

**The Word Became Flesh**  
**Week 60**  
**John 19:31-42**  
**“The Burial”**

**Introduction**

**He was assigned a grave with the wicked, but he was with a rich man at his death, because he had done no violence and had not spoken deceitfully. Isaiah 53:9**

When telling the story of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, many preachers just rapidly pass by the burial of Jesus and go straight for the resurrection. And while I agree that the resurrection of Christ is the most wonderful reality of the gospel, I think the burial of Christ matters a great deal as well. There are so many important truths that we must see here for ourselves. There are multiple prophecies that were fulfilled, as well as, beautiful examples of genuine faith. And also, the lingering question that will echo throughout eternity: How will you respond to the death of The Savior?

You see, some wanted Jesus' death to be over and done with. They could not wait to get Him down from the cross and His body disposed of. Other's however, took lavish steps in order to honor His death, doing the best they could to demonstrate their devotion to The Son of God. There is a spiritual truth to be gleaned from this. There are, once again, only two kinds of people in this world. Those who seek to honor Christ, and those who despise Him. Whichever of these two groups to which a person chooses to belong will determine their eternal destiny.

In John's telling of the story, he introduces us to a man that we have not seen or heard of in this gospel before, namely Joseph of Arimathea. John tells us very little about this man save that he had become a follower of Jesus. We must search the other gospels in order to find out more about this devout man. And if we are not careful, we will miss out on just how great a price he was willing to pay in order to honor his LORD.

The Romans had no regard for the malefactors they crucified. It was a fairly common practice for those who had been crucified to be left to rot upon their crosses. The disposal of their bodies was usually carried out by the vultures that would come and consume their flesh. I suppose, the Roman's reasoning was to leave these tortured corpses hanging as a grim reminder to any who would dare to oppose Roman law.

But, in the case of Jesus, the Pharisees wanted His body disposed of quickly. These evil men had murdered The Savior vicariously through Pontius Pilate, and they wanted to get this wickedness over and done with as soon as possible. Perhaps in their villainous hearts they had surmised that the sooner they had disposed of Jesus' body, the sooner they could wash away the guilt of sin that was a dark stain upon their souls. Or perhaps they had no conscience whatsoever, and they simply wished to put this whole affair behind them and move on. Only God knows for sure, but rest assured, whatever the motive, their day of reckoning had already been scheduled and written on the calendar of heaven.

**Don't be deceived: God is not mocked. For whatever a person sows he will also reap, because the one who sows to his flesh will reap destruction from the flesh, but the one who sows to the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit. Galatians 6:7-8**

In the story of Christ's burial, we are shown a glimpse of the hearts of these two kinds of people. We see the carnal, wicked hearts of the Pharisees. We have witnessed their callousness before. But then, we are also shown two Pharisees who were converted and as a result of their changed nature, they were willing to risk everything to follow after Jesus. They treated His death as precious, rather than contemptible. So let us look together at this beautiful story of their devotion juxtaposed against the rest of the Pharisees blindness and hatred. It is a story of *Sanctimony*, *Sincerity*, and *The Sacred Lamb of God*.

**Sanctimony (vs. 31-37)**

**Since it was the preparation day, the Jews did not want the bodies to remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a special day). They requested that Pilate have the men's legs broken and that their bodies be taken away. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first man and of the other one who had been crucified with him. When they came to Jesus, they did not break his legs since they saw that he was already dead. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows he is telling the truth. For these things happened so that the Scripture would be fulfilled: Not one of His bones will be broken. Also, another Scripture says: They will look at the One they pierced.**

**John 19:31-37**

As mentioned in the introduction, Romans usually left the bodies of the crucified on their crosses until they completely decomposed. And even when they took the bodies down they were carelessly discarded in a ditch or in the city dump. This was simply a way of life in ancient Rome. The lives of prisoners, both political and criminal, were not considered valuable, and therefore, there was no dignity nor compassion even in the handling of their remains.

Ordinarily, even the Pharisees wouldn't have cared less for those who were unfortunate enough to be crucified in Jerusalem. But this time it was different. Jesus was executed on the Friday before the Sabbath of Passover week. It was considered to be one of the holiest Sabbaths of them all. Therefore, these sanctimonious religious leaders beseeched Pilate to hasten the death of these men so that their tortured bodies were not on display during Holy Week.

The hypocrisy of these religious leaders is not only shocking, but sickening as well. After all, they had no problem with the murder of their enemy on this sacred week, but having His body on display during this sacred time was offensive to them! How on earth do people get to this level of depravity? If we could only see the endless lists of atrocities that have been committed in this world in the name of religion, perhaps we might get a glimpse of how evil this world can become when God is nowhere to be found in the equation. Religion without a genuine relationship with God is merely idolatry. And that my friends is the truth. Every substitute that mankind puts in the place of God to use as his moral compass will only lead him to utter ruination.

