

Burial in the Borrowed Tomb

John 19: 31-42

The agonies of the cross have ended for our Lord. He has endured the suffering of the cross, bearing our sin and facing the righteous judgment of God for sin. After declaring the work of redemption finished, Jesus laid down His life, willingly giving up the ghost as He breathed His last.

These verses reveal the events that surrounded the removal of Jesus from the cross and His burial in the borrowed tomb. We will discover the continued animosity of the Jewish elite and the Roman soldiers, as well as the tender compassion of two faithful followers of Jesus. This passage deals with the finality of Jesus' death and His commitment to fulfilling the plan of redemption for humanity. However, if this were the end of the story, we would not have the hope and assurance of eternal life with the Lord. I am certainly thankful for the provision that Jesus made for all men as He died on the cross for sin, but I also rejoice that He rose again triumphant over death, securing eternal life for all believers.

Let's take a few moments to look in on the [events](#) of that moment in time as we conclude our study on the last hours of Jesus' life. I want to preach on: [Burial in the Borrowed Tomb](#).

I. The Bustling around the Cross (31-37) – Following the death of Jesus, there was a flurry of activity around the cross. Notice the activity of:

A. The Sanhedrin (31) – [The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, \(for that sabbath day was an high day,\) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.](#) Bear in mind John is speaking of the Jewish leadership, the Sanhedrin. These events happened on Friday, the day prior to the Sabbath. This was a special Sabbath, the day in which they celebrated the Passover in remembrance of the Passover lamb that was slain just prior to the Exodus, preventing the death of all who had placed the blood of the lamb on the doorposts and lintel. This was a day of celebration and rejoicing for the Jews.

- There is great irony here however. The promised Messiah had come, offering Himself as the sacrificial Lamb that would fully and finally atone for sin, but the majority of the Jews rejected Jesus as the Christ. They viewed Him as an imposter and blasphemer. They had no problem consenting to the death of an innocent Man, but they wanted to appear righteous in regard to the preparation for the Passover. For the religious elite, it would have been unthinkable to allow such condemned men to remain upon the cross during such a holy time. This was in relation to the Old Testament law. [Deut.21:23 – His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; \(for he that is hanged is accursed of God;\) that thy land be not defiled, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.](#)

- The Sanhedrin besought Pilate to have the legs broken of those who were crucified. This would have created intense pain and suffering for the condemned, but it would also hasten their death. Being unable to push up with their legs, the men would be unable to get a breath of air and would literally suffocate on the cross. These self-righteous men had no regard for the physical pain and suffering of the condemned.

B. The Soldiers (32-34) – Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. ^[33] But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: ^[34] But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. True to his nature, desiring to appease the Jews, Pilate consented to their demands and ordered the soldiers to break the legs of the crucified. This was typically done with a large mallet, literally crushing the bones of the condemned. The soldiers broke the legs of the two men crucified with Jesus, but when they came to our Lord, they discovered He was already dead and saw no need to break His legs. However, apparently in an effort to ensure that Jesus was dead, the soldier pierced His side with a sword, from which flowed blood and water.

- This statement has created much debate. Many argue the flow of blood and water point to a ruptured heart within the Savior. For me the debate is senseless. These events took place after the death of Jesus. He had willingly laid down His life for the sin of humanity. He suffered in agony upon the cross, bearing our sin and the judgment of God, but He was not murdered by the Romans. He chose the moment of His death and was in complete control of that moment!

C. The Scriptures (35-37) – And he that saw *it* bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. ^[36] For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. ^[37] And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced. Again we discover that the events of the crucifixion went entirely according to the plan and will of God. Jesus had already died so there was no need to break His legs. The soldiers did not know, but their restraint in breaking His legs were the fulfillment of Scripture. **Exodus 12:46** – In one house shall it be eaten; thou shalt not carry forth ought of the flesh abroad out of the house; neither shall ye break a bone thereof. This refers to the Passover lamb that was eaten prior to the Exodus. Jesus became the ultimate Passover Lamb. **Psalm 34:20** – He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken. Some may consider it trivial, but many of the songs we sing are not biblically sound. We sing of His broken body, but there was never a bone broken in Jesus' body.

- Also the piercing of His side was a partial fulfillment of prophecy. **Zech.12:10** – And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for *his only son*, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for *his firstborn*. Clearly this speaks of the piercing of Jesus' side, and those who were there that day witnessed this. It also

speaks of a time yet future when a repentant Israel will be gathered in the end times, and look upon Him who they pierced.

II. The Burial of the Christ (38-42) – These verses reveal the events surrounding the burial of our Lord following His death on the cross. Consider:

A. The Participants (38-39a) – *And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus.* ^[39a] *And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night.* John speaks of the men who took the body of Jesus from the cross and buried Him in the tomb. Joseph of Arimathaea went to Pilate and received authority to remove Jesus' body and place Him in the grave. Most agree that Joseph would have also been a member of the Sanhedrin. Matthew described Joseph as a rich man. Mark referred to him as an honorable counsellor who waited for the kingdom of God. Luke also referred to Joseph as a counsellor who was good and just. Joseph was apparently a secret disciple of Christ.

