

“The Burial of Jesus” (An Exposition of Mark 15:40-47)¹

Introduction

Here in this passage in Mark’s Gospel we see the burial of the Lord Jesus Christ. This might not seem like a very important event, but in reality it is *much* more significant than one might think.

The burial of Jesus Christ is included in both the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed as an *essential* part of the true Christian faith. And so for the better part of two thousand years (give or take a couple hundred years or so) the Christian church has confessed that our Lord Jesus Christ “was crucified, died, *and was buried*” (The Apostles’ Creed) and that “He suffered *and was buried*” (The Nicene Creed).

Not only do the Scriptures (like our text in Mark’s Gospel) clearly testify to the fact that our Lord Jesus Christ died and was buried, but the Apostle Paul goes so far as to mention the burial of Christ as *one of the most important things that he taught in his ministry in the gospel!* In 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 he writes,

“For I delivered to you *as of first importance* what I also received: *that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,*”

Now Paul’s ministry in the gospel certainly included teaching “**the whole counsel of God**” (Acts 20:27), and in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 he tells us that “**All Scripture is *breathed out by God***” and so is “**profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.**” *All* of God’s Word is important, and *all* of it is given for our benefit, and so is to be preached and taught to God’s people!

Nevertheless Paul saw certain scriptural truths about Jesus Christ as being in some way “**of first importance.**” These included the following truths: 1.) that “**Christ *died for our sins,***” 2.) that “**he was *buried,***” and 3.) that “**he was *raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.***” Not just Christ’s death and resurrection, but also His *burial* was “**of first importance.**” And so this morning we hope to see some of the reasons why the burial of our Savior is so important to our faith and life.

Not only that, but this passage in Mark’s Gospel is *also* instructive to us about *the power and reach of the gospel of Christ*. For here in these verses we see some rather different kinds of people who by the grace of God became followers of Jesus Christ. There are some seemingly *unlikely disciples* of Jesus here in our text.

Women Who Followed Jesus

The *first* thing that Mark mentions here in our text is the presence of certain women at the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ. In v.40-41 he writes,

“There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. When he was in Galilee, they followed him and ministered to him, and there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem.”

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

Mark mentions Mary Magdalene, another woman named Mary (whom we know almost nothing about), and Salome, who is believed to be the mother of the apostles James and John.² These women were *followers of Jesus*, who had been brought to saving faith and converted while Jesus was ministering in Galilee. They also served or ministered to Him during His earthly ministry.

Let us notice here that our Lord Jesus was well-pleased to count these women among His followers, and gladly accepted their service to Him. Imagine the joy these women had in knowing that they had served or ministered to the Lord Jesus Himself! And notice also that Mark adds that **“there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem.”**

Now if Jesus accepted the faithful ministry of women during his earthly ministry, what reason do any of us have in supposing that our Lord is any less accepting and even desirous of using women to serve Him in many ways in His church today?

Some may think that because the Scriptures clearly reserve the offices of *elder* (including pastors and teachers) and *deacon* to qualified *men*,³ that this somehow relegates women to a sort of *second-class citizen* status in the kingdom of God and in His church. This is *not* the case at all.

J.C. Ryle writes,

“In the New Testament, we generally see women mentioned as a help and assistance to the cause of true religion. Elizabeth, Mary, Martha, Dorcas, Lydia, and the women named by St. Paul to the Romans, are all cases in point. . . . It seems meant to teach us that women have an important place in the church of Christ, one that ought to be assigned to them, and one that they ought to fill. *There is a great work that women can do for God's glory, without being public teachers.* Happy is that congregation in which women know this, and act upon it!”⁴

It is beyond the scope of this sermon and this text to go into very much detail about all of the many ways that women in the church *can* and *should* serve the Lord Jesus and His people. But we can be sure that we ought to joyfully encourage them in doing so. *To do any less is to dishonor Christ, weaken His church, and to wrongfully discourage those whom our Lord is pleased to use in His service.*

The Lord has gifted *all believers* (including *you*, if you are a believer in Christ) through His Holy Spirit for service and ministry in the body of Christ in a multitude of ways.⁵ And so all believers should be encouraged to discern and use their gifts, unto the building up of the body of Christ, and to the glory of His name. Are *you* actively serving others in the body of Christ?

Notice also that these particular women went so far as to *watch closely from a distance* even as Jesus was crucified and as He died (v.40). This took no small amount of courage on their part. The disciples had *deserted* Christ. Even Peter himself had *denied* His Lord three times (Mark 14:66-72). But these women stayed close enough to watch, and even to see where Jesus was entombed (v.47).

2 See Matthew 27:56, which speaks of Mary Magdalene, the other Mary, and “the mother of the sons of Zebedee.”

3 1 Timothy 3:1 says, “if any *man* aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work *he* desires to do” (NASB, italics added). The very next verse (v.2) adds that an overseer (or elder) must be “the husband of one wife” (or, more literally, a “one woman *man*”). Likewise v.12 notes that deacons also must be “husbands of only one wife” (or “one woman *men*”). Titus 1:5-9 speaks similarly about the qualifications of elders. See also 1 Timothy 2:12.

4 *Expository Thoughts on Mark*, p.277

5 See 1 Corinthians 12:1-31; Ephesians 4:1-16;

Commentators mention that in Jewish society in the first century the testimony of women was not held in very high regard, but here we find that the testimony of a few notable women (**“Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome”** – v.40) provided some of the most important first-hand witness or testimony to both the death of Christ and His resurrection!

