

INTRODUCTION

I don't really like watching television commercials. So when I want to watch a program or a golf match, I'll usually record it on my TiVo. Then when I sit down to watch it I can fast forward through all the commercials. I love playing golf, but watching golf on TV can be little like watching paint dry. Those guys are so slow, especially when they are lining up a putt. But with my DVR I can fast-forward when someone is lining up a putt or it's a player I'm not interested in seeing. I think a DVR is a great invention.

Maybe you've never thought about it, but when it comes to the burial of Jesus, most of us just fast forward through it. We skip it. We are really into the details and the meaning of the cross. And then we celebrate the wonder and beauty of the resurrection. But the burial? Nothing there, so I'll fast forward from the cross to the empty tomb.

Not so fast. Let's stop and talk about the burial of Jesus' body. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians he summarized his gospel message into three points. He wrote, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." (1 Corinthians 15:3-4) Christ died. Christ was buried. Christ was raised from the dead. If you ignore the burial, you are omitting 1/3 of the Gospel Message.

So, let's read how Mark describes the burial of Jesus in Mark 15:40-47.

"Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.

It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid."

I've entitled this message, "Buried, He Carried My Sins Far Away." I got this title from a song written by an interesting man. In the late 1800s there was a Presbyterian pastor named J. Wilbur Chapman. He was inspired by the evangelistic preaching of Dwight L. Moody, so Chapman became an evangelist. In one of his crusades, a professional baseball player named Billy Sunday came to Christ. Billy Sunday went on to become one of the most effective evangelists in America. Billy Sunday was invited to preach a crusade in Charlotte, North Carolina. He was already booked far in advance so Billy Sunday sent one of his assistant evangelists named Mordecai Hamm. Mordecai Hamm preached in Charlotte and one night a tall lanky boy who worked on a nearby dairy farm came forward to surrender to Christ. His name was Billy Graham who has preached to more people than anyone in history.

But Wilbur Chapman was also a writer and musician. He wrote a famous hymn that many of us grew up singing. It was entitled "One Day" and it tells the whole story of Jesus in five verses. A few years ago, Casting Crowns revised the song as "Glorious Day."

But to me, the chorus is one of the best summaries of the gospel truth. I want us to sing it a couple of times today. Living he loved me; dying he saved me; Buried, he carried my sins far away; Rising, he justified freely forever; One day he's coming—oh glorious day!

In this message we're going to look at three truths about the burial of Jesus and then we'll conclude with one take-away truth you can apply to your life.

I. JESUS' BURIAL WAS CONDUCTED BY TWO UNLIKELY UNDERTAKERS

One might have expected some of the disciples to claim His body, but they were hiding in fear. But Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus are the two unlikely undertakers who remove the body of Jesus from the cross, prepare the corpse, and carry it into the tomb. The Italian Master Caravaggio has captured this scene in his painting *The Entombment of Christ* which is in the Vatican Museum. Mary, mother of James is seen lifting her hands in grief. A young Mary Magdalene has her head bowed weeping into a scarf. Mary, the mother of Jesus is depicted as an older woman wearing the habit of a nun, a little artistic license. Joseph has grabbed the legs and Nicodemus is lifting the torso with his hand touching the wound in Jesus' side. There is a sense of urgency as they are racing to beat sunset when the Passover Sabbath began.

An artist has the liberty to sanitize a scene. But imagine for a moment what a gruesome task faced these two men. First they had to climb up and either remove the nails or remove Jesus' hands and feet from the nails embedded in the cross. Then they had to lower His mangled body. Jesus' back had been ripped apart with a whip, Water and blood had flowed from the wound in His side. They had to remove the razor sharp crown of thorn, perhaps mingled their blood with His. I shudder when I think about the job they faced. As I thought about it, I also thought about all the first responders, medical personnel, and law-enforcement personnel who have to personally confront a scene of violent death. I admire you for the tough work you do. But on that day, there were no body bags. What an act of love! Let's learn something from these two unlikely undertakers.

A. Joseph had the courage to ask for the corpse of Jesus

The Bible says, "As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body." (Matthew 27:57) Matthew adds three important details we don't find in Mark. First, Joseph was a rich man. Second, it was Joseph's tomb where he placed the body of Jesus. And most importantly, Matthew tells us Joseph was a disciple of Jesus. John tells us Joseph was a secret believer because he feared the Jews. It took a lot of courage for him to publically identify himself as a friend of Jesus to Pilate.

Maybe you consider yourself a secret disciple because you're afraid of what others may think of you if you told them. There really isn't any such thing as a secret believer. Either the secret will

destroy the belief, or the belief will destroy the secret. And fortunately in Joseph's case, his love for Jesus destroyed the secret and he spoke up for Christ. Would you be willing to stand up and speak up for Jesus regardless of what others may think?

