

# Jesus's burial and tomb (Matthew 27:57-66)

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- [ 0 : 00 ] And yeah, so would you turn with me to Matthew chapter 27, and we'll be reading from verses 57 to 66.
- ! And Pilate ordered that it be given to him.
- Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away.
- Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there, opposite the tomb. The next day, the one after preparation day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate.
- Sir, they said, we remember that while he was still alive, that deceiver said, after three days, I will rise again. So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day.
- [ 1 : 13 ] Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.
- Take a guard, Pilate answered. Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how. So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.
- And now we welcome Albert to come and share from the Word of God. I went to a beautiful wedding a few weeks ago with some friends I'd met in Alex Springs, which is right in the centre of Australia.
- Yeah, and their wedding was in a country town near Melbourne. It was a gorgeous church with high ceilings and stained glass filled with resonating hymns, just like we heard just with us.
- And, you know, everyone was holding back tears and there were poignant vows. What struck me the most about this wedding is the stories that came out in the reception.
- [ 2 : 34 ] The families had known each other for a really long time and it was a beautiful fulfilment of wishes on this, you know, backdrop of this beautiful property that had been in one of the families for seven generations.
- There was a real theme that God had planned for this couple to come together for a long time. With little circumstances, it made sense when strung together and all the witnesses, including me, wanting the night and dancing and laughter to just last forever.
- I wonder if some of you in this church have been to a wedding that have had that similar feel. It can also be sad to think that on this earth things don't last forever.
- With the vowed death to do us part, acknowledging that things do come to an end. Through a season as a counsellor, I came alongside people who were processing sadness.
- Some who had nursed their loved ones and been in their final moments there with them. And after it felt like the world was out of control in their disappointment and loss of hope.
- [ 3 : 38 ] That pain and sense of loss was tangible and sometimes it stuck with me. At the same time, I would need to balance that with the knowledge that God is in control and is the hope and saviour of the world.

There were times when it was so hard to trust and hold on to that hope because of what was in front of my eyes and what I was feeling and witnessing others feel.

But yeah, coming back to that hope and saviour of the world, Jesus, was so key. Today we'll be going through the passage of Matthew 27, 57 to 66 on Jesus' burials.

We just heard read and just after his death on the cross and before his glorious resurrection that the gospel rests on. And, you know, likely that you'll look on next week in that combined service.

There are many themes and ideas that could come out of this passage as God's word is wonderful like that. However, we'll be focusing on God being in control. And even when it seems like nothing is working out for certain characters in the story, we know the hopeful ending to cling to will come in Matthew 28.

[ 4 : 53 ] So just rereading verse 57. When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph who was a disciple of Jesus.

So why does it start here in the evening? It's likely shortly after Jesus died in the afternoon and just before sunset, just before the eerie events surrounding Jesus' death.

It was a day of darkness and he gave up his spirit. The earth shook, some supernatural events. Yeah, it was a Friday evening before Sabbath that started at sunset shortly after Jesus' death.

And even in this, God orchestrated his timing so that it would be three days in the sense of part of Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Just like Jesus said back in Matthew 12 verse 40, if you want to go back later and read that, referencing Jonah's three days in the belly of the great fish as a metaphor for his resurrection.

So in verse 57, Matthew emphasizes rich man. Why does he do that? In the passage for fulfillment of prophecy in Isaiah 53.9 could be one reason.

[ 6 : 06 ] And the suffering servant is in Isaiah 52 and 53. And it reads in verse 9 of Isaiah 53.

And so, yeah, that could, you know, is thought to be referring to Jesus.

Although we hear of some deceit from the other religious leaders in the later verses. So Joseph from Arimathea, it mentions he's from this place and a disciple of Jesus.

And in the other Gospels, we find out that he was a member of the council, likely the Sanhedrin and a secret disciple. So he likely didn't agree with the decision made to put Jesus to death.