So what was the Pharisees "holy and devout plan" so that their sacred assembly wouldn't be compromised? They requested to Pilate that he break the legs of the crucified men, so they would rapidly suffocate and their bodies could be disposed of before sundown. I don't think I would want any of these men to be my spiritual advisor, how about you?

I am shocked that Pilate even agreed to meet with these men for a second time that day. It was quite obvious that he had had more than his fill of them as it was. So why do you think that he would even entertain the notion of taking down the bodies? Because it was God's will for him to do so. For you see, according to the Scriptures, Jesus would need to lay in the grave for three days.

**For as Jonah was in the belly of the huge fish three days and nights, so The Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights.** **Matthew 12:40**

So in order to fulfill that prophecy, Jesus had to be buried before sundown on Good Friday. *The Jews counted any part of a day as a full day.* Jesus hung upon the cross from 9:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. So, as long as He was buried before sunset on Friday, the amount of time that He spent in His borrowed tomb would be counted as three days; Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. When Pilate agreed to the request of the Pharisees, little did he know that he was simply fulfilling prophecy!

So Pilate gave his soldiers the orders to break the legs of the crucified men. But when they arrived they broke the legs of the two thieves, but refused to break Jesus legs when they saw that He was already dead. The legs of crucified victims were broken in order to hasten their death. This was done

with a heavy iron mallet. I am sure that this instrument was difficult for the soldiers to swing, and therefore, after breaking the legs of the other two men, the soldiers were no doubt arm-weary from wielding the heavy mallet. Therefore, they didn't wish to expend any more energy upon the legs of The Savior if it wasn't necessary. In order to make sure, one of the soldiers pierced underneath Jesus heart with his spear just in case by some chance there was any life left in Him.

All of these things happened, once more, in order to fulfill prophecy. The prophet Zechariah wrote that one day in the future, the nation of Israel **"will look at Me Whom they pierced. They will mourn for Him as one mourns for an only child and weep bitterly for Him as one weeps for a firstborn" (Zechariah 12:10b).**

And by refusing their order from Pilate to break the leg bones of Jesus, the soldiers also fulfilled the prophecies in **Exodus 12:46** and **Numbers 9:12** in regards to the Passover Lamb. But even more explicitly, John reminds us of David's words foreshadowing the Messiah's death found in **Psalms 34**.

**One who is righteous has many adversities, but The LORD rescues Him from them all. He protects all His bones; not one of them is broken.** **Psalms 34:19-20**

Pilate, the soldiers, and even those wicked Pharisees, in all their pious sanctimony, had no idea that they were all simply fulfilling the sovereign will of The Almighty Everlasting God. They thought they were doing what was expedient for them, but instead they were fulfilling everything that God had promised concerning His Son. *How will you treat the death of The Lamb of God? Is it a sacred thing to you, or merely and inconvenience to be discarded and forgotten?*

### **Sincerity (vs. 38-39)**

**After this, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus — but secretly because of his fear of the Jews — asked Pilate that he might remove Jesus's body. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and took His body away. Nicodemus (who had previously come to him at night) also came, bringing a mixture of about seventy-five pounds of myrrh and aloes.** **John 19:38-39**

Many people have asked me over the years, "Do you think that Nicodemus was ever truly born again?" And the answer is a resounding "Yes!" One need look no further than his actions on this day in order to see that he had truly believed. I find it astounding that while it was indeed the Pharisees who led the charge to see The Son of God crucified, here we see two Pharisees risk everything to identify with The Savior. What a beautiful picture of how the grace of God can change the heart of any man!

Nicodemus was that infamous Pharisee, who had come to Jesus under the cover of darkness for fear of what his contemporaries might say or do to him. Jesus had patiently explained to the questioning man that in order to inherit the kingdom of God, he must be born again by The Spirit of God. I'm sure that Nicodemus played that conversation over and over in his mind. Then one day, The Spirit opened his eyes, and he was able to grasp it all. And when the time came to stand up for his faith, he could remain silent and in the dark no longer.

A dear friend of mine, who is now gone on to be with The LORD once said to me, *"If you go around saying that you love Jesus, sooner or later you will get the chance to prove it."* Of all the words that have been spoken to me in my life, it is that statement that has had the greatest effect. It is never enough to claim that we believe. Our lives have to demonstrate that we believe. And often times, that exercising of our faith may indeed cost us everything.

Just think about what Joseph and Nicodemus were willing to do upon that day. Being a Pharisee was a prestigious, as well as, a very lucrative position. Not to mention the fact that the ruling council of The Sanhedrin, to which these men belonged, had ruled that if anyone claimed to be a follower of Jesus, they would be ostracized from the faith. Just ask the blind man that Jesus healed in **John Chapter 9!** Both Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea knew full well what it would cost them to come and claim the

body of Christ. But they did it anyway. *Because if you claim to be a follower of Jesus, sooner or later you will have the opportunity to prove it.* These men were willing to risk it all to follow. And that's how I know that they were truly saved!

