

No One Takes My Life From Me

PART 22 - BURIAL

TEXT: JOHN 19:31-42 (ESV)

Friday Afternoon

For five full months worth of sermons we have been making our way through the last week of Jesus' earthly ministry. Today we come to a somber moment—the burial of the body of Jesus Christ. As we've moved along, the great hope for me as a preacher is knowing how this story ends—with Christ risen on the third day, interacting with His disciples, reinstating those who fled association with Him and beginning the glorious work of establishing His church on earth, without which my family would lack so much. The church is an incredible gift of grace from Her Lord, the Risen Christ.



Rev. Russ Ramsey
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Oak Hills
Presbyterian Church,
Overland Park,
Kansas

And while this has been a great hope for me, this series has also caused apprehension because I've known from the start that in order to get to that most glorious of days—Resurrection Sunday—we'd have to get there honestly, which meant logging many hours covering some brutally horrible and terribly sad moments. In the last study, we examined Jesus' death. Today we turn to the inevitable next chapter of this story of His crucifixion—Jesus' burial. As we'll see once again, though, there hasn't been one part of this story so far that hasn't been infused with the grace and love of God for His people. Today, I am happy to say, is no different. We turn again to John's account.

John 19:31-42

³¹Since 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. ³²So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. ³³But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. ³⁵He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe. ³⁶For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken." ³⁷Again another Scripture says, "They will look on him whom they have pierced."

³⁸After 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. ³⁹Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. ⁴⁰So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. ⁴¹Now 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. ⁴²So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.

Palm Sunday

Let's go back five days. "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel!" (Mk 11:9) As Jesus rode on a donkey into the city where He would be sentenced to execution, people gathered before Him laying palm branches at His feet, making a royal path for Him, declaring Him to be the King of Israel—the charge, ironically, that would stick when He was tried and which would be posted on a sign above His head on the cross—**JESUS OF NAZARETH, KING OF THE JEWS**.

It was bold to return that first Palm Sunday—to not only face the ire of the Chief Priests and the paranoia of the Romans, but to accept the declaration that He was King. He was, after all. But what they anticipated and who Jesus was were two very different things. I now ask: What do we expect from Jesus as our King? Most of Israel's expectations had no room for an early death. He could've toppled Roman paganism. He could've revitalized their religion. He could've led them to the kind of prosperity they had enjoyed under their first great King, David.

But entering the city, whatever their expectations were, Jesus had different ones. He said on Palm Sunday, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds... Now my heart is troubled. What shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" (Jn 12:23-28)

Right then a miracle happened. "A voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and will glorify it again...' Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. The prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." (Jn 12:20-32) Whatever expectations people had, Jesus' knew His purpose in returning to Jerusalem was to finish what He had come to do. He had come to be "lifted up" on the cross. And He said that His death would draw people to Himself.

Maybe right now, He is drawing you to Himself. Jesus' death was no accident. He laid His life down. John wrote, "These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name." What do you believe about Jesus today? Jesus said His death would draw people to Himself, and today's text is the story of two men drawn out of hiding by Jesus: Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. My prayer as we look at the account of His burial, is that He might draw all of us closer to Him now.

Liar, Lunatic or Lord

After the travail of the cross, just before He died, Jesus said, "It is finished." (Jn 19:30) What was finished? Everything a person needs to be saved. All the sacrificial requirements of God's law were offered, all the prophecies concerning the Messiah fulfilled, even the slaughter of the spotless Passover Lamb. People asked Him to prove that He was the Son of God by coming down off the cross—by saving Himself. But it was God's will that He should die, so He proved He was the Son of God, not by coming down from the cross at the last minute, but by staying on it to the end to fulfill the will of His Father. Every one of us has to do something with the death of Jesus. Who is this man to you?

C.S. Lewis said our options for regarding Jesus are to view Him as either a liar, a lunatic or Lord. I'd add another option—to never really engage the question. Jesus claimed to be the Messiah—God's Redeemer. (Mt 16:15-17) He was either lying, crazy or correct. Right now, the questions before all of us are these: Who do you say that Jesus is? Upon what basis have you decided your answer? How certain are you that you are right?

The Chief Priests were split between liar and lunatic. Three different details show their oblivion to Jesus. First, when they brought Jesus to Pilate, *"to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover."* (Jn 18:28-29) The Chief Priests wanted to stay clean for Passover, the holiday commemorating when God liberated the people of Israel from their unjust oppression. Ironically, the Priests now stood as unjust oppressors, outside Pilate's palace so as not to be defiled, as they brought false testimony against Jesus. Pilate had to come out to them just to hear the charges.