B. Nicodemus came into the light to help the Man who told him he needed a new birth

John tells us, "He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with the Jewish burial custom." (John 19:39-40)

In John 3 we learn that Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin as well. Nick came to Jesus at night because he didn't want anyone to see him with Jesus. It was the first Nick at night. Nicodemus was a very religious man, but Jesus said in order for a person to see the Kingdom of Heaven they must be born of the flesh AND be born of the spirit. To get to heaven you need to be born again. Apparently Nicodemus believed Jesus, because like Joseph, he came into the light to show his love for Jesus.

There's always a cost when you choose to follow Jesus. Joseph and Nicodemus had a lot to lose by claiming the body of Jesus. By identifying with Jesus, they would be expelled from the Sanhedrin. Many of their old Jewish friends would reject them because of their association with Jesus. And by touching a corpse, both Nicodemus and Joseph rendered themselves ceremonially unclean for seven days. In other words, they were not allowed to participate in the Passover. But they had something better than a holy day: They lovingly handled the real Passover Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. After washing the body, they wrapped it in the strips of cloth soaked in the gummy spices. Then taking the single sheet, they covered His body and carried it to the tomb. Not only were they the unlikely undertakers they also became the pallbearers of the Prince of Peace. What a funeral service! No sermon, no hymns, no eulogy. But in three days we know a funeral service would have been premature!

II. JESUS' BURIAL WAS PROPHESED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

I won't spend much time on this point, but every aspect of the death of Jesus was prophesied in the Old Testament. Isaiah predicted Jesus would pour out His life unto death and would be numbered with the transgressors. That means he would be crucified with wicked men. I'm about to show you an amazing prophecy that seems to be a contradiction. But before we read it, remember Jesus was assigned to death as a wicked criminal. Do you know what happened to the bodies of those the Romans crucified? Usually the bodies were left to hang on the crosses for many days. Then they were removed and disposed of in a common burial site for criminals. That's what the Romans planned to do with the body of Jesus. But a rich man, Joseph, stepped in and changed the assigned burial place. Isaiah prophesied, "He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth." (Isaiah 53:9)

That's an amazing prophecy! So although Jesus' body should have been in the assigned grave of

the wicked, He was placed in a borrowed tomb of a rich man. It's okay that He just borrowed it because He wouldn't need it very long!

III. JESUS' BURIAL SYMBOLIZED THE REMOVAL OF OUR SINS

John gives us a very important detail about the location of the tomb. "At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid." (John 19:41)

Last week I showed you a photo of a rock cliff in Jerusalem that looks like a skull. It is located within 100 feet of a 1st Century vineyard that contained a cistern capable of storing 200,000 gallons of water. And less than 100 feet from that underground cistern is a tomb that has been cut into the limestone cliff. I've been there many times, and I can testify that the tomb is empty. It had to be a rich man's tomb, because it has three chambers. Many believe it is the tomb where Jesus was laid. Whether it is or not, for sure, the tomb was in a garden. So what's the importance of that?

A. Human sin began and was buried in a garden

In the New Testament Jesus is often compared to Adam. The Bible says, "For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:17) So our human story began in a garden. Adam and Eve were placed in a perfect garden to enjoy perfect fellowship with their Creator. It really was paradise in every way. But when sin broke that fellowship, the human story was renamed Paradise Lost. When Jesus entered the tomb He bore our sins in His body, when He came out of the tomb, our sins were gone forever.

The greatest allegory ever written was "Pilgrim's Progress," penned by Baptist preacher John Bunyan, while he was in prison in 1660. The main character is a man named Christian (no hidden meaning there). In one scene Christian is running up a hill, and he is burdened by a terrible load on his back (sin). Bunyan wrote, "He ran thus until he came to a path ascending and upon that place stood a cross and a little below it, a sepulcher (tomb). So I saw in my dream that just as Christian came up to the cross, his burdened loosed off his shoulders and fell from his back and began to tumble and so continued to do until it came to the mouth of the sepulcher where it fell in it and I saw it no more." That's what Jesus did with our sins. Living He loved me; Dying He saved me. Buried He carried my sins far away! But there is a second powerful symbol in His burial.

B. The Jewish scapegoat symbolically carried away sins; Jesus literally took our sins away

On the Day of Atonement, there were two male lambs used; they are often called goats. One ram was slain and the blood was taken into the Holy of Holies. But the other ram was left alive. It was called the scapegoat. The High Priest would approach the scapegoat, put his hands on its head and transfer all the sins of the nation of Israel. Then another priest would lead the goat away into the wilderness.