- Accompanying Joseph was Nicodemus who first came to Jesus by night. This is the man that spoke to Jesus regarding salvation in John chapter three. He too was a follower of Jesus, but wasn't willing to make a public display of his faith, coming to Jesus by night. Some think that Nicodemus would have belonged to the Sanhedrin as well since he was referred to as a ruler of the Jews. These were men of means and influence.
- It is interesting to note: the cross made the difference in the lives of these men. Prior to the crucifixion and sacrifice of Jesus, these men were unwilling to publicly identify with Him, but following His sacrificial death, their fear has been replaced with devotion and commitment. The same is true for us as well. It is impossible to experience the truth of the cross and yet be unwilling to identify with Jesus. *Gal.6:14 – But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.*

B. The Preparation (39b-40) – *Nicodemus...brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight.* ^[40] *Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury.* Nicodemus met Joseph and brought spices weighing about 100 pounds. This was customary of the Jews, but it also reveals his devotion to Christ. This would have been very costly for Nicodemus. They wrapped Jesus' body in linen cloth and applied the spices to anoint His body. This was similar to that which was done for royalty.

- Again I don't want to appear to over-spiritualize Scripture, but there is a lesson to be learned here. First, it is a shame these men were unwilling to publicly identify with Christ while He was alive. We must be willing to embrace the cross and the Gospel of Christ regardless of what the world thinks. Second, we find they spared no expense and were willing to pay whatever price

it cost them to follow Jesus at this point. Their lives had been changed and they were willing to make whatever sacrifices necessary to serve the Lord. We too must develop that attitude!

C. The Placement (41-42) – Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. ^[42] There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation *day*; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand. Near to Calvary's hill was a sepulcher in which no man had ever been lain. It was a fresh, new grave. This too was a fulfillment of Scripture. *Isaiah 53:9* – And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither *was any* deceit in his mouth.

▪ Our Lord had died and was now placed in the tomb. No doubt this was a time of varying emotion. Consider the thoughts of John Phillips: *We can imagine how things probably went. Pilate went home to supper and to make a report to his wife of the day's events. Annas and Caiaphas presided at their respective Passover feasts. Peter wept alone. The body of Judas lay forgotten. John sought to comfort his new mother. The other disciples hid themselves from public eye. Herod and his men of war mocked. Did Mary of Bethany have a sense of expectation in her heart? Did a Roman soldier try on his new robe, and another try to wash the blood of the Son of God off his spear?*

The world spun 'round. Angels watched as some of their number went down to earth to prepare for the dawn of a new day. ⁱ

➤ Were this all we had, we would yet be without hope. I have been challenged, and my faith has been strengthened through our study of Jesus' final hours before His death, but thank God His death is not the end of the story. I cannot leave you with Jesus remaining in the grave. Consider the very next verse in John's gospel. *John 20:1* – The first *day* of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. Mary Magdalene was the first to discover Jesus was no longer in the grave. He rose triumphant in resurrection life, defeating sin, death, and Hell. Later that morning He would appear to Mary in the garden, alive and well. He appeared to those who walked on the way to Emmaus, revealing truth to them and broke bread among others. That evening He appeared to the disciples behind closed doors. Eight days later, He reappeared, revealing Himself to Thomas. Sometime later He showed Himself to Peter and the others by the sea shore. *1 Cor.15:5-8* – And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: ^[6] After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. ^[7] After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. ^[8] And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. The record proves the grave was not the end. Jesus was seen of many witnesses following His glorious resurrection. He ascended back to the Father, where He is seated at His right hand, but we are promised He will return. *Acts 1:9-11* – And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. ^[10] And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; ^[11] Which also said, Ye men of

Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? **this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.**

Conclusion: I am certainly thankful that Jesus was willing to endure the suffering of the cross, bearing our sin and shame while drinking the cup of the wrath of God on our behalf. He purchased our redemption, providing the means of forgiveness of sin and reconciliation to God. However, I rejoice that death and the grave were not the end. We might have been forgiven of sin, but we would have no hope of eternal life had He not risen victorious. In fact, He would have been like all others before Him had He not come forth triumphant. Jesus died for our sin, and yet He rose again! It has been some 2,000 years and He lives today!

I am thankful that I was given the opportunity to respond to the Gospel by faith, receiving Jesus as my Lord and Savior. How have you responded? Have you confessed your sin unto Him and embraced His sacrifice for sin by faith? If not, I urge you to do so. You will not find hope and salvation in any other. Look to Jesus and respond to His call in salvation!

¹ John Phillips Commentary Series, The - The John Phillips Commentary Series – Exploring the Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary.