

The Burial of Jesus
(John 19:38-42)
Expository Lessons from the Gospel of John

I. Background and Recap of Preceding Events from Gospel of John

- a. Jesus has been accused by the Jews and condemned to death by crucifixion by Pilate, the Roman Governor.
- b. He has been crucified between two condemned criminals. After hanging on the cross all day (about 9 am until 3 pm), he expires on the cross.
- c. In order to expedite the death of the three men crucified, so that they will be buried before sundown on Friday evening (marking start of the Sabbath), the legs of the two men crucified with Jesus are broken by the Roman soldiers.
- d. When they come to Jesus, they find he has already died, so his legs are not broken. The soldier confirms this by piercing his side with a spear; out come blood and water. This manner of death fulfills the prophecies that indicated “none of his bones shall be broken” (rules for the Passover Lamb in **Exodus 12:46** and **Numbers 24:8**; consider also **Psalms 34:20**) and “they shall look on him who they pierced” (**Zechariah 12:10**).

II. Account of the Burial of Jesus

- a. Read **John 19:38-42**
- b. Compare with the parallel accounts of the burial of the body of Jesus, from the other three gospels.
 - i. Read **Matthew 27:57-66**.
 - ii. Read **Mark 15:42-47**.
 - iii. Read **Luke 23:50-56**.
- c. Summary of the events surrounding the burial
 - i. Jesus is taken down from the cross on the Preparation Day (Friday afternoon), the day before the Sabbath (which corresponds to our Saturday; but begins at sundown on Friday afternoon).
 - ii. Joseph of Arimathea asks Pilate for the body of Jesus.

iii. Description of Joseph of Arimathea:

1. Prominent member of the Jewish Council, the Sanhedrin. **(Mark 15:43)**
2. He is a good and just (righteous) man. **(Luke 23:50)**
 - a. Note that the same Greek word for just/righteous that is used here (Greek: δίκαιος), we also find used in in **Romans 3:10**. There Paul is quoting from **Psalms 14** and **53** (designated **Psalms 13** and **52** in the LXX), where it says, "There is none righteous, no not one".
 - b. Calvinists and others influenced by Reformation Theology have tried to use the passage from **Romans 3** to claim that every individual human being after the Fall of Adam and Eve has been totally depraved. However, we see here that Joseph of Arimathea is one person clearly described as being "good and righteous".
3. Although a prominent member of the Council that condemned Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea did not go along with the decision of the others. **(Luke 23:51)**
 - a. In the past, I have sometimes heard people claim that all of us are guilty of murdering Christ. They support this assertion by taking **Acts 2:36** out of context.
 - b. There Peter says to the crowd gathered in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, "God has made this Jesus, *whom you crucified*, both Lord and Christ." (**Acts 2:36**, NKJV)
 - c. However, consider Joseph of Arimathea. It makes the point in Luke's account that this person, a member of the Sanhedrin, *was not responsible* for the decisions that led to the crucifixion of Jesus.
4. Joseph was wealthy.
 - a. He is described as "a rich man from Arimathea". **(Matthew 27:57)**
5. He had become a disciple of Jesus; however, this was in secret, out of fear of the Jews. **(John 19:38)**
6. He was waiting for the kingdom of God. **(Mark 15:43, Luke 23:51)**

7. He “took courage” and approached Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus. (**Mark 15:43**)
8. Pilate is surprised to hear that Jesus is already dead, and has it confirmed by a centurion (**Mark 15:44**). Pilate grants custody of the body of Jesus to Joseph.
9. It says Joseph “took it down”. (**Luke 23:53**)
 - a. I assume this means that Joseph personally took the body of Jesus down from the cross.
10. Joseph bought fine linen for a burial shroud in which to wrap the body of Jesus. (**Mark 15:46**)

iv. Description of the tomb

1. The tomb was located in a garden, near the place where Jesus had been crucified. (**John 19:41**)
2. This was Joseph of Arimathea’s own tomb. (**Matthew 27:59**)
3. It was a new tomb, in which no one had yet been laid. (**John 19:41**)
4. Joseph had hewn this tomb out of rock. (**Matthew 27:59**)
 - a. Large stone rolled against the entrance to the tomb
5. Two of the women (Mary Magdalen and the other Mary) also were there at the burial; and saw where Jesus was laid. (**Matthew 27:61, Mark 15:47**)

v. Preparation of the body for burial (**John 19:38-40**)

1. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus worked together to prepare the body for burial.
 - a. This is the same Nicodemus who had come to Jesus at night in **John 3**; described there as a Pharisee, ruler of the Jews and teacher.
2. Nicodemus brings about 100 pounds (45 kg) of a mixture of myrrh and aloes.
3. Body of Jesus is bound with the spices, in a clean linen cloth, according to Jewish customs of the time.
 - a. In **Matthew 27:59** it says Joseph wrapped the body in “a clean linen cloth”.

- b. In **John 19:40**, in the NKJV it says the body was “bound in *strips of linen*”.
 - i. However, in the ESV renders it: “So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.” (**John 19:40**, ESV)
 - ii. Actually, the ESV is a more literal translation from the Greek text here. It just says “linen cloths”. There is nothing about “strips of” in the Greek text.
- 4. The two women watching the burial preparation (Mary Magdalen and the other Mary), after departing, prepare spices and fragrant oils for the body. (**Luke 23:55-56**)
 - a. They plan to return to the tomb to further prepare the body after they rest on the Sabbath.
- vi. The tomb is secured after the burial.
 - 1. On Friday afternoon, after the body of Jesus is wrapped and laid in the stone tomb, a large stone is rolled over the entrance (doorway) by Joseph of Arimathea. (**Matthew 27:59-60**)
 - 2. The next day (on the Sabbath, Saturday) the chief priests and Pharisees ask Pilate to secure the site until after the third day. (**Matthew 27:62-66**)
 - a. They knew He had taught He would rise on the third day. They feared His disciples would come at night and steal the body, falsely claiming that He had risen from the dead.
 - b. “On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, saying, ‘Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, “After three days I will rise.”’” (**Matthew 27:62-63**, NKJV)
 - c. **Question:** Where and when did Jesus teach, before His death, that He would rise on the third day?
 - i. “Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”” (**John 2:19**, NKJV)

- ii. "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.'" (**Mark 14:58**, NKJV)
 - iii. "For 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**, NKJV)
 - iv. "And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again." (**Mark 8:31**, NKJV)
- 3. Pilate gives orders to have the tomb secured. (**Matthew 27:65-66**)
 - a. A guard of Roman soldiers is stationed to watch the tomb.
 - b. The stone rolled in front of the tomb doorway is sealed with an official seal (which it is illegal for an unauthorized person to break, under threat of severe punishment).
 - i. In *Manners and Customs of the Bible* by James Freeman, it states that the ancient custom for sealing would involve stretching a cord across the stone, with a lump of stamped clay (impressed with the image of an official seal) fastening it at each end.
 - ii. In this manner, the seal would guarantee that the tomb could not be opened without detection.

III. Are any Prophecies Fulfilled in the Burial of Jesus?

- a. Foundation of the faith: the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.
 - i. "For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures," (**1 Corinthians 15:3-4**, NKJV)
 - ii. The phrase "according to the Scriptures" means in fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament.