But maybe at the time didn't have the courage to object. Although he was a disciple and believed that Jesus was the Messiah. He was from Arimathea, likely 30 kilometers away.

[ 7 : 14 ] But why didn't he have a tomb in his own town? He had a tomb here in Arimathea. Yeah, we don't exactly know a lot of these answers. But he spent a lot of money to have this tomb in Jerusalem.

And maybe he thought he saw the Messiah differently. And he thought the Messiah would reign as a king and overthrow the Romans in Jerusalem and not in his hometown.

But we're not really sure why. Or did we catch up with Jesus? Did he catch up with Jesus to become a disciple? How did that happen? We're not really sure.

But in other places in scripture, he's described as being a rich man, a good man, and a just man. So I wonder how he decided to come at this time.

I wonder what prompted his heart to move. And what prompts your heart to move? Because this was a time where all the other disciples had scattered.

[ 8 : 16 ] So they were likely scattered and hiding and feeling scared and defeated. However, this Joseph of Arimathea took the steps to come and God used him in this moment where everyone else had scattered.

So in verse 58, it says, It went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. This took courage and it was a risky use of his influence.

It was a public association with Jesus. The man contend to death on a cross by so many of his peers. I wonder how many times before this did he almost go public with his beliefs but didn't when he held back.

Were there moments in his past with his colleagues where he tried to convince them subtly? In this moment, in God's timing, he was able to go public with his beliefs.

What was he feeling? Was there sadness there as well? Did he feel like he was too late? Did he fully trust Jesus was coming back? Or was he just trying to do all he could with what God gave him for somebody he respected?

[ 9 : 23 ] What would you be feeling as you thought about all your influence and going to an authority to use it for God? Also in verse 58, Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him.

And this is Jesus' body. So Pilate seems to be allowing both sides to do what they want. Pleasing all sides. The friends of Jesus and later we hear the enemies of Jesus.

The hopes of one side and the fears of the other side. So what was Pilate thinking? Was he fence-sitting? Did he hear the testimony of the centurion who said, Surely this was the Son of God?

Yeah. Did he... Was he starting to believe? We don't really know all these things in the background. But we do know the next step was in verse 59, Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean cloth.

So the story of what happens in these verses so far is almost like a news report or a Twitter snippet. It is a bit bare.

[ 10 : 27 ] But can we stop and imagine we were there? Can we go back and picture this in our mind's eye? However, this journey to thinking about Jesus coming off the cross and getting prepared to burial could be a bit graphic and confronting.

But let's see if we can go there together. All four Gospels don't mention servants. We know that Joseph and in another Gospel, Nicodemus was likely there as well.

And they were rich and prominent and likely had many servants. But we don't know. But it implies that Joseph and Nicodemus were likely there and did the work themselves without the usual help and not much time for these burial preparations.

So let's imagine Joseph from Arimathea, this wealthy, influential person, comes to Jesus on the cross in the evening of his death. And has to physically pry him off the cross, likely using a tool to take the metal spikes out of Jesus' body and the wood.

Picture that struggle. Then the spikes come out and that heavy, bloody body slumps over the shoulder of Joseph and the thump of that weight.

[ 11 : 45 ] Can you picture the sticky blood, the smell, the sight of that and the many cuts on Jesus' body sticking to Joseph's clothes?

The clean linen wasn't directly put on, but burial customs were followed. It would have required cleaning of the body of Jesus as the light from the day was fading, looking at Jesus' body and seeing no life in it.

If you were there, would you start cleaning the dried and semi-dried blood and thorns from his head? Or would you start at his feet and then go to his back? Would you be looking into his eyes?

The cross likely wasn't sanded, but it was very rough and spiky wood. And Jewish burial customs at the time required taking all foreign material out and washing the body of all the dirt and grime.

This would mean feeling through the matted hair that was filled with blood and sweat and dirt and spit. Pouring water over it and washing it gently.

