

Jesus is Lord, Even in Death

Last month the Ottawa Citizen Newspaper had a news report about a 18-month-old boy who survived a fall out of a 5th story window. He fell 50 feet and only ended up with a broken leg. In an interview with the parents they said they attributed his good fortune to the fact that he landed on his loaded diaper which cushioned his fall.

I don't know about you, but if my toddler fell out a window and hit the ground 50 feet below and survived I'd be praising Almighty God, not a loaded diaper.

Why is it that people can't see the hand of God in their lives? When tragedy happens they're quick to blame Him. They're quick to say "How could God let this happen to me?" But when the innumerable blessings of life take place God isn't even on their radar screen.

I want to challenge you with this thought this morning, God is intimately involved with every facet of your life. It may not seem like it. You may not realize it, but the Sovereign God is Lord of all.

*** Turn to Luke 23:50 pg 936**

Today we've come to a passage in Luke that's usually passed over pretty quickly. It isn't one of those familiar passages of Scripture.

You don't pick memory verses from this section. Nobody ever took their life verse out of this portion. It probably never was the subject of a sermon you heard in the past or a Sunday school lesson or a Bible study.

But II Timothy 3:16 says: *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness...*

That means even the passages that seem mundane are there for our spiritual benefit.

Remember: *Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ... He was buried, and ... He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures...*

Naturally we tend to focus most of our attention on the death of Christ and His resurrection 3 days later. Well, this morning we're going to see what we can learn from the burial of our Savior.

The burial of Jesus Christ is as supernatural and as miraculous in many ways as was His death and His resurrection.

I. God's Sovereignty Was Shown Through Joseph **Read vs 50-51**

Immediately after the crucifixion is the one and only time we read about Joseph of Arimathea. Mt 27:57 *Now when evening had come, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus.* Mr 15:43 *Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member.*

Follow this now, he was *prominent council member*. The council is the Sanhedrin. That means he was a member of the ruling body that convicted Jesus Christ of the crime of claiming to be the Son of God and sentenced Him to death for blasphemy. He was a member, a prominent member, of the Sanhedrin. But, *He had not consented to their decision and deed.*

The decision to put Jesus to death wasn't unanimous, but Joseph obviously was out voted.

Luke describes him as *waiting for the kingdom of God*. He had a heart that really sought God and God's truth. Luke also tells us he was *a good and just man*.

This Joseph is really a bright spot in the midst of an oppressive spiritual darkness that had captured Israel's leadership, but then why haven't we read about him before this?

Turn to John 19 pg 961 Read vs 38a *After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, went to Pilate...*

You'll find that expression "the Jews" 82 times in the gospels. In what we call the Synoptics, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, It's almost exclusively used by foreigners like the Romans. But in the Gospel of John, which uses it 66 times. In John's Gospel the term "the Jews" is a technical term for Israel's leadership.

Joseph of Arimathea wasn't fearful of the man on the street, but He was afraid of his fellow leaders.

So up until this point he's been a covert believer.

He knew in his heart who Jesus was, but he was afraid to speak out. He felt he had too much to loose.

He was afraid of the leaders. As a member of the Sanhedrin, if they found out he was following Jesus, it would be the end of his Sanhedrin rights. It would be the end of his wealth because he wouldn't be able to do business with anybody. It would be the end of his social status, he and his family would be alienated and ostracized.

He'd even get kicked out of the Synagogue. It would be the end of everything. The price would be very very high and this man was not going to take a step of boldness and identify with Jesus until he was certain that Jesus was in fact, worth the effort.

I have to believe that Joseph went through an immense spiritual struggle. Could you imagine what was going on in his mind and heart up until this point?

Maybe you can, because you're a bit of a secret service disciple too. You come to church, you sing the songs, you participate but when you walk outside these walls you put on your everyday dude look.

Jesus isn't part of your conversation or your priorities. Your friends and coworkers think you're a nice person, but you've never told them about your faith in Christ because you're afraid.

You're afraid they'd reject you, you're afraid you'd lose some of your friends, maybe you're afraid of what your family will think.

You know, our family's always been *Episcopians* or *Baptists*. What would Mom and Dad say? Uncle Norm might even cut me out of his will!

There's plenty of pressure on us to be clandestine Christians. That was Joseph of Arimathea until the crucifixion. But suddenly he switched from covert follower to open disciple.

Back to Luke 23, verse 52-53 (Read)

Matthew says: When Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in *his* new tomb...

Joseph being a wealthy and influential man had a tomb in a garden in the area of Jerusalem. It could have been a family plot or something, but he had a new tomb there that had never been used.

Everything about Jesus' life, death, burial, and resurrection had been prophesied from the beginning.

I hear people say, "How do you really know the Bible is true? What proof is there?"