- iii. There are lots of prophecies about the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. **Question:** *Are there any prophecies that speak of His burial?*
- b. Buried in the tomb of a wealthy man.
 - i. “And they made His grave with the wicked— But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth.” (**Isaiah 53:9**, NKJV)
 - ii. “I will appoint evil men for his burial and rich men for his death...” (**Isaiah 53:9**, LXX, OSB)
 - iii. Many have associated this statement with the fact that Jesus was buried in the tomb of a wealthy man, Joseph of Arimathea.
- c. Allegorical-style prophecies that may touch on this.
 - i. Story of Joseph being betrayed by his brothers, in **Genesis 37-41**.
 - ii. Note that Stephen speaks about Joseph’s story in **Acts 7**. There, Stephen makes the following points to a hostile Jewish crowd in Jerusalem, before being stoned to death.
 - 1. Their forefathers rejected Joseph, who was appointed by God;
 - 2. Their forefathers rejected Moses, who was appointed by God; and now...
 - 3. They have just rejected and killed Jesus, the Christ, the promised Anointed One sent by God. Therefore, *they are just like their fathers!*
 - iii. Other parallels we see between the life of Joseph and that of Jesus (we discussed this in greater detail in our expository series on **Genesis**) include:
 - 1. Joseph is the most beloved son of his father. (**Genesis 37:3-4**)
 - 2. He tells his brothers the dream where they are bowing down to him (and they resent him for that). They do NOT want to have him to reign over them. (**Genesis 37:5-11**)
 - 3. He gives his father an honest report of the wickedness of his brothers, and they hate him for that. (**Genesis 37:2**)
 - 4. His brothers plot to kill him. (**Genesis 37:12-36**)
 - a. Read **Genesis 37:18-30**.
 - b. His brothers strip his tunic off of him.

- c. They cast him into an empty pit
 - d. He goes on a journey, with spice traders (bearing spices, balm and myrrh).
 - e. When older brother returns to pit later, there is no body in there; he is perplexed.
5. Although he has done nothing wrong, he ends up “in prison”. (**Genesis 39-40**)
- a. Recall Peter says that Jesus “preached to the spirits in prison” (**1 Peter 3:19**).
 - b. While the body of Jesus was in the tomb until the third day, His spirit went to *Hades*, the temporary waiting place for spirits of the dead while awaiting the Day of Judgment.
 - i. See **Acts 2:22-28**, where Peter quotes from **Psalm 16** (designated **Psalm 15** in the LXX).
 - ii. “For *You will not leave my soul in Hades*, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.” (**Acts 2:27**, NKJV)
6. He comes out of prison later; transformed appearance. (**Genesis 41**)
- a. He becomes second highest ruler, over all the kingdom. (**Genesis 41:40-44**)
 - b. He holds keys to the granaries. The entire world must come to him for life-sustaining food; and they must *give up everything they have* in order to receive it. (**Genesis 41:53-57**)
- iv. Daniel in the Lion’s Den (**Daniel 6**)
- 1. His enemies resented him; but could not find any sin to charge against him. (**Daniel 6:4-5**)
 - 2. Found by his enemies, who conspire against him, while he is praying (and he is praying three times). (**Daniel 6:7-13**)
 - 3. Ruler does not want to have him killed; but feels trapped by the accusers, and reluctantly sentences him to death. (**Daniel 6:14-16**)

4. Cast into the pit of death. (**Daniel 6:17**)
 5. Stone and seal cover the entrance. (**Daniel 6:18**)
 6. Miraculously, he comes out of the pit alive. (**Daniel 6:20-24**)
 7. Enemies are cast into the pit, and their bones broken before they reach the ground (unlike the famous Jewish prophet Daniel: *none of his bones were broken*). (**Daniel 6:25**)
- d. Summarizing the specific elements of the burial of Jesus that were prophesied or foreshadowed in the Old Testament:
- i. Buried in the tomb of a wealthy man (**Isaiah 53:9 / Matthew 27:57**)
 - ii. Body cast into an empty pit. (**Genesis 37:24 / John 19:41**)
 - iii. His brother later comes to that pit but is perplexed to find the body missing. (**Genesis 37:29-30 / Luke 24:12**)
 - iv. His body is placed among myrrh and spices. (**Genesis 37:25 / John 19:39-40**)
 - v. The 'pit of death' holding the body of the famous Jewish prophet is covered with a stone that is sealed. (**Daniel 6:18 / Matthew 27:60, 27:65-66**)