[ 12 : 55 ] Looking at the face of Jesus that had dried bits harder to clean, maybe around his eyes and his nose and his cheeks. And gently washing that to real bruises. Joseph and Nicodemus, they were experts in the scriptures.

Would they be thinking of the scripture of the suffering servant? There's a verse in Isaiah 52, 14 that says, Just as there were many who were appalled at him, his appearance so disfigured beyond that of any human being, and his form marred beyond human likeness.

Would they be thinking that? Would that verse come to their mind? Would they be thinking that would clean the gaping wound in the side of Jesus and felt that before Thomas did, maybe? Would they wince while doing that and feeling physically exhausted and tired from the process and emotionally drained, wondering about Jesus?

I thought you were God. How can you be dead? Where are you? Jesus, is this it? Have you ever asked that in the midst of situations that did not pan out how you had hoped?

Jesus is this it? I have. At a time when I asked this was after a season of family trauma and couples counseling in the central desert of Australia. I went there so excited and it was such a privilege but also left me so emotionally drained hearing the pain of others that it began to cloud my hope in Jesus because of all the tears and messy lives that I was surrounded by every day and it was hard to feel God was even was in control when my capacity was low and it was easy to ask Jesus is this it? I wonder if you've ever been in a situation like that where you've been at the end of your rope and asked that like Joseph might have in that moment with Jesus's body.

[ 14 : 52 ] After cleaning the body it was wrapped in a spice perfumed lotion and in heavy clean linen and then the body was carried to a tomb nearby. The women that washed Jesus's feet with her tears and hair and perfume did something remarkable and is also in all four gospels and just like what Joseph did on that Friday evening with love motivating this act. How humbling it was for Jesus to endure this.

Some of you may have aging parents or grandparents or people in your life who have disabilities or who are old and can't take care of themselves. They need people to care for them to wash and and care for them.

They can't do that anymore and the humbling process of that. Here we have the God who created everything allowing his body to be washed just so he can sympathize with us and our reality in this world.

Many years ago my uni days straight after high school I worked as a disability care worker. I had a client in their 90s who I had to wash and bathe as they were so frail. However it surprised me when they would tell me stories of how they played national level football in their younger days and seeing those photos and it must have been so humbling for them to be boshed by some uni kid. And a bit more recently I moved back home during the start of COVID to look after my mother as she endured countless cancer treatments. And it was yeah it was it was very sad but also thinking about how humbling it was for her as a woman who never seemed to complain or take a sick day and worked so hard her whole life in the same job for 40 years. And it was hard to witness her loss of dignity through that process.

How much more humbling it was for Jesus to know his body would endure this. Jesus knew the totality of what he had to embrace. He knew it was the plan of God the Father for him. Jesus embraced the suffering and the humility and loss of dignity of death and burial for our sakes. The Son of God had his body prepared and wrapped for burial. And Joseph likely an expert in the law and scriptures and I wonder if that that verse came to mind for them. That Isaiah 53 9 that the Messiah would be with the rich at his death as these rich men prepared the body. Did they know they were fulfilling this scripture?

[ 17 : 37 ] Did Joseph reflect on his own death and what that meant as he lay Jesus in his valuable tomb and walked away? In verse 60 of Matthew 27 it says, And placed it in his own new tomb they had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance and went away. It seems like Joseph really respected and loved Jesus to do all this.

Imagine the finality of rolling that stone, that sense of loss and sadness and walking away from that. And he's not mentioned before and he's not mentioned in the Gospels after this.

It feels like the author of Matthew is trying to invite us to identify with him as well as the waiting witnesses in the next verse. Because we know what it's like to lose someone we love, but they don't know what we know and they don't know what comes next in Matthew 28, that hope for resurrection.

Yeah, so we know Joseph is not mentioned before or after, but came in just for this time. And we don't know what happened to him after, but I wonder what his family said about not participating in Passover and Jewish customs that weekend due to being unclean.

