

INTRODUCTION

Every Pastor deals with death. I've stopped counting, but I've conducted hundreds of funerals over the years. Through those years, I've had a friendship with the funeral directors in every city I've pastored. They are all pretty good guys with a sense of humor, like Chris Stewart, one of our deacons. I've said to Chris the same thing I've said to other funeral directors, "I know that you'll be last guy to let me down!"

A Baptist preacher who was preaching on death. He said, "Every member of this church is going to die!" A little guy sitting on the front pew laughed out loud when he said it. The preacher didn't like that very much so he repeated it. "I said, every member of this church is going to die!" And again the little boy laughed. The preacher stopped and said, "Son, what's so funny about that?" The little boy said, "I'm not a member of this church!"

We often laugh at death, but truthfully, many people are afraid of dying. We've all said good-bye to loved ones. But for Christians, there is good news about death. Before Jesus, death was irreversible, but Jesus reversed death, and removed its sting. And the day Jesus died and was buried was The Day Death was Buried.

John 19:38-42: "After this, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus—but secretly because of his fear of the Jews—asked Pilate that he might remove Jesus's body. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and took his body away. Nicodemus (who had previously come to him at night) also came, bringing a mixture of about seventy-five pounds of myrrh and aloes. They took Jesus's body and wrapped it in linen cloths with the fragrant spices, according to the burial custom of the Jews. There was a garden in the place where he was crucified. A new tomb was in the garden; no one had yet been placed in it. They placed Jesus there because of the Jewish day of preparation and since the tomb was nearby.

There are many great pieces of art that depict Jesus being removed from the cross. I'll share two of my favorites because they are so different. First, there's the Italian master, Caravaggio, and his *Deposition of Christ* (*fig. 1*), which I've seen in the Vatican Museum in Rome. Caravaggio loved dark colors and shadows, because he lived a dark, troubled life. The three Marys can be seen in the background, with Mary the wife of Clopas raising her hands. Mary the mother of Jesus is seen as an old nun on the left. This caused a scandal because the Catholic church taught that Mary never aged.

The Apostle John can be seen at the front cradling the shoulders of Jesus on his knee and his hand is covering the wound in the side of Jesus' body. The second man, Nicodemus, is holding the knees of Jesus and looking at the viewer. One of Caravaggio's heroes was Michelangelo who painted the Sistine Chapel ceiling, so to honor him, Caravaggio painted Michelangelo's face as that of Nicodemus.

In contrast, there's the painting by the Dutch artist Peter Paul Rubens from the same period. It's the Descent from the Cross (*fig. 2*) and it can be viewed at the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia.

You can see the differences immediately. The mother of Jesus is seen as a young woman reaching across the body of Jesus. Mary Magdalene, portrayed as a blonde-fair skinned Dutch maiden, is holding the arm of Jesus. Joseph of Arimathea is at the top wearing garments of a wealthy man. The young disciple John is helping him as Nicodemus assists. The wounds in the hands, feet, and side of Jesus are visible. All the characters in the painting are focused on the face of the dead Savior.

I'm certain you've heard hundreds of messages on the death of Jesus, and you've heard just as many messages on the resurrection of Jesus, but it's rare to hear a message devoted entirely to the burial of Jesus. But according to 1 Corinthians 15:4-3, the burial is one of three main points of the Gospel message. Paul wrote: "For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that 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)

Like many of you, I'm not crazy about television commercials, so I will often record a program and then fast forward through the commercials. Some preachers just fast forward through the burial of Jesus and go from the Cross to the Empty Tomb. But we're going to stop and consider the impact of the burial of Jesus. In fact, we're going to pause the John series after this message. For the next three weeks, we're going to leave Jesus in the tomb as Pastor Michael shares a special three-week series on Love Your Neighbor. Then when we resume the series in a few weeks, we'll talk about A Tomb with a View.

But in this message, I want us to focus on three factors surrounding the burial of Jesus.

1. The men at His burial

The Bible tells us that Jesus had two unlikely undertakers, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. You might expect family members or disciples to step forward and claim the body,



Fig. 1 Deposition of Christ
Caravaggio, c. 1602-1603
Oil on Canvas



Fig. 2 Descent from the Cross
Peter Paul Rubens, c. 1612-1614
Oil on Panel

but instead these two respected members of the Jewish Sanhedrin collected the body of Jesus from the cross. It was not an easy or a pretty job. First, they had to climb up and either remove the nails or removed 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 thorns. I shudder when I think about the job they faced. As I thought about it, I also thought about all the first responders 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! We can learn two spiritual lessons from Joseph and Nicodemus.

