernatural miraculous events that surround Jesus' death and resurrection. We will see that even though Jesus was dead, he still planned and executed his own funeral.

To show you how God was supernaturally at work in the very ordinary events of Jesus' burial, I want to begin our study by explaining how God works in the world. There are two ways he accomplishes his purposes.

The first is through miracles. God interrupts, suspends, or overrules the natural order of things. A natural process is suspended by God. God injects himself into the actions of the world to change things in such a way that it cannot be explained by human behavior or natural processes. Miracles by definition are miraculous. Miracles are one of the ways God is at work in the world. We have seen this through the Gospel of Mark as Jesus miraculously healed people and created food out of thin air.

Another way God works in the world is no less miraculous. It is just more conspicuous. **A second way God executes his will in the world is through the miracle of providence.** Providence means God accomplishes his purposes, plans, promises, and prophecies not by interrupting the normal order of nature but by pulling together the free behavior of people, events, choices, and the outcome of circumstances with meticulous precision so that what happens in the world is exactly what God has purposed and promised will take place.

That is what we see happening at the burial of Jesus. God accomplished what he promised about Jesus and what he purposed for Jesus, not in a miraculous, supernatural way like we see in Jesus' death and resurrection, but in an ordinary and providential way as God worked his invisible hand behind the scenes guiding people's hearts and choices so they accomplish God's will in this world.

In previous weeks, as we studied the Gospel of Mark, I didn't limit us to the text of Mark's Gospel. I brought in the other Gospels where it would be helpful so we could learn more about the events in Jesus' life as they transpired. I will continue on that trajectory this morning. While the Gospel of Mark jumps from the death of Jesus immediately to the burial of Jesus, if we look at the other Gospels, we find there are things that took place with Jesus' corpse while he was still on the cross that Mark doesn't tell us about.

Rather than begin in Mark, I am going to begin in the Gospel of John so we can see how the soldiers treated Jesus' corpse while he hung on the cross after he died. This little study on Jesus' corpse will not take us off our study on

providence but will serve to reinforce the same points we will discover as we study Jesus' burial in the Gospel of Mark. So let us begin in the Gospel of John. The question we are answering is: "How was God providentially at work in the burial of Jesus?"

The Roman soldiers providentially fulfilled God's will after Jesus' death.

When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. John 19:30 (ESV)

At roughly 3 p.m. in the month of April in the year 30 A.D., Jesus finished suffering for our sin on the cross. With a loud voice he shouted, "It is finished!" In Greek, the word he used means, "Paid in Full." Jesus had paid in full for all of our sin. He suffered all of the wrath we deserve to endure for our sin while he hung on the cross for the three hours from noon to 3 p.m.

When Jesus' work of suffering for our sin was done, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. Last week, we learned that nobody took Jesus' life from him. Nobody forced Jesus to die. Jesus was still strong. Death on a cross took place by asphyxiation as the weight of the body hung on the arms collapsed the chest cavity so people could not breathe or speak. Jesus was not close to death. He could still speak and speak with a loud voice when he proclaimed, "It is finished!" Jesus died after that because that is when he chose to die because his work on the cross was done. Understand nobody took Jesus' life from him. Nothing forced Jesus to die at that moment. Jesus chose to die at that moment. He chose to die because his work of suffering for our sin on the cross was complete. Jesus reinforced this truth earlier in the Gospel of John.

"For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it 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.” John 10:17–18 (ESV)

Jesus chose to die at this point. Jesus chose to give up his spirit. Typical crucifixion victims took two to three days to die. For Jesus, it was only six hours. Once he absorbed the wrath of God that we deserved for our sins from noon to 3 p.m. his work was done.

While Jesus was dead shortly after 3 p.m. that day, the two men who hung on crosses next to Jesus, men who were murders and thieves, were still very much alive. They had two to three days to go until they died. They were very much alive.

The problem was the Jews wanted Jesus dead and the other men dead. They didn't want these men lingering between life and death into the second or third day. They wanted their deaths completed in a hurry. Why did they want all of them dead in one day? The Gospel of John tells us the answer.

Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away. John 19:31 (ESV)

We start our news days at midnight. The Jews started their new days at sundown in the evening. It was now Friday. Saturday, which was the Sabbath, would begin at sunset. This Sabbath wasn't an ordinary Sabbath. It was a Passover Sabbath, a high holy day. People moaning in agony as they died because they were hanging on crosses would have really put a damper on the holiday spirit. This is why the Jews asked Pilate to break their legs so they could finish the death of Jesus and the criminals in a hurry. They didn't want to listen to the dying men moaning in agony through the holiday.

The reason they gave Pilate was probably not the unpleasantness of listening to the agonizing groans of men being tortured to death over a holiday. They no doubt gave Pilate more pious biblical reasons. They probably referred to Deuteronomy 21:22-23 that says if anyone was executed for a capital crime, their body could be suspended as a warning to others for only one day. Deuteronomy says that a body suspended as a warning to others needed to be removed before nightfall.

I find this funny, and pathetic, on the part of the Jewish leaders. They had no problem with murdering Jesus because they were jealous of him, but they were worried about ritual defilement of the Sabbath because crucified bodies by the Roman government were hung too long. It seems to me they lost focus on what was truly important. This is often what happens with religious people.

How would the Romans hasten the death of someone on the cross? They used a tool called a *crucifragium*. It was massive, long-handled sledgehammer with a huge metal head on it. It was used to break a crucified victim's femur in half while he hung on the cross.

As men hung on the cross, their deaths would eventually come by asphyxiation. When they were too weak to push up with their feet to expand their lungs for air, they hung all their weight on their hands. The weight of their body compressed their chests so they couldn't breathe. Before that happened those who were crucified used their legs to push their bodies up so they could breathe. When Roman soldiers broke a victim's femur using the massive *crucifragium* there was no way for a crucified victim to push up with his legs. He could barely

breath. Death followed rather quickly. That is what the Romans soldiers attempted to accomplish.

So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. John 19:32–33 (ESV)

Why did Jesus die before the criminals hung next to him? He chose to die. No one took his life from him. Next we find a bit on how the soldiers treated Jesus' body after he died.

But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. John 19:34 (ESV)

The thrusting of a spear through the heart was customary. It was a way the Romans ensured death. If you have a hole in your heart, you are dead. I always understood the sudden flow of blood and water from Jesus' heart cavity as evidence that Jesus' death transpired some time before this event. The blood and the serum had separated in Jesus' heart cavity from his earlier death. The piercing of Jesus' heart sac with a spear allowed the blood and water to spurt out.

While that may be true, this week I ran across some interesting --- medical and Scriptural explanation for why there was blood and water in Jesus' heart cavity. Apparently under extreme stress, the heart can burst. When it does, it fills the heart cavity with blood and lymphatic fluid.¹ That may be what happened to Jesus. If so, that means Jesus literally died of a broken heart. While the source of Jesus' death was that he chose to give up his spirit, it appears the medical

¹ While the heart sac filling with lymphatic fluid from a ruptured heart is a current theory regarding Jesus' death, there are medical reasons this doesn't appear to be the case. After discussing this theory with a friend that is a respected doctor at the University of Nebraska, he told me that when the heart ruptures and blood fills the heart sac, that blood clots, not separates. In addition, lymph fluid looks white like milk, not clear like water.

reason for Jesus' death was a broken heart. That would be an interesting fulfillment of some Old Testament prophecy spoken by Isaiah about Jesus.

In previous weeks, I shared quotes from Psalm 69. This Psalm gives detailed prophecy about Jesus with extremely intimate details about his death. Look what Psalm 69, which is prophecy about Jesus's life and death, says about the way Jesus died.

Reproaches have broken my heart, so that I am in despair... Psalm 69:20 (ESV)

Even though Jesus willed his own death, it appears that prophetically and medically the manner of Jesus' death was a literal broken heart.

Next, John tells us why these details about the way the soldiers treated the corpse of Jesus are important.

He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe. For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken.” And again another Scripture says, “They will look on him whom they have pierced. John 19:35–37 (ESV)

John says the way the soldiers treated Jesus when they didn't break his bones and when they chose to pierce his side with a spear were fulfilling God's will, even though those choices were freely made by the soldiers of their own will. They were doing exactly what God declared would happen to the body of Jesus. They were unwittingly and unknowingly, by their own free will, fulfilling the Scriptures.