IV. About that Linen Burial Cloth...

- a. On a recent teaching call (with Middle East) I was asked about the "Shroud of Turin".
 - i. This shroud has been kept for centuries in Turin, Italy.
 - ii. Some believe the shroud (a large piece of cloth) is the burial cloth in which Jesus was laid.
 - iii. Others hold it to be a forgery of the Middle Ages.
 - iv. Either way, this piece of cloth certainly has generated a lot of controversy. It has become the most scientifically researched artifact in all of history!
 - v. Whether or not this turns out to be the actual burial cloth of Jesus does not impact my faith in the resurrection. My faith is based on the evidence of the fulfilled prophecies and eyewitness accounts, just as Paul reminded us in **1 Corinthians 15:1-4**.

- vi. However, in view of the extraordinary attention this artifact has received in the religious world, I think it is worth mentioning in this lesson.
- b. Main objections to this being the authentic burial cloth of Jesus include:
 - i. Carbon-14 dating done in 1988 (by three labs independently) places the date of this cloth somewhere around the 1300-1400's AD (Middle Ages of Europe).
 - ii. Also, there is no clear record of the history of this piece of cloth that goes back further than about 1300 AD, (in Europe).
 - iii. There certainly were lots of fake religious artifacts and legends circulating in Europe during the Middle Ages!
- c. However, there is some interesting scientific evidence for the other viewpoint, as well. One recent article (2018) presenting the evidence for the other side: *Why is the Turin Shroud Not a Fake*, by Giulio Fanti, an engineering professor at the University of Padua, Italy.
 - i. Source of the article: *Global Journal of Archaeology and Anthropology*, vol. 7, issue 3; published December 4, 2018.
 - ii. By that expression "not a fake", the author of the article meant that it is an authentic burial cloth *of someone from first century*. It is not possible to prove from scientific examination whether *Jesus* was the person who had been wrapped in it.
 - iii. Basic description of the cloth described as 'the shroud of Turin':
 - 1. Size: about 14 ft x 3.5 ft (4.3 m x 1.1m)
 - 2. Double image, front and back, of naked man tortured and crucified
 - 3. Negative image (Like an old-fashioned photographic film negative image, dark areas of the actual person appear light and vice-versa.)
 - 4. Wounds (blood stains on the cloth) correspond to locations mentioned those in gospel accounts (head, hands, feet and side)
 - iv. Arguments advanced to support authenticity of the shroud in the article include:
 - 1. There is no known explanation for how the image on the cloth could have been created. The image was not caused by paint

nor stain applied to the cloth; most likely theory is that it somehow resulted from a large burst of energy from a human body.

2. Five other dating methods (other than Carbon-14) date this artifact to a time period that includes the first century. A side note: the cloth itself may have come from India originally.
- d. **Important:** I want to make it clear that I am not personally advocating for the authenticity of the shroud of Turin (as being the actual burial cloth of Jesus). There has been a lot of debate on this, and there are arguments on both sides.
- i. I just want to make listeners aware of this well-known and controversial artifact; and that there is (at this time) reasonable scientific evidence *both* to support and to refute the idea that this is authentic.
 - ii. Again, a reminder - In the end, our Christian faith is based on the gospel accounts, not on some disputed archaeological artifact!
 - iii. **Additional comments I wanted to add to the notes** here, based on some feedback I received in our group after giving this lesson, Perhaps some further clarification is needed.
 1. First, some people wondered why I would bring this subject up at all. I thought it would be appropriate to discuss in this lesson because the shroud is such a widely-known and controversial artifact. I thought it would be good for us to at least become familiar with it. Someone could bring this up to you in a future discussion.
 2. Based on the things I brought up, some people could be left with the impression that I believe this shroud was the authentic burial cloth of Christ, based on one article I referenced, by an Italian engineering professor. Certainly, there have been many fraudulent claims of Biblical artifacts coming out of Europe in the Middle Ages; so many might immediately assume that this is just another one!
 3. I just wanted others to be aware that while there are some technical experts who hold this to be a forgery of the Middle Ages, there are others who cite technical evidence that it does go back to the first century. I don't know enough to have a strong opinion on the matter, either way. So, I am certainly not pushing for anyone to believe that this is the authentic burial cloth of Christ. Perhaps it is, and perhaps it isn't.