(1) JOSEPH: God can use rich people.

All four Gospel Accounts mention Joseph of Arimathea. When you compare all the accounts, you learn that Joseph was a wealthy man who went to Pilate to request to take charge of the corpse of Christ. We learn that the tomb belonged to Joseph and had just been carved out of a rock face, and it had never been occupied. When Jesus was placed in a rich man's tomb, He was fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 53:9: "He was assigned a grave with the wicked (that refers to the two thieves), but he was with a rich man at his death, because he had done no violence and had not spoken deceitfully."

Victims of crucifixion were usually left to be eaten by birds and wild animals, or thrown, like worthless garbage, into the dump, and burned. This was the likely fate of the two thieves who died with Jesus. That was the grave He was assigned. But instead, a rich man stepped forward and asked for the body of Jesus.

Throughout history, God has used wealthy people to advance His Kingdom. In Acts 16 a wealthy business-owner named Lydia came to know Christ and invited Paul and his companions to use her house as a location for the church to meet.

R.G. LeTourneau was a man who built huge earth-moving equipment that helped us win WWII. Early in his business career, R.G. determined to live on 10% of his income and give 90% to the Lord's work. That's why there's a great school over in Longview named after him. If God has blessed you with riches, be like Joseph of Arimathea, Lydia, and R. G. Le Tourneau. Use God's money to further His Kingdom.

(2) NICODEMUS: God can change religious people.

Nick was the Pharisee who came to visit Jesus at night, the first Nick at night. Nicodemus was a very religious man, but Jesus said that in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven he had to be born again. We see here that Nicodemus believed Jesus, but he was a secret follower. So what was it that caused Nicodemus who came to Jesus at night, to be seen in the daylight caring for Jesus? It was the cross. After the cross, Nicodemus couldn't keep the secret any longer.

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. In Nicodemus'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? Next, let's consider:

2. The manner of His burial

Today, when someone dies, the body is usually embalmed or cremated. Jewish burial customs during the time of Jesus were very different, as they are to this day. Before Jesus' body was placed in the tomb, these two unlikely undertakers did two things.

(1) Jesus' body was washed.

According to Jewish customs, a body was washed as it was prepared for burial. Women washed the bodies of women and men washed the bodies of men. After the torture and crucifixion, Joseph and Nicodemus faced quite a challenge to wash away the blood of Jesus. What a difficult and sad task that would have been.

There is one important detail here that you shouldn't miss. By handling the corpse of Jesus, both Nicodemus and Joseph were rendered ceremonially unclean for seven days. That meant that they weren't able to participate in the Passover. But they had something better than a Passover ceremony, they were lovingly caring for the real Passover Lamb who was slain from the foundation of the world.

And as they were tenderly washing off the blood of Jesus, they probably didn't fully understand at the time, that the blood of Jesus was washing away their sins.

(2) Jesus' body was wrapped.

Nicodemus brought seventy-five pounds of aloe and myrrh. That was a large amount and cost a lot of money. Usually that amount of spices was reserved for a king. And Joseph and Nicodemus wanted to give Jesus a burial of a king.

Myrrh was a liquid and aloe was a powder. When they mixed them, it created an aromatic gummy-like substance. They soaked the cloth in the spices and wrapped the body of Jesus. Because they didn't embalm, this was done to mask the terrible smell of a decaying body.

According to Jewish customs, the body would be left in a tomb for a year, and then the bones would be removed and separated. They would then be placed in a bone box called an ossuary. Families would stack their ossuaries together. Today in Jerusalem, thousands of Jewish ossuaries cover the flank of the Mount of Olives facing the Temple Mount.

After they wrapped the body of Jesus in the aromatic strips of cloth, these two men became the pallbearers of the Prince of Peace. What a funeral service! No hymns, no eulogies, no sermon. But in three days they would learn that a funeral service would have been premature.

3. The meaning of His burial

There are at least three spiritual truths that we can uncover that deal with his burial.

(1) We can know our sins are removed.

When Jesus was on the cross, the Bible says He bore our sins in his body. When Jesus was buried, our sins were buried with Him, and when He came out from the tomb, He was sinless again, so He left our sins there.

The Bible teaches that our forgiven sins have been buried. Micah 7:14 says, "He will again have compassion on us; he will vanquish our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea." Someone said that God buried our sins in the depth of the sea and put a "No fishing" sign there.