Let me show you where the quotes that John mentions are found in the Old Testament. Psalm 34:20 prophetically declared that none of Jesus' bones would be broken.

He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken. Psalm 34:20 (ESV)

The Gospel of John also tells us that Jesus is the true lamb of God slain for the sins of the world. He was like the Passover lamb in every way. One thing we know about the Passover lamb is none of its bones could be broken.

It shall be eaten in one house; you shall not take any of the flesh outside the house, and you shall not break any of its bones. Exodus 12:46 (ESV)

Jesus, as our true Passover lamb, could not have any of his bones broken!

Before we leave these verses, let me mention a comment I received two weeks ago when we were talking about Jesus' arrest and his trial before the Sanhedrin. The Scriptures tell us they put a bag over Jesus' head and punched him in the face. At that time, I said Jesus probably got a broken nose when soldiers punched him square in the face with all their strength.

A very kind person wrote me after the message to tell me that could not be true. Jesus' nose was not broken because the Bible says not a bone was broken in Jesus' body. It is worth mentioning that the reason I said Jesus' nose was probably broken when they punched him in the face is because the bottom part of the nose is not a bone. It is a piece of cartilage. If you are not sure if the nose is cartilage, look up the human skull and you will see what I mean. If others of you were confused by my mention of Jesus probably having a broken nose, I am sorry. Of course nobody knows if Jesus' nose was broken. My simple point is Jesus could have had a broken nose and still not have a bone broken in his body. I wanted to take a moment to clarify what I said and why I said it.

Let's continue with our study. We saw that the fact that the soldiers didn't break any of Jesus' bones to be a fulfillment of Scripture. Next we see that the

piercing of Jesus' side, which was also done by soldiers of their own free will, also fulfilled the Scriptures. God told us hundreds of years before that Jesus' side would be pierced.

And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child...
Zechariah 12:10 (ESV)

So the actions of the soldiers, although transpired by their own free will, still took place in such a way that they fulfilled exactly what the Scriptures said would happen to Jesus' body. God had all of Jesus' death, crucifixion, burial, and resurrection under control. Even when Jesus was dead, he had scripted and coordinated his own funeral so it was carried out exactly the way he planned.

We see God's providential will not just happening with the soldiers in charge of the death of Jesus, but we also see it happening with a man named Joseph of Arimathea who took care of Jesus' burial.

Joseph of Arimathea providentially fulfilled God's will after Jesus' death.

And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath... Mark 15:42 (ESV)

This verse sets the scene. Jesus died at 3 p.m. It was now late afternoon. The insurrectionists and murderers next to Jesus had their femurs smashed. They were dead or almost dead. Jesus's bones were not broken, but he was leaking blood and water out his side from a pierced heart.

Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Mark 15:43 (ESV)

Joseph was a common name. It was also the same name of Jesus' earthly father. But this Joseph came from Arimathea. Where was that? We don't know. It was likely the birth place of Samuel but we can't be sure.

What the text does tell us is that he was a prominent and respected member of the Jewish Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was the supreme court of Israel that condemned Jesus to death. There were 70 men on the Sanhedrin, plus the high priest making 71. This is Joseph of Arimathea's only appearance in the Bible, but what he did was so notable that all the other Gospels tells his story. His story is the story of a religious man coming to God through Jesus.

In previous weeks, we heard the stories of people far from God being brought near to God through Jesus. The Jewish thief and murderer that hung next to Jesus was saved by simple faith and trust in Jesus. The Gentile centurion, and many of the soldiers with him, that were in charge of pounding the nails into Jesus' hands and feet to carry out his execution were also saved by simple faith and trust in Jesus. Here we have a different story. Instead of people who are far from God being brought near to God through Jesus, we have a religious man who devoted himself to the rituals and traditions of Judaism giving up on religion, trusting in Jesus and being brought near to God by Jesus.

Remember Joseph of Arimathea's identity. He was not just anybody in the Sanhedrin. He was a prominent and respected member of the Sanhedrin. Luke, in his parallel account, told us Joseph was a good and righteous man. Matthew described him as a disciple of Jesus. John described him as a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews. He was a true believer in Jesus. He had come

to the correct conclusion on Jesus' true identity. Joseph of Arimathea believed Jesus was indeed the very Son of God.