The Bible says, "He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat's head. He shall send the goat away into the desert in the care of a man appointed for the task. The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place; and the man shall release it in the desert." (Leviticus 16:21-22)

The goat would be led so far away there was no way it could ever return. It would be led to a place of desolation and desertion. That's exactly the idea John the Baptist had in mind when he first recognized Jesus as the Messiah. The Bible says, "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'" (John 1:29) When Jesus died on the cross, all our sins were transferred to Him. And when He entered the tomb, He was taking them far away. He took them far, far, away. In the Shrek series, Far Far Away is a fictional city. But in the Bible, Far Far Away is where Jesus took our sins. How far away you ask? In Psalm 103:12 the Bible says, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our sins." Aren't you glad the Bible doesn't say as far as the north is from the south? You may wonder, "What's the difference?" Well, just look at a globe. Start at the equator and go north and keep going over the north pole and then you're going south. That's pretty close. But take the same globe and go to the equator and start going east and you'll never be going west. I don't know how that works, but just rejoice that when Jesus was buried He carried our sins far away!

CONCLUSION

So, what's the Take-away truth as I call it? How can I apply this to my life?

WHEN WE ARE BAPTIZED WE IDENTIFY WITH JESUS

In Romans 6 the Bible compares our baptism to the burial of Jesus. Paul wrote, "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." (Romans 6:4)

Baptism symbolizes a burial. From the beginning of the church in Acts, baptism was always by immersion and for Believers only. The practice of sprinkling babies was an invention of the Roman Catholic Church. Baptism became one of their seven sacraments.

During the 16th Century, many people started reading the Bible and men like Martin Luther compared the Bible with what the Catholic Church taught and he got angry. He realized the Bible never meant for there to be a Pope who acted like a king. He called the Pope the Anti-Christ and called the Church in Rome the Synagogue of Satan. He was upset when he realized the Bible never allowed for the church to sell indulgences so people could buy their way out of hell. So he became one of the most important reformers.

In our visit to Germany in April, I was able to see the amazing influence of Martin Luther. He started his own church where there were only two sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper.

And many people are surprised that Luther understood baptism should be by immersion. He just still thought babies should be baptized. In a sermon in 1518 he said: "First baptism is called in Greek *baptismos*, in Latin *mersio*, that is, when we dip anything wholly in water so that it is completely covered over. And although in many provinces it is no longer the custom to thrust the children into the font and to dip them; nevertheless, it should be thus, and would be right, that after speaking aloud the word (baptize) the child or any one who is to be baptized, be completely sank down into the water, and dipt again and drawn out.

The sign rests in this, that a man plunge a person in water in the name of the Father, etc., but does not leave him therein but lifts him out again; therefore it is called being lifted out of the font or depths. And so must both of these things be the sign; the dipping and the lifting out. The baptism is a bath of the new birth. Also a drowning of the sins in the baptism." (Martin Luther, "The Holy Sacrament of Baptism," Works of Martin Luther (Concordia, 1960), 35:29)

In Luther's Church in Wittenberg, you can see an altarpiece painting of Luther dipping a little baby in a baptistery. This practice was later changed because in cold weather many of the wet babies became sick after being dipped, so they went back to sprinkling.

At the same time in Switzerland, there were some serious Christians who read the New Testament that baptism was only for people old enough to place their faith in Christ. They started baptizing each other. They were cruelly labeled Anabaptists which means (baptized again). And these saints were persecuted and martyred by the Protestants, Roman Catholics, and civil authorities. But they couldn't be silenced. To them, the mode of baptism—by immersion for believers only—was worth dying for. Do we take correct doctrine that seriously?

When you are baptized correctly, you identify with Jesus. Let me illustrate that. When you stand and say the Pledge of Allegiance to the American flag, you are identifying yourself as a U.S. citizen. You wouldn't stand and say the Pledge of Allegiance to any other country's flag. Baptism is the same kind of identification with Christ. So, if you have been baptized by immersion as a profession of your faith in Christ I want you to visualize your sins, all of them, being buried with Christ. And when you came up out of the water it was a beautiful picture of the new life you have in Christ.

If you have not yet followed Christ in baptism, this is my appeal to you. Will you identify with Jesus by being baptized? It won't make you any more holy, but it will publically identify you as a follower of Jesus.

To conclude, let's stand and review the points of the Gospel in our song: Living he loved me; dying he saved me; Buried, he carried my sins far away; Rising, he justified freely forever; One day he's coming—oh glorious day!

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TAKE-AWAY TRUTH: WHEN WE ARE BAPTIZED WE IDENTIFY WITH JESUS

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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