What we know of Joseph, by reading the other gospels, is that he was a member of the Sanhedrin ruling council. He was more than likely a Pharisee, for he had been looking forward to the coming kingdom of God (**Mark 15:43**). The Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead, while the Sadducees did not. So it stands to reason that Joseph was a Pharisee and believed the words of Jesus, when He claimed that He would raise up all who believed in Him (**John 6:39**).

To Joseph, the death of Christ was a precious thing to be honored, as it was with Nicodemus. And these men came to Pilate to beg him for the body of Jesus. Again, taking no thought for their own safety in doing so, for it was obvious that Pilate had had enough of these pious Jews for one day. These men risked being the enemies of The Sanhedrin, as well as Rome itself, by taking the stand that they took, but God has honored them for all eternity by including them by name in His Holy Word. And not only that, their names have been permanently written in The Lamb's book of life as well. The sincerity of their faith is no longer in question. It is made clear by the way that they treated the death of The Savior. The question once more remains: *How will you treat His death?*

### **The Sacred Lamb (vs. 40-42)**

***They took Jesus's body and wrapped it in linen cloths with the fragrant spices, according to the burial custom of the Jews. There was a garden in the place where he was crucified. A new tomb was in the garden; no one had yet been placed in it. They placed Jesus there because of the Jewish day of preparation and since the tomb was nearby.*** **John 19:40-42**

It was customary in those days to anoint the body of a deceased person with a mixture of myrrh and aloes in order to cover the smell of decay. The amount of these spices and ointments was determined by the weight of the body being interred. Usually about half of the person's body weight was the normal amount of spices used for their burial. Of course, this was only done for the wealthiest of persons, for to purchase these various ointments and spices would have been very expensive.

As we read the different gospel narratives, we will ascertain that Jesus was anointed and wrapped in cloth, then laid in an unused tomb that had just been hewn out of solid rock. The tomb had been commissioned by Joseph of Arimathea for his own burial. But he gave it up, in order to offer a clean and peaceful burial place for the body of Jesus. One wonders if Joseph himself was dying and that is why this tomb had been so recently excavated. We can only speculate if this was true.

One thing is for certain, to accumulate the large amount of spices (approx. 70 lbs) would have taken some time, especially during Passover week, when so many of the local merchants would have closed their shops. I wonder if Joseph had already purchased these items for his own departure. If this is the case, then what a wonderful picture of Christ taking our place in the grave, so that we could overcome death's sting.

Of course, another option would be that as soon as these two men saw the way that the sham trial was going and acknowledging its inevitable conclusion, they dismissed themselves and began collecting the necessary items needed to give The LORD a proper burial. And a proper burial it was indeed. He was anointed and wrapped in a manner that was fitting for the wealthiest of Kings and buried in a rich man's tomb. This was done in order to fulfill the prophecy of **Isaiah 53:9**. Jesus was assigned a death with criminals, but was buried as a king. For He is the sinless Son of God, the King of kings and LORD of lords.

But I also would like to point out another truth of this story that you might have never thought about before. All this took place on the holiest week on the Jewish calendar. And any action considered unclean to a devout Jew on this day-before-the-Holy-Sabbath would prevent them from participating in the Passover. The Law of Moses plainly states that to touch a dead body would defile a person.

**Anyone who touches a body of a person who has died, and does not purify himself, defiles the tabernacle of The LORD. Numbers 19:13**

The amount of time specified for a person to purify themselves after coming in contact with a dead body was, by this same law, seven days (***Numbers 19:11-13***). After three days, they were to take a ceremonial cleansing bath, and then the person would be declared as “clean” after seven days. So do not miss the significance here. Joseph and Nicodemus were priests. They knew The Law of Moses better than anyone. They also knew that if they touched the dead body of Jesus, not only could they mark themselves as the enemy of Rome, and a pariah to the Sanhedrin, but they wouldn't even be able to eat of the Passover Lamb in the most sacred feast of their faith. And yet, they were willing to risk all of that in order to personally wrap the body of Christ.

But here is the most beautiful part of their willing sacrifice. By forsaking their positions, their friends, and even their religious ceremonies, they were given something far greater. They may have missed out on the Passover feast, but they touched with their very own hands the body of The Sacred Passover Lamb Himself! Nothing can compare with this great privilege that they were given, to anoint the body of The Anointed One, The Messiah, and Savior of the world.

So, once more I would ask you this question today: *How are you treating the death of The Lamb of God*. Is it a precious thing to you, or is it merely an inconvenience you wish would simply go away? Jesus is the Alpha and Omega, The first and The last, The beginning and The end. He will never go away my friends, so choose wisely. To the Believer, the death of Christ is a sacred and precious thing, for by it, we have been delivered from the sting of death. So take a stand for Him today. Do not be ashamed of the cross. Choose Christ... and live.

And let all those who find His death precious say... TRUTH!!