Prior to this moment, Joseph hid his faith in Jesus because he knew there will be a steep price to pay if he publicly identified with Jesus. This is why Mark said Joseph was courageous. He knew if he went and asked for the body of Jesus, the rest of the Sanhedrin would see him. They were just in Pilate's presence minutes before Joseph arrived. Remember they asked Pilate to break the legs of those who hung on the cross. Joseph knew that not only would the Sanhedrin then know he was a follower of Jesus but Pilate would also know about his faith in Jesus. Joseph knew that asking for the body of Jesus would make a break between him and the other members of the Sanhedrin. He knew he was giving up the prestige and prominence he held on the Jewish supreme court when he went public with his love for Jesus.

Why did Joseph go public with his love for Jesus just to obtain the body of Jesus? Usually crucified victims had their bodies taken down and they were thrown in the town garbage dump, a place called Gehenna. What remained of the body was left to rot and be eaten by dogs. Joseph didn't want that to happen to the body of Jesus. That is why he went to Pilate to ask for Jesus' body.

Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died. And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. Mark 15:44 (ESV)

Pilate assumed Jesus was not dead in six hours. He knew death on the cross typically occurred in two to three days. Pilate's soldiers had just left to break the legs of those hanging on the crosses. It was too soon for Jesus to have expired. This is why Mark said Pilate was surprised to hear that Jesus had

already died. The term “already” is unusual. It carries the sense of a long time before. It emphasizes that Jesus chose to die hours before this time. The death of Jesus in such a short time was so unusual, Pilate had the centurion verify it.

And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph. Mark 15:45 (ESV)

What did Joseph do when he was granted the rights to Jesus’ body? He went to the site of the crucifixion. There, the soldiers would have taken Jesus’ cross out of the ground and laid it in the dirt. Joseph would have had the stomach-wrenching job of pulling Jesus’ limp feet through the head of the iron nail. He have pulled Jesus’ limp wrists through the spike driven through his wrists. It was an agonizing task to wrench Jesus’ body off the cross upon which it was nailed tight.

Joseph then had a bloody corpse on his hands. That meant he was ritually defiling himself. Unlike the rest of the Sanhedrin, who were selfish and only concerned that they would be ritually pure so they could eat dinner, Joseph didn’t care about ritual impurity, Jewish rituals, and traditions. Caring for the body of Jesus, whom he loved, was much more important than clinging to the empty traditions of his past. He didn’t want to see Jesus’ body dishonored. He didn’t want to see Jesus’ body thrown in the trash heap. He wanted to give the Jesus he loved and recognized as God a proper burial. He even gave Jesus his own tomb.

How did burials work in the ancient world? Today, we know there are thousands of tombs in the area of Jerusalem carved into the rock. A tomb carved into the rock was a small room hewn out of rock with a small opening in the front.

In the small rock room were rock shelves carved into the wall. Sometimes they even chiseled into the shelves an indentation in the shape of a body. There, a deceased body that was wrapped in cloths and spices was left to decompose. Once it was decomposed, only the bones remained. The bones were picked up and put into a smaller container called an ossuary. At that point the shelf in the tomb shelf could be used to let another body to decompose down to bones.

Joseph, who was a rich man, had one of these tombs. It was a brand new tomb that had never been used. Joseph of Arimathea was a rich man because only rich man could afford a new tomb like this. Joseph gave Jesus his new tomb.

Why did Joseph give his tomb to Jesus? In one sense, it is obvious. Joseph loved Jesus. Joseph was a true believer in Jesus. Joseph wanted to honor Jesus. Joseph didn't want Jesus' body to be thrown in the trash heap where it would be eaten by dogs and dishonored. But there is more to the story.

While Joseph was acting on his own free will, while Joseph was carrying out his own desires, just like the soldiers did earlier, Joseph was unwittingly fulfilling Scripture and doing exactly what God planned for him to accomplish with the body of Jesus. Look what God had prophetically said through the prophet Isaiah about the burial of Jesus hundreds of years before this moment.

And 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. Isaiah 53:9 (ESV)

They made Jesus' grave with the wicked. Jesus was killed between two thieves. Rather than Jesus' body being thrown in the public dump, which was the fate of the two murderers who died, he was buried in the tomb of a rich man.

