

Matthew 23-05-28a

Good morning. Welcome to Sunday morning here at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 28th of May, 2023.

We're in the Gospel of Matthew, and we have come to that most happy circumstance following the crucifixion, which is the resurrection. It is even more fascinating than I remembered as we review and revisit it this morning, and we will be looking at more than one Gospel in that process. Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our investigation of His Word, and we'll begin.

Father, we are so grateful that we are beneficiaries of Your grace, the objects of Your love in the fullest expression, with the Lord Jesus Christ coming and dying in our place, accomplishing redemption and reconciliation, propitiation, atoning for our sins and making it possible for us to do as we do this morning, which is to approach Your throne in worship with respect and love and appreciation for the incorporation that we enjoy into Your plan and purpose, the fellowship that we have in the Spirit with one another, and the opportunities that we have to learn and grow in this life as we prepare for service and function both now and in the ages to come. We pray that as we look at this wonderful sequence of events following the burial of the Lord Jesus Christ and leading into His resurrection and His interaction with the disciples thereafter, that we will find in it a personal blessing, motivation, challenge, opportunities to draw closer to You through the Lord Jesus in the presence and power of the Spirit. And as a result, we will bear fruit that is in keeping with righteousness, reflects Your glory and the glory of our Savior.

We pray it in His name. Amen. I am so glad to be at this portion of Matthew.

It has been a 27-chapter trip, and we find ourselves having looked last time at Joseph of Arimathea, Joseph of Ramah, and all of the wonderful concepts and Old Testament reminders that are brought to bear by that association. He is carefully associated with his hometown in every one of the Gospels. And so we saw that in Matthew 27:57 last time: when evening had come, there came a rich man from Arimathea, from Ramah.

And you remember, this is the Heights of the Watchers, is what the full name of it means. The Zophim suffix that you find in 1 Samuel 1:1, dealing with Elkanah and Hannah and that story of the birth of Samuel, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. There are so many beautiful symmetries in the life of the Lord Jesus.

And I think sometimes that God must have smiled as He put His plan together. One of many that you can note is that Jesus' life begins with Joseph, the husband of Mary, and it is renewed with Joseph of Arimathea, all harking back to the first Joseph, the 11th son of Jacob, with his incredible story of death and resurrection, certainly in the eyes of his father, who sees the bloody coat. But that Joseph, who is humbled and literally takes on the form of a servant, and is in the house of Potiphar, and is in prison, and ultimately rises to be second in authority over all of Egypt—only the Pharaoh is higher. And the Lord Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father—only the Father is higher than the Lord Jesus, to whom all authority has been granted, as we see in our upcoming chapter.

So this is, this is Joseph of Arimathea. This man went to Pilate in verse 58 and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate commanded the body to be given to him. When Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth. This clean linen cloth was divided into strips, and the body was wrapped with these swaddling cloths, if you will, the very same type of material that was used when Jesus was born and was found by the shepherds lying in the manger. Another one of those beautiful symmetries.

He 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. This tomb is near to the place of crucifixion. When you read the parallel Gospels, you find that this tomb is very near Golgotha. It tells us it is in that same place.

So we find from Luke that—I'm sorry, from John, in John chapter 19—that Nicodemus, who came to Him by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus, bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury. Now, in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid.

This is Joseph's tomb, which he had had hewn out of the rock on his own account, and all of that is in John 19:38 and following. So we get those additional details, and this is why the tomb that is so often visited as an alternative to the traditional site is called the Garden Tomb, because John says it was in, in a garden.

A few points to note: the sameness and yet difference in detail between Gospel accounts is a reminder to us that a lot can take place that is not mentioned in Scripture, and it serves the purpose of each Gospel's point of view, each Gospel's theme, to exclude or include various details, all of which are easily harmonized if you are starting from the premise that there is one truth to which these four accounts all bear witness, rather than looking for some way to impugn or make an allegation against the integrity of the Scriptures.

And so, the fact that Matthew says that it was wrapped in a linen cloth—it started out as a linen cloth, but it became strips under the ministrations of Joseph and Nicodemus—and Matthew does not mention the spices; John does. John is a closer eyewitness to many of these events, beginning at the trials, where he went inside and Peter was outside, continuing through the crucifixion, where John is at the foot of the cross with these other witnesses, the ladies and those passing by and the religious leadership who are engaging in such great derision. John has greater knowledge of the detail in terms of the preparation of Jesus' body.