Was he prompted by God to fulfill this? And we go back to that verse in Isaiah 53. He was assigned a grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence nor any deceit in his mouth.

[ 19 : 15 ] So Jesus would have been assigned a Roman mass grave, the usual place for most bodies after a crucifixion, a pile of bodies. Yet God orchestrated it and got Joseph there so that Jesus' body was with the rich in his death.

Wow. God is in control of the whole situation, whether Joseph realized it or not. In verse 61, it says, Mary Magdalene and the other Marys were sitting there opposite the tomb.

They were friendly witnesses to this burial. They'd been traveling with Jesus. They saw his battered body on the cross and now in the tomb, seeing it sealed away.

What were they feeling? Are they remembering Jesus' words and praying? What emotions would be coming up for them? They were there out of love for Jesus.

They were following him, caring for him, even financially supporting him, as it mentions in Luke 8, verse 3. Their experience is poetically described by Campbell Morgan and relating to the powerful mental state they might have been in.

[ 20 : 25 ] It says, These women were hopeless, disappointed, bereaved, heartbroken, but the love Jesus had created in those hearts for himself could not be quenched even by his dying, could not be overcome even though they were disappointed, could not be extinguished even though the light of hope had gone out.

And over the sea of their sorrow there was no sighing wind that told of dawn. It seems like these reactions to Jesus' death were out of love. Even though we don't know if they were hopeful and remember Jesus' words of resurrection, it would have been as it would have been hard to remember at this point.

The next verses are verse 62 to 66. I'll read them out. The next day, the one after preparation day, the chief priests and Pharisees went to Pilate.

Sir, they said, we will remember that while he was still alive, that deceiver said, after three days I will rise again. So give an order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day.

Otherwise his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he's been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first. So take a guard, Pilate answers.

[ 21 : 46 ] Go make the tomb secure as you know how. So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard. So these unfriendly witnesses are a big contrast to the love and respect of Joseph and the Mary's we just heard.

So these chief priests and Pharisees, they want to crush and get rid of all the memories of Jesus and stop the movement. They were thought to be actually two groups that were bitter enemies normally with varying beliefs.

But they were coming together to do this. What do you think is motivating them? In contrast to the love of the witnesses previously, it seems like these guys are afraid and seem to use their influence from that space.

They must have heard about Jesus being put in a tomb. And this reaction to Jesus' death is different from the early reaction in the text. The disciples may not have even remembered Jesus' words of rising on the third day, but these enemies of Jesus remembered it clearly and went out of their way, driven by fear and anger.

And even after they got Jesus killed, to make sure that their positions were not changed. And they were willing to even submit and suck up to the use of authority of Pilate by saying, Sir, sir, sir, sir, what was it like for the contracted soldiers and for Pilate?

[ 23 : 15 ] Sounds like just another day at work for them. It's not really a personal loss. There is a danger and they were trying to suppress it. But a different attitude to the loving witnesses before.

Were they thinking, why do I have to guard a dead man's grave? What's the point? Or had they seen the eerie events of the day and heard the rumors from the centurion saying, this must be the son of God?

And feeling a bit spooked by that or moved. It seemed like Pilate wanted to make both sides happy to reduce the chance of any conflict so that he would have an easier week at work, possibly hoping all this would go away.

A seal on the tomb is mentioned. A seal on the tomb with maximum human authority, guarded by soldiers so that there's no way the disciples could come and steal the body, even though they were likely hiding in a room somewhere.

God uses this scenario when everything seems impossible to make the resurrection more amazing and unrefutable. Here, Jesus is really dead and buried.

[ 24 : 21 ] However, we know God's plan breaks through with this plan of resurrection as nothing can stop God's plan. Jesus being really dead allows us to know and have faith when Jesus is really alive.

As without this burial witnessed by so many, there is no resurrection. People would be able to say, oh, Jesus is just in a coma if he immediately resurrected from this cross without the unguarded tomb.