How could Isaiah speak about this happening to Jesus hundreds of years before? The Holy Spirit spoke through Isaiah, directing him to say this about Jesus because God was large and in charge of exactly what would happen to the body of Jesus. God directed the free will of Joseph of Arimathea to providentially fulfill this prophecy.

Joseph didn't just fulfill this prophecy by giving his tomb to Jesus, but he also unwittingly fulfilled another prophecy about Jesus regarding the amount of time Jesus would be in the grave.

For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Matthew 12:40 (ESV)

For the Jews the terms day and night refer to a day. For the Jews, a day was any portion of a 24-hour day. Jesus was buried by Joseph of Arimathea just before sundown on Friday. He was in the grave on Saturday, and he rose on Sunday morning. Joseph had no idea he wasn't just fulfilling Scripture by giving Jesus his tomb. He was also fulfilling Scripture by making sure Jesus was in the tomb on Friday night before sundown. That way Jesus could rise from the dead three days later on Sunday morning! This is another example of God at work providentially in this world as the free choices of Joseph of Arimathea actually carried out the foreordained plan of God. Let's return to the Gospel of Mark.

And Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mark 15:46 (ESV)

Joseph bought a fine linen cloth. That is the way they buried people. As I mentioned earlier, the Jews did not embalm. They just wrapped a body in linen with fragrant spices around the body and between the linen layers.

Can you imagine how heart wrenching this was for Joseph to hold the bloodied, limp body of Jesus? The one who had raised people to life was now cold and without life. Have you ever carried a corpse? Have you touched a cold and lifeless body? I imagine that carrying the body of Jesus was an eerie feeling for Joseph. It was more than eerie. I imagine it was hard. Jesus was literal dead weight. I have always thought that Joseph needed help at this point. Carrying a dead body is much easier with two people. It is very difficult for one person. While Mark doesn't mention this, if we turn to the Gospel of John, we find Joseph was not alone. Joseph did have help carrying the body of Jesus to the tomb.

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. John 19:38–39 (ESV)

We read about Nicodemus in John 3. He was also a member of the Sanhedrin. Nicodemus came to Jesus at night under cover of darkness so nobody in the Sanhedrin knew he was talking to Jesus. Jesus told Nicodemus that he needed to be born again. Apparently, like Joseph of Arimathea, he also placed his faith in Jesus. He was also a genuine follower of Jesus. At this point, just as Joseph of Arimathea went public with his faith in Jesus at great social cost, Nicodemus also chose to go public with his faith in Jesus at great social cost. While Mark tells us Joseph of Arimathea was a prominent and respected member of the Sanhedrin, John 3 tells us that Nicodemus was also a respected member of the Sanhedrin. Nicodemus was called a ruler of the Jews and the teacher of Israel. Nicodemus was a well-respected teacher. We now have two

religious people, members of the Sanhedrin, the ruling counsel of Israel, who made a break with Jewish rituals and traditions to place their faith in Jesus.

Nicodemus brought 75 pounds of aromatic spices to wrap between the strips of cloth around Jesus' body.

It is worth noting that 75 pounds of spices for a body is a lot. That is the quantity usually used for a king. One quick question we should answer is where were Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus at the trial of Jesus? The Bible tells us that all the members of the Sanhedrin voted in favor of Jesus' death. Why didn't Joseph and Nicodemus object? Apparently they were absent or they were not invited to the middle-of-the-night meetings the Sanhedrin held at the house of Caiaphas to condemn Jesus.

The amazing point is both Joseph and Nicodemus, by their own free will, were carrying out the will of God for the body of Jesus by burying Jesus in a rich man's tomb.

John 19:41 tells us the tomb was near where Jesus was crucified and it was in a garden. They didn't need to carry the body far.

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. John 19:41 (ESV)

This was the best these two men could do for the burial of Jesus on such short notice. There were no hymns sung, no prayers, no sermon, just Jesus' body washed, wrapped with cloth and spices, placed on the shelf in the new tomb, and the stone rolled over the front. Then they went away. Mark tells us this:

Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid. Mark 15:47 (ESV)

Remember the women we looked at briefly last week? They followed Jesus since his ministry began in Galilee two years before. They watched from a distance as Jesus was crucified. Unlike most of the apostles who abandoned Jesus at the cross, these women were faithful to Jesus when he died. They stayed with Jesus to the absolute end. When Joseph and Nicodemus took Jesus' body off the cross they continued to follow Jesus. They watched these men wash, wrap, and carry the body to Joseph's new tomb. They watched where Jesus was laid. The Gospel of Luke tells us there were other women other than the ones mentioned in the Gospel of Mark that were there, such as Joanna and Salome.