God put it this way,

Isa 48 "I have declared the former things from the beginning; They went forth from My mouth, and I caused them to hear it. Suddenly I did them, and they came to pass. Because I knew that you were obstinate, And your neck was an iron sinew, And your brow bronze, Even from the beginning I have declared it to you; Before it came to pass I proclaimed it to you

God says, "I know you guys. You're hard headed and stiff necked so I've given you the end from the beginning. I've filled my Bible with prophecy so that you can know its true and not just made up by men."

Go with me now to Isaiah 53. Pg 562

We don't have time to read through it this morning, but Isaiah 53 is a powerful prophecy about Jesus Christ written 700 BC. **Read vs 8-9**

NASB translates vs 9 *His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death...*

Jesus was crucified between two thieves, but now a rich man becomes a beggar. Joseph goes to the Roman Governor Pilate and begs for the body of Jesus.

Why? Why would Joseph risk everything that he had once valued? We could try to draw up a psychological profile here, but I believe the best answer is: to fulfil prophecy. God was sovereignly at work. Even the details of Jesus' burial are in God's hands and Joseph is part of that fulfillment.

Jesus had to be buried in a rich man's tomb and Joseph was that man.

See in other countries they occupied, after a criminal died, the Romans would leave his body to rot on the cross as a warning to others. But because they tried to keep some semblance of peace in occupied Israel and the Jews would have caused a lot of trouble about dead bodies left out in the open, the Romans normally removed body.

And when it was taken off the cross it would be thrown into a common criminal's

grave. And it's very likely that that would be a pit somewhere where they threw the criminals or it might be the valley of Hinnom, where the city dump in Jerusalem was. They often threw the bodies there to be burned by the smoldering fire or to be eaten by wild animals.

That's what would have been assigned to Jesus. Isaiah 53 says in verse 9 He would be assigned with the wicked in His death...but He would wind up with the rich.

Who would care for Jesus body? The disciples had all fled. Even John doesn't seem to be around by this time. And certainly the rest haven't shown their faces at all. And the women don't have any resource to bury Jesus, they're from Galilee, they don't have any grave in the city of Jerusalem. Who is going to take care of this? Joseph.

But Joseph didn't do it all alone. He's the one that risked going to Pilate, who was really mad at the Sanhedrin right now for pressuring him into crucifying Jesus.

But Joseph had some help from here on. **Back to Luke 23 Read 53-56**

Joseph took Jesus' body to his tomb and according to John was joined by Nicodemus. John writes: *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.*

Nicodemus was a well respected teacher and leader in Israel. He had come to learn from Jesus one night and his questions became the backdrop for some of the best loved verses in the NT.

Jesus told Nicodemus: *Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.... as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

I have to believe that Nicodemus went away from that night-time encounter with Jesus a changed man.

He was a sincere man, a godly man. He wasn't a self-righteous man. He came seeking truth and accepted it when he heard it.

The truth is that Jesus died for sinners, and He's the only way to heaven. Nicodemus was *also* part of the ruling body in Jerusalem. In fact, in John 7 you read about Jesus going up to Jerusalem at the Feast of Tabernacles and getting the chief priests and Pharisees all riled up.

They send out men to arrest Jesus but the men come back empty-handed.

When the chief priests and Pharisees question them the guys say, *"No man ever spoke like this Man!"*

Then the Pharisees asked them, "Are you also deceived? Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him?"

In other words, "Are you falling for this Jesus too? You don't see any of us buying into his teaching!"

And then there's a dissenting voice from across the room: *Nicodemus (he who came to Jesus by night, being one of them) said to them, "Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?" They answered and said to him, "Are you also from Galilee?"*

That was the only other time you read about Nicodemus. He spoke up in Jesus' defence.

But, now he's taken the boldest step of his life. Just like Joseph he'll probably loose everything.

Joseph brings the strips of linen cloth and Nicodemus brings about 100 pounds of spices. They were running out of time because it was coming up on a religious holy day, but they worked to get Jesus body as prepared as possible.

Just like Orthodox Jews today, they didn't embalm bodies. Jews today bury their dead as quickly as possible. In Jesus' day they anointed the body with a heavy load of spices to keep the smell of death from polluting the area around. Myrrh was a liquid and aloe's a powder and they mixed them.

The only time anybody ever got anointed with 100 pounds of that stuff was when they were royalty. And these two godly men are saying, in effect, the world may not offer Jesus that kind of respect that a king should have, but we will even in death. And they bury Him with a burial of a king.

And the women helped, too. They made sure they knew exactly where Jesus was buried because they would come back Sunday to finish the anointing.

- I. *God's Sovereignty Was Shown Through Joseph*
- II. *God's Sovereignty Was Shown Through the Women*

Matthew explains: *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.*

What's the significance of these women? If Joseph of Arimathea is used by God to confirm the Sovereignty of God through fulfilled prophecy, these two women are used to confirm the Sovereignty of God through first-hand testimony.

We're going to look at this in depth in a couple of weeks but for now just look at **Luke chapter 24** with me. **Read 24:1-9**

First-hand witnesses. Even in His burial, Jesus had a couple of women who couldn't quite leave the grave. Oh, they might have left for a time on the Sabbath day, but they came back that third day.

