

THE DEATH AND BURIAL OF JESUS CHRIST
Matt. 27:50-66

Intro: Matthew gives us the longest account of the death and burial of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Only John includes material not given by Matthew: the record that our Lord's legs were not broken, but that His side was pierced with the Roman spear (John 19:31-37).

Matthew is the only one who tells us about the sealing of the tomb, the Jews' way of seeking to prevent the disciples from stealing the body of Jesus and then saying that He had been raised from the dead (Matt. 27:62-66). But we will not consider this now.

Basically there are six events mentioned by Matthew:

- (1) The unusual record of our Lord's death--found in all four Gospels (Matt. 27:50; Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46; John 19:30).
- (2) The rending of the veil--only in Matthew and Mark (Matt. 27:51a; Mark 15:38).
- (3) The resurrection of many saints who had died--only in Matt. 27:51b-53).
- (4) What the Roman centurion said about the Lord--in the first three Gospels (Matt. 27:54; Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47).
- (5) The women (Matt. 27:55, 56; Mark 15:40, 41; Luke 23:48, 49).
- (6) THE MAIN EMPHASIS IN EACH GOSPEL BEING ON THE ACTION TAKEN BY JOSEPH OF ARIMATHAEA (Matt. 27:57-60; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42).

When Paul, in 1 Cor 15, states what the Gospel is, he writes in the following manner: "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried" (1 Cor. 15:3, 4a).

The burial, of course, proves His death. Without His death there would be no Gospel, no salvation for anyone! We have the testimony of His enemies, His disciples, as well as angelic testimony, to the effect that He really died. Therefore, I am not going to take time tonight to go over this evidence even though some always try to explain away the supernatural by denying the death of Jesus Christ. There is no question but that He died. The Jews who wanted to seal the tomb of the Lord did not doubt His death (cf. John 19:62-66); they wanted to prevent spurious talk about His resurrection!

So, instead of dealing with this ridiculous way men have sought to be able to explain the resurrection, let us see if we can the significance of the events which the Holy Spirit has sought to emphasize.

I. THE UNUSUAL WAY IN WHICH HIS DEATH IS RECORDED IN ALL FOUR GOSPELS.

John tells us that He said, "It is finished" (19:30).

Luke tells us that He said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (23:46).

But all four say something similar to what we find here in Matthew (27:50): "Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost," or, to be more exact, the spirit. The verb means to release, to send away.

Earlier He had said (and John records it for us in 10:18), speaking of His life, "No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself . . ."

Men would have gladly killed the Lord Jesus many times before He died, but even in His death, He did not die until the work was finished, and He was able to commend His spirit, His life, into the hands of the Father.

The death of Stephen bears many similarities with the death of Christ, but there is one basic difference. "He fell asleep," i.e., he died (Acts 7:60).

No one but our Lord had authority to determine the very moment of His death. This is a tremendous addition to the mountains of evidence we can see in the Gospels that He was more than a man. He was God in human flesh!

II. THE MANY ASPECTS OF TRUTH WHICH ARE BOUND UP IN HIS DEATH. It seems that the Holy Spirit is seeking to show us how much was involved in the death of Christ just by what happened when He died.

Let me mention briefly the four things.

A. The rent veil (Matt. 27:51a; Mark 15:38).

What is the meaning of this?

We have here the first intimation of a truth which runs right on through the NT. It is this: the old Mosaic order is set aside. Israel was no longer under the Law. All that had been anticipated by the

sacrifices of the OT had now been fulfilled in the death of Christ. Therefore, the writer of Hebrews tells us, "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh, and having an high priest over the house of God, Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb. 10:19-22).

We have the first evidence of this when the veil was rent "from the top to the bottom"--as though God had reached down and pulled it apart!

B. The dead raised (Matt. 21:51b-53).

Note: They were raised when He died, but they did not appear until after His resurrection.

Nevertheless, in this we have another foretaste of what was coming. Listen to 1 Cor. 15:20: "But now is Christ risen from the dead and become the firstfruits of them that slept."

Others were raised before He was, but He was the first to be raised, never to die again! If there were dead raised when He died, what would He accomplish by His resurrection!

Cf. John 11:25, 26; 14:19; Phil. 3:20, 21.

At the time of our Lord's death we have the first evidences of this doctrine which has become our greatest hope.

C. The Roman centurion (Matt. 27:54; Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47).

Who was this centurion? He was very likely the man in charge of the soldiers who had crucified the Lord Jesus. They were so named because they usually commanded about 100 men--more or less. He had to be a Roman. Therefore, we have an indication of another outgrowth of the work of Christ: the Gospel for the Gentiles.

Others also Mt. 27:54.

If you had been hoping that some might see the light and recognize that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, this man would probably have been the most unlikely prospect. But here is the evidence. Sure-

ly if God could reach the heart of this man under these circumstances, then there is nothing too hard for Him.

Matthew and Mark tell us that he saw in Jesus Christ the Son of God; Luke tells us he said that Jesus was a righteous man, i.e., not guilty, but actually the person that he claimed to be.

It seems certain that right in the shadow of the cross this Roman soldier passed from death to life --"an anticipation of the conversion of the Gentile world" (Godet, Luke, II, 339).

For the fourth line of evidence, let us look at the Jewish women who stood "afar off."

D. The Jewish women (Matt. 27:55, 56; Mark 15:40, 41; Luke 23:48, 49). Luke includes more than just the women.

What is apparent here? At least two things:

- (1) The obvious fact that our Lord was able to keep those who were His own. And, as we go on reading in the Gospels and in the book of Acts, the list grows.
- (2) God's continuing purpose with the nation Israel. It certainly is not accidental that there were Jews and Gentiles present, and that the superscription written over our Lord's head on the cross, "THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS," was written in Latin, and Greek, and Hebrew (Luke 23:38; John 19:19-22).

Finally, let us notice

III. THE AMAZING ACCURACY OF THE WORD OF GOD--fulfilled in the actions of Joseph of Arimathea.

Please turn to Isa. 53:9. How would you possibly have fulfilled this prophecy which seems to be so paradoxical? "And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death . . ."

Where did God have a rich man who would be willing to bury the Lord Jesus Christ? NOT ONE OF THE DISCIPLES WOULD HAVE BEEN ABLE TO ANSWER THIS QUESTION. Suddenly two men come out of the shadows. One we have met before but the other we have never heard of. They were two of the highest ranking Jews of the day--both obviously

believers, but "secretly for fear of the Jews" (John 19:38). What a strange time to take a stand! This "honorable counselor" (Mark 15:43), member of the Sanhedrin, took the most amazing time to show his faith in Jesus Christ--because he was a disciple (Matt. 27:57). Jesus knew it; no one else did.

How amazing are the ways of God, and let us be careful lest we feel we always know where God is at work. The prophet Elijah felt that he was all alone ("I, even I only, am left"), but God said, "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him" (1 Kings 19:14, 18).

Concl: How wonderful are the ways of God! No fiction story could possibly compare with this. Even in the events of our Lord's death, that which men considered triumph or tragedy, depending upon what side you were on, contains messages which showed that by our Lord's death He was openly up the way for God to carry His eternal purposes on to completion.

He was triumphant in His death, and even more triumphant in His resurrection. But we need to staylong at the cross and at the tomb until our hearts grasp all that the Lord is seeking to teach us.