

Episode #947 Matthew 27 Part 9-God in a Tomb

I. The purpose of the gospel of Matthew is to present Jesus as the Christ, the King of Israel. It is another grand treatise like John to prove to Israel Who Jesus really is. It is the book of being “in Israel,” in contrast to believers today who are “in Christ.”

II. God had died on the cross, and great signs accompanied that momentous death. Now, we read of His burial and the events that accompanied it. Starting off, we read of the intervention of the man Joseph of Arimathea.

III. The Burial of the Lord. Matthew 27:55-61.

- A. Verse 57. Being a disciple is a radical step. This man Joseph was a good man, a just man, and we are told in Luke 23:51 that he waited for the kingdom of God. Yet he was also a member of the Sanhedrin, Mark 15:43, and a ruler of the Jews. How could the Sanhedrin allow this, when they were so opposed to the Lord? John 19:38 reveals the truth: he had kept his discipleship secret for fear of the Jews, his fellow rulers. How the Lord could accept a man as prominent as this as His disciple and yet that not become public knowledge, we are left to wonder. Most likely to me seems that he had only recently taken this step, for it seems doubtful he could have left real discipleship secret for long.
- B. Verse 58. “Went” is the word *proserchomai*, meaning he approached Pilate as a king or ruler. He made strong request. Here we have an interesting circumstance: a rich ruler of the Jews, most of whom had called for the Lord’s death, comes to Pilate requesting the Lord’s body to honor Him in burial! Pilate is to learn that not all the influential people of Israel are any too pleased at his weak and unjust response to the corrupt rulers.
- C. Verse 59. He rolled His body up in a clean linen cloth, after the manner of Hebrews to bury their dead. This was close to mummification. Our understanding of the way the wealthy did this is that spices were applied between every roll of the cloth. When drying, this would form a solid shell around the body. A living man would be trapped inside this shell, if he was thus wrapped. When the Lord rose, He passed right through this solid wrapping and left it sitting empty. “Clean” means pure, being ceremonially clean. This would be costly, the array of a rich corpse. The Lord was dishonored in death but highly honored in burial.
- D. Verse 60. This new tomb was made to be his family burial tomb. “New” does not mean newly hewn, but fresh, and yet unused. He puts the Lord there as one of his own family. This tomb was not a grave dug in the earth. He had hewn this out of the rock. This is the Greek word *petra*. On the rock of His substance, the Lord built His *ekklesia*. Here, He is buried in the rock. Nearby, a boulder would be hewn out to fit over the door, with a bit of rock left intact to hold it in place. A track was then hewn leading from the rock to the door. When the tomb was used, the last bit of rock holding the boulder in place would be cut away, and the rock would roll down to cover the door. After that, a large number of men with the right equipment would be needed to get into the tomb for subsequent burials. For a wealthy man’s tomb, this discouraged casual graverobbers.
- E. Verse 61. These women at least followed Joseph and the burial party to watch this portion of the tragedy, having already watched the crucifixion and death. “The other Mary” is, in other words, Mary the mother of Jacob (James) and Joseph, as we had

her mentioned back in verse 56. This is not the Lord's mother, for her name was not Mary, but Miriam, Mariam in Greek. "Tomb" is a burial place, a different word than in verse 60.

IV. The Pharisees Demand a Guard. Matthew 27:62-66.

- A. Verse 62. The day following the Day of Preparation was the day the Passover was normally eaten (the Lord ate His a day early) and the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. From the first to the last day of the feast, there was to be no leaven found in their homes. The first day was a High Sabbath, on which no work was to be done, no matter which day of the week it might be. In this case, I believe it was a Thursday. This is the first time the Pharisees are mentioned in connection with this injustice. Yet we would contend that the "elders" mentioned earlier as a critical part of the conspiracy to murder Him were mostly Pharisees. They gathered as a delegation, Greek *sunago* for a gathering together. This is the only gospel in which we read of this delegation and its actions. Since Matthew is meant for the Jews, this is included to dispel a false story that was spread among the Jews by this confederation, as we will read in chapter 28.
- B. Verse 63. Bullinger makes it "are reminded," probably by some who heard Him. Notice that they are able to remember accurately His words and understand them. When His words were twisted at His trial, they well knew that these were lies. They call Him a deceiver or imposter. They still have to vent their spleen. We do not have a record of Him saying these exact words to the rulers, though He told His disciples this surely enough. The reference may well be to the sign He gave them in Matthew 12:39-40. They understood what the sign meant, and they show it here.
- C. Verse 64. "Command" is the word used when Pilate commanded the body to be given to Joseph. Pilate is seeing that he took a side in a conflict with men he cannot trust. "Tomb" = or burying place is the same word as in verse 61, but not verse 60. Notice He said "after three days" versus their "until the third day." After three days would be the fourth day at least. One is a figure and one is literal. I believe "until the third day" was the figure. "From the dead" means out of the dead ones, a phrase they learned from the Lord earlier in His ministry. "Last" is *eschatos* error, meaning the resultant error is worse than the initial error, which would be overshadowed if the disciples did this. They no doubt mean the error of the people in supposing Him to be the Christ, which they thought was an error or deception He had practiced upon them. Notice that, in spite of all His miracles, they still do not believe another miracle can happen now, but only fear a deception. These men lacked faith completely. Instead, they trusted in their own cleverness and success in defeating God.
- D. Verse 65. "I grant you a guard," a group of Roman soldiers with which to guard the tomb against any such grave robbing. Bullinger says *koustOdia* is a transliteration of the Latin *custodia*, made up of four soldiers.
- E. Verse 66. "Tomb" is again the burying place, the same words as in verse 61. The seal would have been placing the Emperor's seal or the seal of Rome upon it. If anyone broke the seal without authorization, that was grounds for war with the forces of Rome. They would have watched the sealing, and been in charge of seeing to it that the seal was not disturbed. It is good that it was this way. The stage is all set so that there can be no deception. There could be nothing at all that could contravene the witness of the Bible to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

V. Conclusion: The Lord Jesus Christ was buried in the tomb. When they had completed this, Adam's race had done their worst, and there was nothing else they could do. They had betrayed and murdered their own Creator, and sin had reached its nadir. Now, God would act to turn around the tragedy started in Genesis 3 with the fall. Now, He will turn man's foul victory into His gain, and will bring about His Own victory in spite of all the enemy can do. From now on, He will advance, reversing all that men have done until He brings us back to where He always intended us to be.