

Jesus Was Buried in a Tomb

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children realize that there were many who followed Jesus, even though the religious leaders rejected Him. In our topic today, we will learn that there were also some of the rich and some of the religious leaders who loved and followed Jesus.

Matthew 27:57-61 says, “Now when evening had come, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be given to him. When Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb, and departed. And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the tomb.” Joseph of Arimathea is mentioned in each of the four Gospels and each one teaches us something about Joseph. Here, we see that he was a rich man who had also become a disciple of Jesus.

Mark 15:43 says, “Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.” Here, we see that Joseph was a prominent council member (the Sanhedrin) and had become a disciple of Jesus. Luke 23:50-51 says, “Now behold, *there was* a man named Joseph, a council member, a good and just man. He had not consented to their decision and deed. *He was* from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who himself was also waiting for the kingdom of God.” Luke mentions several things about the character of Joseph. He was a good and just man. He had not consented to the decision and deed of the Sanhedrin. He was waiting for the kingdom of God.

John 19:38-40 says, “After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave *him* permission. So he came and took the body of Jesus. And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury.” These verses tell us that Joseph had been a secret disciple because of fear. However, at this point, we see that he became a bold follower of Jesus. We also see that there was a second member of the Sanhedrin who publicly revealed that he was also a disciple of Jesus. Nicodemus had secretly talked alone with Jesus, in John 3, early in the public ministry of Jesus. Here, we see that he joined Joseph to prepare the body of Jesus for burial.

Luke also tells us one additional detail about the place where Jesus was buried. Luke 23:53 says, “Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a tomb *that was* hewn out of the rock, where no one had ever lain before.” We see that this was a special burial place that had been hewn out of the rock. This meant that someone had worked for many weeks or even months to create this tomb in the rock. We saw that Joseph was a rich man. He had probably paid someone to chip away the rock until there was a tomb large enough for him and his family to be buried when they died. This tomb had not yet been used because none of his family had died. However, this tomb

also fulfilled another Old Testament prophecy. Isaiah 53:9 says, “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.” Jesus died between two criminals, but He was buried in the tomb of a rich man, fulfilling every detail of this prophecy.

The religious leaders had heard Jesus say that He was going to rise from the dead. As a result, Matthew 27:62-64 says, “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.’ Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him *away*, and say to the people, ‘He has risen from the dead.’ So the last deception will be worse than the first.” Jesus had told the disciples several times that He was going to rise from the dead on the third day. The disciples did not really understand what Jesus meant until after the resurrection. However, here we see that the religious leaders had also heard what Jesus said and they were fearful that Jesus would rise from the dead.

That is why the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together the next day to talk to Pilate. They told Pilate that they remembered what Jesus had said while He was still alive. They called Jesus a deceiver, but their fear was very strong. They were afraid that what Jesus had said would happen, because everything else Jesus had said during the previous three years had happened exactly as He had said. As a result, they really wanted these guards to make sure that the tomb would not be opened. The chief priests and Pharisees told Pilate that they were afraid the disciples might come by night and steal the body from the tomb. The chief priests said that the disciples would then tell the people that Jesus had risen from the dead. Again, we see that the religious leaders were controlled by fear.

The religious leaders said that if such a deception occurred, the last deception would be worse than the first. The word translated “the first” means *the first in time or place or the first in rank*. They said that everything Jesus had done, including raising people from the dead, was a deception. Here, they said that if the disciples could steal the body and claim that Jesus had risen from the dead, that one thing would be a greater deception than all of the things Jesus had previously done. They were right about the impact of the resurrection. 1 Corinthians 15:19-20 says, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” That is why the Father provided more than five hundred people with the opportunity to see Christ after His resurrection.

The religious leaders called Jesus a deceiver, but we see that they were the ones who became the real deceivers when Jesus rose from the dead. Matthew 28:11-15 says, “Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, ‘Tell them, “His disciples came at night and stole Him *away* while we slept.” And if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will appease him and make you secure.’ So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.” Here, we see that the religious leaders were willing to pay the soldiers a large amount of money to deny that the resurrection had happened. They also promised to protect the soldiers so Pilate would not kill them.

Here, we see that the religious leaders requested that Pilate send soldiers to guard the tomb until after the third day. We see the response of Pilate to their request. Matthew 27:65-66 says, “Pilate said to them, ‘You have a guard; go your way, make *it* as secure as you know how.’ So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard.” A Roman guard was made up of four to sixteen soldiers. Each group of four soldiers would stand with their backs to each other and by doing this were able to hold off a much larger army while they also protected one another. As a result, sixteen soldiers could stand off a very large army.

However, Pilate said something very unusual to the religious leaders when he said, “Go your way, make *it* as secure as you know how.” Pilate had heard enough about what Jesus had done during the previous three years, as well as hearing Jesus say to Pilate directly that His kingdom was not of this world, to know that Jesus was no ordinary man. John 19:7-8 says, “The Jews answered him, ‘We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God.’ Therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid.” Pilate was probably not at all sure that the religious leaders could make the tomb secure. In spite of that fact, he gave them the soldiers they had requested.

We see what the religious leaders did to make the tomb secure. They set a seal on the rock. The word translated “seal” means *to set a seal or a mark on an object* so that it cannot be changed or moved. Then, they set the guard in place so they could watch to make certain that no one broke that seal and tried to move the rock. The only problem for them was the fact that God was the One in control. Matthew 28:1-4 says, “Now after the Sabbath, as the first *day* of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead *men*.” The angel did not roll back the stone to let Jesus out of the tomb but rolled the stone back so everyone could see that Jesus was not in the tomb but had risen from the dead.

The religious leaders feared the resurrection. Pilate was filled with fear because he realized that Jesus was no ordinary man. The disciples had no thought of stealing the body because they were afraid of the Jewish religious leaders. Everything was ready for the greatest event in the history of the world, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain to others why the resurrection is so important to the history of the world. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain the importance of the resurrection.