One of my wife's favorite hymns is the song "One Day." In the early 1900s there was a Presbyterian evangelist named J. Wilbur Chapman who was saved under the preaching of Dwight L. Moody. It was in one of Chapman's crusades that baseball player Billy Sunday was saved and became an evangelist. In addition to being an evangelist, Chapman was a musician and writer. His song, One Day, has five verses that tell the entire Gospel Story. And the chorus sums up the work of Christ. It's one of my favorite songs, so if you know it, sing it with me: 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! Did you catch the third line? Buried He carried my sins far away! Praise God Jesus carried our sins into the grave and left them there!

(2) We can identify with Him in baptism.

When the Apostle Paul was looking for a metaphor to describe the Christian life, he chose baptism, which is like a burial. The Bible says in Romans 6:4-5: "Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be in the likeness of his resurrection."

When I baptize someone, as I dip them in the water I say, "Buried with Him in baptism." Baptism is a picture of a burial. When you go underneath the water, the old person you were before Jesus is dead and buried. By the way, that's why the word baptism means "immersion." Sprinkling doesn't fulfill the picture. When someone dies, you don't take them and sprinkle dirt on them—you put them six feet under.

One of the greatest stories in the Bible is found in the book of Ruth. If you haven't read it, that means you're ruthless. My next book to be published in a few weeks is entitled, *Starting Over in a COVID World: Lessons from the story of Ruth*. When Naomi and Ruth returned to Bethlehem they were two widows starting over with nothing. In the first chapter, Naomi begs her daughter-in-law to stay in her home country. But Ruth said, "Where you go, I will go. Where you live, I will live. Your people will be my people and your God will be my God. Where you die,

I will die and where you are buried, I will be buried." (Ruth 1:16) Ruth was identifying her life with Naomi's. That's what total commitment is. Have you said that to the Lord? Lord, because you were buried in baptism in the Jordan River, I will be buried in baptism to identify with you. This is a great time to ask you, "Have you been scripturally baptized?" I'm not talking about being sprinkled as a baby. Have you, since you placed your faith in Christ, followed Christ in Believers baptism by being immersed as your profession of faith? Jesus' burial is a picture of our baptism.

(3) We can enjoy a resurrected life now!

When I baptize someone I say, "Buried with Him in baptism, you are raised to walk in newness of life." We don't have to wait until we die to experience the resurrected life. We begin to experience eternal life when we meet Jesus.

Paul wrote in Colossians 3:1 "So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

Notice the past tense. The Bible doesn't say, "You will be raised with Christ." It literally says, "Since you have been raised with Christ set your mind on things above, not earthly things."

You've heard the expression, "Get your mind out of the gutter." A better expression would be "Put your mind in Heaven." Our position determines our perspective. Don't look at your circumstances from an earthly perspective. Look at them from the perspective of Christ who is seated at the right hand of God. Once you do that you'll never be under the circumstances again.

Our passage says, "There was a tomb in a garden." Think about it. Death started in another garden, the Garden of Eden. And death ended in another Garden—in the tomb where Jesus was buried.

CONCLUSION

As I prepared this message I wondered what an imaginary conversation between Jesus and Death might have been like: Death met Jesus in the cold dark tomb on the evening of the Crucifixion. Death laughed at Jesus and asked Him, "Well, well, if it's not the mighty Son of God. Looks like you DIED!"

Now that you are under my control, I want to ask you: 'Just WHO do you think you are telling everyone you are God? No one is listening now, mighty man! You're dead! You're mine now. We have plenty of time. So tell me great and powerful dead man, who do you think you are you NOW?'

Jesus sat up and removed the cloth covering His face. Death staggered back when he saw this. Then Jesus smiled and said, "Who do I think I am? Death, I'll tell you WHO I am: I'm the

eternity before history. I'm the voice that spoke light into existence. I flung the stars into space and spun the galaxies. I'm the One who moves mountains."

"Death, you really want to know who I am? I am the keeper of the books. I am the redeemer of wasted years. I am the home for every prodigal son. I am the foot that crushes your head. I am the spear in your side. I have the first word and the last word because I AM the Word."

"And Death, I have a word for you today—you aren't attending MY funeral, today you are attending YOUR FUNERAL! The nails that were in my hands are the nails in your coffin! I am not a victim. I am the Victor!"

"And Death, you are done because on Sunday morning I will be gone and you'll still be here but you will be powerless. You'll be the laughing stock of every redeemed life."

"Listen carefully Death, from this moment on you are now and forevermore finished!!"

Death recoiled in horror and was speechless for once.

Jesus said, "By the way, the name is Jesus! It's the name above every other name, and one day you and everyone else will bow your knee and confess with your mouth that I am Lord to the glory of God the Father."

And that's the day that DEATH was buried.

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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