

John 19:31-42
(Psalm 22:1-5, 23&24; Romans 6:1-4)
“He Was Crucified, Died and Was Buried”

Introduction

There is a finality about the grave. One who has stood at the grave of a loved one harbors no illusions, cherishes no false hopes. This one who was once so alive and full of laughter is now silent and still. The life once lived in the flesh is past.

And so, each gospel writer tells us of Jesus' burial. “Make no mistake,” they seem to say, “Jesus really died. We know that he died because he was buried.” The Apostles' Creed preserves the point: “He was crucified, died and was buried.”

There are instructive lessons for us this Good Friday evening in both the fact and the circumstances of Jesus' burial, as well as in its significance, a significance developed and taught a few years later by the apostle Paul in his letter to the church in Rome. This evening, I would encourage you to notice these three things: both the fact and the circumstances of Jesus' burial, as well as its significance.

Body

1. Notice, first, the fact of his burial.

A few years ago, visiting the grave of a friend, I turned to the man with me and observed inately, “It's so peaceful and quiet here.” “Of course it is,” he replied, “Except for you and me, every one here is dead.” There is an awful loneliness about a graveyard. All these once vibrant bodies that would have enjoyed one another's company, now lie silently awaiting the resurrection. Each has laid down his work. What was unfinished will forever remain undone. The word left unspoken will never reach the listening ear.

As children, was there any more horrible prospect, any more claustrophobic nightmare, than that of being buried alive? As children, we used to prove our bravado to our friends by walking alone through a graveyard at night. This place of nightmares is where Jesus went to save us. And here we see again the importance of our bodies in salvation. It was a body Jesus took to redeem us, a body he offered as a sacrifice for sin, a body that suffered the agony of scourging, crucifixion and death. It was his body that was buried and that broke down from the inside out the power of death to hold us captive forever.

And so, we who are in Christ have no more reason to live in fear of the grave. Before Jesus entered the grave, King David could write, “Where shall I go from your *Spirit*? ... If I make my bed in the grave, you are there” (Psalm

139:7&8). But now, the believer can also say, “Where can I go from your *body*? If I make my bed in the grave, you are there.”

2. Notice, also, the circumstances of his burial.

The circumstances of Jesus’ burial are intriguing, and raise questions of how difficult it is to identify good guys and bad guys in the gospels, as well as in life. The good guys, Jesus’ family and his disciples, should have claimed his body, as did the disciples of John the Baptist after King Herod beheaded him. If left unclaimed, the Romans would leave a body to the vultures and the dogs. And if a body were left hanging over night, the entire land would be ceremonially defiled according to the law of Israel (see Deuteronomy 21:22&23). Yet those who should have claimed his body have run away. The other gospels tell us that only two of his women disciples were present when his body was claimed and buried. Where are to good guys when it matters?

The Sanhedrin, the ruling council that has delivered him over to Pilate for death, is surely filled with nothing but bad guys. Yet it is two of the Sanhedrin’s members who have become disciples of Jesus who now go to Pilate to claim his body.

There is a lovely symmetry here, I think. At Jesus birth, his heavenly Father provided a man named Joseph to risk his reputation by marrying a young woman already pregnant, and by providing her child with a home and a father’s love. At Jesus’ death, his heavenly Father provides another Joseph to risk his reputation by claiming Jesus’ body and providing him with a grave.

The circumstances of Jesus burial should caution us about trying to judge too quickly and easily who are the good guys and the bad guys. We never really know until the end of the story.

3. Notice, finally, the significance of his burial.

In the reality of Jesus’ burial, the apostle Paul recognizes a profound lesson for those who have been baptized into Jesus. “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death” (Romans 6:3). He then describes two wonderful consequences of our death and burial in Christ:

First, we are now dead to sin’s *power*: We were crucified with him “so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin” (Romans 6:6&7). And again he writes, “For sin will no longer have dominion over you” (6:14). Once we are in Christ, we are dead to the power of the world, the flesh and the devil. The only way that we can

continue to be dominated by sinful habits and behaviors is by willfully yielding ourselves to a defeated enemy.

Secondly, we are now dead to sin's *penalty*: Paul writes, "you have also died to the law through the body of Christ" (7:4). Jesus has paid in full the penalty of our law breaking, and cried out from the cross, "It is finished!" The law has no power over the dead, and when I died and was buried in Christ, the law lost all power over me to condemn me to death. I am free from the law as an instrument of death, because Christ has kept the law perfectly in my place. Now, in Christ, the law can become again for me what it was meant to be: the picture gallery of what it looks like to love God and love others.

Conclusion

"Nothing is certain but death and taxes." Another tax season is upon us. There is no avoiding it. We may put off our death a while longer, but death will finally find us all. Jesus died and was buried to break death's power from the inside out, so that we who are in Christ need never again fear death and the grave. The life of faith begins with a death, the death of Christ, and it calls us – you and me – to die as well: to die daily to ourselves so that we may live unto Christ.

If we die in him, we shall live in him, if we are buried with him, we shall be raised with him. For us the power of death is broken forever, and we can celebrate with the apostle Paul what he expressed in these words: "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Colossians 3:3&4).

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