V. Joseph of Arimathea

- a. He is prominent in the burial account.
- b. There is much to commend in what we see of him in the gospels. I see him as a heroic example of faith, an upward call to us all.
 - i. He was willing to stand alone, and refused to give into peer pressure and would not go along with the rest of the Sanhedrin when they condemned Jesus.
 - ii. He stood out as a good and righteous man among his generation, commended as such in the gospels.
 - iii. Although afraid of the reaction of the Jews, he “took courage” and asked Pilate for custody of the body of Jesus.
 - iv. He showed a noble love and devotion toward Jesus, even after the crucifixion; at a time when it appeared Jesus’ mission had failed, when many others had dispersed and were discouraged.
- c. There is a long (very old) tradition that he was among the first who brought gospel to Britain.
 - i. Some look at the maps in the back of their study Bibles (which often show three missionary journeys of Paul) and falsely assume that this is as far as the gospel went in the first generation. That certainly was not the case!
 1. Paul was only one of many apostles. The others also took the Great Commission seriously!
 2. While we have the account of three of Paul’s missionary journeys in the Book of Acts, that account only goes up to his first imprisonment in Rome.
 - a. Also recall that in **Romans 15:24-28**, Paul said “*when I go to Spain*”, not “*if I go to Spain*”.
 3. Britain was (at least parts of it) part of the Roman Empire at that time. Who would have gone there, when Jesus tasked the apostles with taking the gospel to “all nations”?
 - ii. For more information regarding historical support of this claim, see *Origin and Early History of Christianity in Britain*, Andrew Gray; originally published 1897, reprinted by Artisan Publishers

- iii. Maegalwyn of Llandaff, c. 450, wrote that Joseph was buried on Isle of Avalon (also called Glastonbury). Other early historical testimony exists as well.
- iv. Note that 'Gildas the Wise', Christian writer c. 520-560, wrote in *The Ruin of Britain* that Christian faith was introduced to Britain by the last year of Tiberias Caesar (the 22nd year of the reign of Tiberias).
 - 1. "Meanwhile these islands [British Isles], stiff with cold and frost, and in a distant region of the world, remote from the visible sun, received the beams of light, that is, the holy precepts of Christ, the true Sun, showing to the whole world his splendor, not only from the temporal firmament, but from the height of heaven, which surpasses everything temporal, at the latter part, as we know, of the reign of Tiberius Caesar..."
 - a. (Source: Gildas the Wise, *On the Ruin of Britain*, chapter 8.)
 - 2. Recall that ministry of John the Baptist began in the 15th year (**Luke 3:1**) Since Jesus' ministry was approximately three years, this would have put Jesus' death around the 18th year of Tiberias Caesar.
 - 3. Therefore, Christian faith would have been introduced to the British Isles within 5 years after the crucifixion of Jesus; which means it would have arrived there by c. AD 38.
 - 4. *If Gildas is correct* in his account of the history of Christianity entering the British Isles, perhaps the old accounts about Joseph are correct. It is therefore quite possible that Joseph of Arimathea was involved in bringing the gospel to the western limits of the Roman Empire.
 - 5. Perhaps this also demonstrates how serious Jesus' followers took His command to take the gospel *to all nations*. (**Matthew 28:18-20**).
 - 6. May we be inspired by Joseph's courage, as well as to his obedience to Jesus' Great Commission!