Without their crucial testimony scoffers might have the appearance of just cause for suggesting that our Lord Jesus hadn't really risen from the dead, as if the disciples had merely gone to *the wrong tomb* when they went to find His body. This, of course, is a ridiculous idea, but some have tried to disprove the resurrection of Christ on that very basis.

Can there be any doubt that if Jesus Christ had not truly risen from the dead on the third day, that the enemies of Christ and His gospel would have been quick to find the correct tomb and produce the His dead body for all to see? And so the church would have perished in her earliest days.

But our Lord Jesus is risen from the dead, and these women in our text provide some of the most important testimony to that fact!

Not only that, but note *the power and reach of the gospel* here in our text. Mary Magdalene in particular was probably someone whom most people would have written off as a lost cause. We don't really know much about her background and history, but Luke 8:2 tells us that Jesus had delivered her from very severe demonic possession, having cast out **“seven demons”** from her.

Surely we would think of someone like that as a lost cause, would we not? And yet see how our Lord Jesus had mercy upon her. And so she followed Christ, and even ministered to Him for the rest of her days!

And by God's grace she has the honor of being mentioned in Scripture not only as a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, but also as a witness to His death, burial, and His resurrection (Mark 16:9; John 20:11-18)!

We should remember and take to heart Paul's words in 1 Timothy 1:15, where he says,

“The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.*”

Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners! *Real* sinners, *all kinds* of sinners – even sinners like *you* and like me! He came not **“to call the righteous but *sinners to repentance*”** (Luke 5:32).

Joseph of Arimathea

And here in this passage we also see yet *another* not-so-likely disciple of Jesus Christ in the man named **“Joseph of Arimathea”** (v.43). Mark tells us that he was **“a respected member of the council”** (v.43). The **“council”** was the *Sanhedrin* – the very same Jewish council that we find opposing Jesus throughout Mark's Gospel, to the point of plotting His death!

And Mark also tell us that Joseph **“was also himself looking for the kingdom of God”** (v.43), he had been looking to Jesus in faith. And he also sought to give Jesus a proper burial *before the Sabbath*, as it was not lawful to leave a body hung on a tree overnight.

Deuteronomy 21:22–23 says,

“And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, *his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day*, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.”

John 19:38 tells us that Joseph **“was a disciple of Jesus, but *secretly* for fear of the Jews.”** And so this man who was a follower of Jesus, but who had up to this point *tried* to keep it a secret (!) now summons up the *courage* or *boldness* to go to Pontius Pilate himself to ask for the body of Jesus so that he might give Him a proper burial! (John 19:39 adds that **“Nicodemus”** also came to help Joseph with Christ's preparation and burial!)

And just as the women mentioned earlier in our text served Christ *in his life*, and provided the world with an important testimony of His burial, even so our brother Joseph of Arimathea served Christ *in His death*, and provided the world with an important testimony to the veracity of His death as well.

In v.44-45 Mark writes,

“Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died. And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph.”

Because Joseph went to Pilate to request the body of our Lord for burial, Pilate himself ordered the Roman centurion to verify that Christ had indeed died. And this shuts the mouths of scoffers and skeptics who would try to say that our Redeemer did not die, but merely *swooned* or *fainted* on the cross, and so (they would say) that His resurrection on the third day was merely a *resuscitation* of sorts.

In v.46 Mark writes

“And Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.”

And in doing this he also fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 53:9 which says of the Messiah:

**“*And they made his grave with the wicked
and with a rich man in his death,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.*”**

Jesus was buried in a tomb borrowed for a short time from a rich man, Joseph of Arimathea. And so Joseph not only fulfilled that prophecy of Christ, but also showed himself to be a disciple of Christ, and had his name put down in Scripture as such for all the world to see, but also helped to provide very important testimony to the veracity of Christ's death!

For one of the most important things about Christ's burial in that tomb was that *it proved the veracity or truthfulness of His death for our sins*. *Heidelberg Catechism* Q.41 asks “Why was He buried?” And the answer given there is simply that “His burial testifies that he really died.”

Conclusion

In conclusion, let us see a number of things that we can take from this passage. First, *see how our Lord Jesus saves all kinds of sinners!* He saves *the uncleanest of the unclean*, even someone who was demon-possessed! And He also saves the *self-righteous*, the person of high religious attainments, who outwardly seems to have it all together, but who only by the grace of God even sees His need for the Savior!

That Jesus saved Mary Magdalene and Joseph of Arimathea shows us that our Lord saves *all kinds* of sinners, and so we should boldly take the gospel to all kinds of sinners, and expect to see all kinds of sinners saved!

William Perkins (1558-1602), often called “the father of Puritanism,” suggests two (2) benefits or uses of Christ's burial for us as believers. *First*, he says that “it serves to work in us the burial of all our sins.”⁶ He cites the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 6:1-4,

“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? *We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death*, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”

Because we were “*buried with him by baptism*” into His death, we should *reckon ourselves to be dead to sin, and so walk in newness of life* in the power of Christ's resurrection.

The second “use” that Perkins suggests is that “the burial of Christ serves to be a sweet perfume of all our graves and burials”⁷ Because Christ died for our sins and was buried, He sanctifies our graves, and removes the terrors of death for believers. Our Lord not only died and rose again for us, but was also buried for us as well.

And so as our *death* only means that we are *absent from the body and present with the Lord* (2 Corinthians 5:8), so the *burial* of our bodies in the grave is only a precursor to our glorious resurrection on the last day! - *Amen*

⁶ *The Works of William Perkins*, Vol. 5, p.229

⁷ *Ibid.*