Like Joseph and Nicodemus, these women loved Jesus. Nicodemus brought 75 pounds of spices for Jesus' body to mask the scent of what they thought would be his decay. These women loved Jesus too. They were not to be outdone by these men. They went home and began preparing spices of their own that they planned to put on the body of Jesus as an expression of love and devotion. They couldn't bring spices the next day, because it was the Sabbath. They showed up Sunday morning with their spices, expecting to be able to show their love for Jesus by putting more aromatic spices on his dead body. When they showed up on Sunday morning, they were in for a surprise. Jesus was not there. The tomb was empty. Jesus rose from the dead! That changes everything!

That is the glorious story of Jesus' resurrection from the dead that we will study next week. What lessons can we learn from Jesus' burial that we can apply to our lives?

What can we learn?

There are two lessons we can learn that come screaming out of this passage.

1. **God is at work in the world through more than just through miracles.**

God is also at work through providence. God achieves his purposes by guiding the free choices of people and the outcome of events. While we may not see God at work supernaturally in the burial of Jesus, we see God at work fulfilling his will providentially in the burial of Jesus. The soldiers unwittingly fulfilled God's will by choosing to not break a bone in Jesus' body. They unwittingly fulfilled God's will by piercing Jesus' side. Joseph unwittingly fulfilled God's will by being a rich man who gave Jesus his own tomb. All of those things were prophesied beforehand, and people who were acting out their own free choices and desires did exactly what God had planned to happen. All of this shows the providential power of God. Nobody can thwart God's will. In an ultimate sense, everyone will carry out God's will for their lives, whether they realize it or not. This is especially appropriate for us as we look at a world in chaos because of politics and a pandemic. No matter what happens with the pandemic and no matter who is in the White House for the next four years, we have a God who is large and in charge of this world, and he will have people accomplishing exactly what he wants them to do, even when they have no idea they are executing his will. Look what the Bible says about government leaders and who is in control of their thoughts and desires.

The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will. Proverbs 21:1 (ESV)

God being large and in charge and directing people to carry out God's will does not mean life will be easy. It does not mean problems will go away. It means we know that the God we serve is in charge of everything that happens in our lives and our nation. Nothing happens beyond his will and because of that we can have confidence as we face an uncertain tomorrow.

2. God is not just in the business of saving people far from God. He is in the business of saving religious people who are trusting in themselves instead of God. Over the last two weeks, we saw how Jesus saved people far from God. Jesus saved a Jewish murderer that hung on the cross next to him. Jesus saved the Gentile centurion that was in charge of executing him. Jesus didn't just come to save people far from God. He came to save religious people who are trusting in their religious rituals, traditions, and good works instead of God. Both Joseph and Nicodemus, two influential men that were part of the Jewish Sanhedrin, turned their backs on Jewish rituals and traditions to publicly identify with Jesus. They were willing to ritually defile themselves by touching Jesus' dead body. They were willing to lose their positions of power and influence in the Sanhedrin by publicly honoring and caring for Jesus' dead body. They stopped trusting in religion and rituals to be made right with God. They started trusting in Jesus to be made right with God. That is all it takes.

How about you? What are you trusting in to be made right with God? Is attending church a tradition that leaves you feeling right with God? Is having church music and services the way you have always done them what leaves you feeling right with God?

If you are trusting in anything other than Jesus, and Jesus alone, to make you right with God, you have become a religious person like the members of the Sanhedrin of old. It is so easy to become a religious person instead of a Jesus person. If we have been in the church for a while, it is easy to find our comfort and spiritual assurance from our rituals and traditions instead of Jesus. To the degree we find our spiritual comfort in our rituals and traditions instead of Jesus, we need to repent. If the Lord is convicting you that you have found your spiritual assurance of being right with God in religion, rituals, traditions, and familiarity instead of Jesus, to the degree that the Holy Spirit has convicted us, to that degree let us repent and cling to Jesus alone to be forgiven of our sin and made right with our heavenly father.



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