Second, they quibbled over the wording of the sign over Jesus' head. (Jn 19:19-22) The third evidence of their oblivion to Jesus is in today's text—the removal of Jesus' body from the cross. Deuteronomy 21:22-23 says, *"If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, you must not leave his body on the tree overnight."* To the Chief Priests, it was vital to have the bodies of the criminals taken down quickly because leaving him there would defile their Sabbath, and this wasn't just any Sabbath—it was the Passover. So they asked Pilate to hurry the process by breaking the convicted men's legs—a technique used to hasten death. When they came to break Jesus' legs, He was already dead. To be sure, a soldier pierced Jesus' side with his spear. No movement, only a flow of blood and water.

The Chief Priests never saw what was really happening. When John writes about the soldier piercing Jesus' side, this was the testimony of an eye-witness—his testimony. And John wants his readers to understand that the fact that Jesus' legs were not broken was evidence supporting His identity as the Messiah. This detail was prophesied as one of the many ways you would know the true Messiah. By now John had pointed out at least eleven specifics in the life and death of Jesus that were spoken of by the prophets. (Jn 2:17, 6:44-46, 12:14-16, 12:37-43, 13:18-19, 15:24-25, 17:12, 18:9, 19:23-24, 19:28, 19:31-36) Jesus didn't defy Scripture's descriptions of the Messiah. He embodied them—all of them—perfectly. And still, the religious leaders failed to see Him. Most of them, anyway.

Drawn Near to Christ

Joseph of Arimathea boldly asked Pilate for Jesus' body, and Nicodemus helped him prepare and bury Jesus. These two had a lot in common. They were both members of the court of the Chief Priests. They were both wealthy—Joseph provided Jesus' tomb and Nicodemus provided 75lb of spices for His burial. They both were waiting for the Messiah (Mk 15:43, Jn 3:2) and they both believed Jesus was from God. (Jn 3:2, 19:38) As members of the Sanhedrin, they both, on different occasions, attempted to defend Jesus. (Lk 23:51, Jn 7:51) They were decent, upright men.

But they had something else in common. They were both, up until now, **secret** disciples of Jesus because they feared the Jews. John says throughout Jesus' ministry, many Jewish leaders believed in Jesus but would not confess their faith for fear of being put out of the synagogue, because they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. Joseph of Arimathea, according to John 19:38, was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews. Nicodemus, according to John 3, wanted to learn about being born again, but came to Jesus under cover of darkness to avoid being known as one of Jesus' sympathizers.

Can you relate to these two men? Have you been a secret disciple of Jesus? Would you say you are one who is still *"trying Christianity on?"* If so, may I ask why? Is it an intellectual obstacle? Is it a lifestyle you're not ready to lay aside? Are you afraid of how it will make you appear in the eyes of others? I tell you this: Jesus said His death would draw people to Himself, and among the first were Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus.

Why did these men come out of hiding? Because before Jesus' death, their decisions concerning their devotion to Jesus were allowed to remain academic and ideological. They could flirt with Messianic concepts without engaging the man Who embodied them. But Jesus wasn't just a teacher with differing views now. He laid down His life unto death for them. They had to engage Jesus not only on the basis of His teaching, but now also on the basis of this expression of love—offering up His life.

By His death, they were drawn near, drawn out and engaged with the question of the identity of Jesus Christ. And with this text before us now, my prayer is that we too—all of us—are also engaged with the question of Who Jesus is. Has Christianity been merely the observation of a religion for you? May our hearts be awakened by this expression of God's love toward sinners. May we be drawn out as well. May we engage Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

If you're one who has flirted with Christ but never surrendered your life to Him, let me say this. If man was created by God, for God, (Gen 1:27, Lev 18:2) and if we are made in His image and were created for relationship with Him, (Ex 6:7) and if that relationship was broken by sin which separates us from a Holy God, (Eph 2:11-12) and if Jesus died in the place of sinners so His righteousness might be applied to us when all our sin was applied to Him on the cross, (1 Pet 3:18-19) then there is no more authentic way to live as a human being than as a follower of Jesus Christ—following the One whose death restored us to the relationship with our Maker we were created for from the beginning of time. There is no more secure way to live than openly as a follower of Jesus.

Today you have before you the death of Jesus Christ and you have to do something with it. You must either deny it happened or deny Jesus was who He said He was. Or you must accept this death occurred because He had come to die, to die the death you deserved so that you might have life in His name. Either it was taken from Him or He laid it down. Jesus said, *"No one takes my life from me. I lay it of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again."* Was that a lie? Or was it the truth? You need to answer that question if you haven't already. Jesus laid down His life intentionally and authoritatively for you. *"These things are written that you may believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name."* Do you believe this?

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