And we get a feel for that in 1 Corinthians 15 verses 3 to 4. I'll read from verse 1 though.

And it says, Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you firmly received and on which you have taken your stand.

By this gospel you are saved, if you firmly hold on to the word I preached to you. Otherwise you have believed in vain. For what I received, I passed on to you as of first importance.

[ 25 : 24 ] This is from verse 3. 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. And that he appeared to Cephas and then to the twelve.

And then he appeared to more than 500 of the brothers and sisters at the same time. Most of who are still living, though some are fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James and to all the apostles.

And last of all, he appeared to me also. Paul here says, Christ died for our sins and the proof of this was that he was buried. This burial is a reality of his death to many witnesses.

And that he was raised for our sins is the proof that for this was all the witnesses as well. Hence all these elements are crucial to the gospel. The burial and the empty tomb allows the good news and the gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection to shine more.

What is your reaction to Jesus' death and burial? Here we see one of respect and love from Joseph, who uses his influence. One of grief and sadness from the Marys who travelled with Jesus and were there at every step of his death and waited outside the tomb.

[ 26 : 38 ] One of pleasing both sides from Pilate. And one of likely indifference in another day on the job by the guarding soldiers. As well as one of hatred and fear by the religious leaders and Pharisees.

However, these people didn't know what was coming next. The future hope of this. What is your response to Jesus' death? Would you trust that God is in control in this situation when it doesn't seem possible?

But we do know how the story ends. Does the hope of this resurrection change your response that you know how the story ends? Does it help you trust that God is in control despite what is going on?

Despite disappointments, grief or even great human authority and opposition? Because we know that chapter 28 is coming and Jesus' resurrection in that next verse.

Joseph and the women, they haven't thrown it all away. Even if in that moment, if we were with them, it would feel like all is lost. We know soon that they will have the affirmation of that trust in what is going on with Jesus' glorious resurrection.

[ 27 : 50 ] Can we do that in our own lives with trusting God, even when it seems like nothing is going to plan? We know Joseph and the women are waiting outside.

We know that all their hope will be vindicated. And the soldiers and the religious leaders and Pilate, whatever is going on with them, they are ultimately on the wrong side when Jesus is resurrected.

So how can we keep trusting and keep going when everything seems lost? We can do this by holding on and trusting God has a plan and purpose, even if we don't see it.

Just like Joseph and the Marys. These examples allow us to keep holding on, convince God will come through, and at the end, alongside the hope of Jesus' resurrection.

We can be encouraged and comforted by the love God has created in our hearts by believing in his death, burial, and resurrection. That whatever is going on, if we hold on to God, if we hold on to the hope of Jesus, and don't wander away, if we hold on to Jesus, it will be worthwhile.

[ 28 : 59 ] How might we know or see that we are truly trusting in God's control? What might that look like practically?

This could mean remembering to put time aside to think back or journal or reflect on how God has come through for us in our lives, especially at work or as a parent or at school, and the peace that came with that, maybe taking some time over Easter to do that, especially at a busy time when we're surrounded by family and friends, taking a few minutes to put aside just to reflect on that.

Can we stand in awe at how God's plan worked out? Every little detail, the timing of Joseph, the prophecies of Isaiah in the burial of Jesus. And when we stand in awe of this, we can realize the same God is watching over your life, filtering your temptations, filtering your struggles and your suffering.

He's orchestrating the building of character. He's orchestrating every little detail in your life. God is working a glory in you that far outweighs any trial that you're ever going through.

So through the story of Jesus' burial, we can trust God's amazing plan, everything orchestrated down to the detail, including our lives with him. So we're just going to pray to end.

[ 30 : 29 ] Dear Lord, thank you for all that you do. And as we reflect on your word, and as we come into Easter on this Palm Sunday, please move our hearts closer to you and help us know your love for us.

Amen.