And they became the ones who gave testimony. They became the ones who spoke about the resurrection of Jesus Christ and could say, "we were there." And in Mark 16:9 *Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons.*

Jesus appeared: not to people who had something to gain, not to the disciples so some one could say they fabricated the story to carry on their agenda.

These were women. These weren't the Apostles. The truth is the Apostles were a little reluctant to even believe them. And Thomas was even reluctant to believe when he heard from the rest of the disciples.

So God gave us some first-hand witnesses who spread the word of the resurrection. Through first-hand testimony and through fulfilled prophecy even in the burial of Christ, God is sovereignly at work vindicating Jesus Christ as His Son.

- I. *God's Sovereignty Was Shown Through Joseph*
- II. *God's Sovereignty Was Shown Through the Women*

III. God's Sovereignty Was Shown Through the Pharisees

For this one we need to turn back to the **Gospel of Matthew, chapter 27. PG 880.**

Read 27:62-66

Remember, God is in control. Men act of their own free will but God is still in control. In the end He works all things after the council of His own will.

John MacArthur writes: *...A myriad of scriptures tell us that God is sovereign. Now this is a marvelous truth to understand. Somebody is in charge, is what it's saying. The world and the universe and all that is going on with the millions and billions of isolated circumstances are not functioning at random. There is a design and a designer and a purpose and a goal and an objective and an intention in all of it.*

To understand how God could take the almost infinite number of circumstances, attitudes and events that exist both in the natural and the demonic world and pull them all together to work out His own will is really beyond our comprehension. It's enough for us to figure out how a computer with identifiable data can come rapidly to a conclusion but to understand how the infinite mind of eternal God can collect, collate and bring to perfect harmony every isolated bit of data that exists in the entire universe and make it all work for His will is really beyond our understanding.

It's beyond our puny brains ability understand but it's what the Bible teaches.

Let me ask you, what do you think would have happened if they had just put Jesus' body in the tomb with no guard and then three days later the tomb was empty. How many people do you think would have believed that He arose from the dead? Peter stood up on the day of Pentecost 50 days after this and told the crowd in Jerusalem, Jesus rose from the dead. I can just hear the cat calls now. "Sure he did. And we just saw Elvis and big foot down at the Jordan river too."

But now notice what happens. The enemies of Jesus make sure that there's no other explanation for the empty tomb except a resurrection.

The Chief Priests and Pharisees, the guys that hated Jesus so much they orchestrated His murder, now go to Pilate with one last request.

"This Jesus character said He was going to rise from the dead and we want to make sure his followers don't stage a resurrection."

Seems like Jesus' enemies listened closer than His friends. The disciples were devastated at Jesus' death. Peter said to John, "Let's go back to fishing." They were totally confused. Even though Jesus had told them before hand exactly what would happen.

We read it all the way back in Luke 9. Jesus explained to His disciples: *"The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day."*

I mean, come on. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to interpret what He said. But the disciples were so caught up in grief they didn't have it in them to believe a promise like that. They forgot all about it. Not one of them said to the others, "Don't worry, Jesus said he'd rise from the dead."

But Jesus' enemies remembered. They were listening. They didn't know the disciples were confused and scared. They figured the disciples were so committed to Jesus' message that they'd fake a resurrection. They'd sneak in and steal the body.

So they get Pilate to order a Roman guard to seal the tomb and patrol the area. Perfect!

And when Jesus does rise from the dead on the third day, no one can say the disciples stole the body. They tried that one, but nobody bought it.

And when Peter preached in Jerusalem 50 days later he boldly proclaimed: *"This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."*

No one heckled. No one brought up Elvis or Bigfoot. The record says, *"they were cut to the heart."*

Why? Because they knew it was true, and the clincher was the guarded tomb.

Do you see how God is working in everything? He used Joseph of Arimathea providentially to fulfill prophecy. He used the two Marys providentially to give first-hand testimony to the resurrection. And He used the chief priests and the Pharisees providentially to give forceful proof that Jesus truly rose from the dead.

Now, how does this relate to you and me? The Bible says: *"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."*

Do you understand what that says? The person who is born into God's family through faith in Jesus Christ can have complete confidence that all things are controlled by God to work together to fulfill His eternal purpose.

The truth of God's sovereignty and God's providence is not some distant doctrine for theologians. This is where the rubber meets the road.

It's when you can't explain the trouble you're going through that you need to understand the providential power of a sovereign God who takes every bit of the diverse data of the universe and controls it all for your good and His glory and eternal purpose.

Is that comforting? It doesn't matter what it is. And He demonstrated His ability to do it through the burial of Jesus Christ..

Whatever happens in your life, whatever you can't understand, whatever you struggle with, whatever doesn't make sense, whatever trials you may be going through, it all fits.

This is it. God is doing it. He's at work. It's for His glory. It's for our good. He's in control. He hasn't abandoned His throne. And our hope and our confidence is in the God who providentially controls all things to His own intended and eternal purpose.