I suspect that John was present for this because he includes exactly who was there, exactly how much material they had, exactly how they applied it and prepared the body for burial in that 19th chapter. Returning to our passage, laid it in his new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock. John does not mention that the tomb belonged to Joseph; Matthew does. But it's an interesting detail because of what we talked about last time.

Where is Joseph from? You can say it out loud. Where is Joseph of Arimathea from? This is my similarity to who's buried in Grant's tomb. Joseph of Arimathea is from Ramah.

How far away is Ramah? We covered this. I mentioned it two or three times last week. It's seven miles north of Jerusalem.

People typically are buried in their hometown. People who have traveled far away, they'll ship the body back to their hometown. I've got a lot of people planted in the cemetery in Tulsa.

There are exceptions to that. If you're a veteran and go to the Veterans Cemetery, that might be in a different spot. But in Israel, what is the importance of the land to which your tribe and your clan have possession and assignment? Remember Joseph himself when he died in Egypt, what were his instructions? You keep my bones ready. And when you go back to the land, I want to be buried in the land, in the land that was promised to my great-grandfather and my grandfather and my father.

And so you recall very famously that when the Exodus took place—begins—they take the bones of Joseph. There's a very memorable scene in The Ten Commandments where, in the Exodus, and the bones of Joseph, and they're singing this kind of mournful tune as they carry his bones away.

So do you find anything odd about this notation here in verse 57 and 58 and 59 and 60, especially verse 60? What do you note here? Joseph of Arimathea didn't plan his tomb in Ramah. He has purchased a plot and hewn out a solid rock for a tomb in Jerusalem. Why would he do that? What do you think?

How much does Joseph know about Old Testament prophecy and the importance of Jerusalem? He doesn't want to be buried up in Ramah. He wants to be buried in Jerusalem, right there looking down on the Valley of Hinnom and looking across to the Mount of Olives. Why would he want a tomb that has a view of the Mount of Olives, do you think? Where does Old Testament prophecy say the Messiah is going to return and deliver His people and establish His kingdom?

Joseph, being a rich man and having the means, has bought himself a box seat for the return of the Lord Jesus. He is a disciple, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, and you find this out as you read the various Gospel accounts. Mark, for example, tells us that Joseph of Arimathea was a prominent Sanhedrin member who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God. He was waiting for the kingdom of God.

When he saw the Lord Jesus, he recognized that Jesus was there to present the kingdom. But when He came to His own and His own received Him not, that kingdom was put on hold. That kingdom was delayed. But he was waiting for the kingdom of God.

This is why he has a tomb in Jerusalem and not in Ramah, and conveniently so. We find out from Luke that he was from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, waiting for the kingdom of God and was a good and just man. Each of

the Gospels gives us a slightly different detail about Joseph, but he's extremely important, and that emphasis is why we looked at him so closely last week.

So he's got this tomb because he is waiting for the kingdom of God, because he is a just man, because he is a follower of the Lord Jesus. He believes in the Lord Jesus, and I would love to have heard the conversation. Maybe we'll be able to listen in the future to an account of the conversation between Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus as they are preparing the body of the Lord Jesus, because both of them believe that Jesus is from God.

They believe in the Lord Jesus and what He said, and He said that He would be delivered into the hands of men, that He would be killed, and that He would rise again the third day. Joseph is waiting for the kingdom. Nicodemus is waiting for the kingdom.

Jesus has offered the kingdom, but now He has been slain. He's been executed as a criminal on the cross. They are preparing His body for burial.

I would love to know what they talked about, whether they said, "Well, you know, this only has to last three days. We don't, you know, we don't have to wrap it too tight." But on the other hand, it's a hundred pounds of spices. But this is a very temporary thing.

Jesus' body is going to be here less than half a week. Three days and three nights. And yet the burial is done so carefully.

And I think it's Barnhouse made a great point. I've got an—I love these old commentaries from guys from decades and centuries gone by—but I think Barnhouse made the point in his commentary that up to this point, look at the way the body of the Lord Jesus was treated from the time He was arrested and dragged out from Gethsemane and the Mount of Olives into the various trials. He is stripped. He is scourged. He is spit on.

He has His beard pulled out. He is manhandled and vilified and disrespected physically, as well as in every other way. They force Him to carry His cross, along with Simon of Cyrene, out to Golgotha, where He is nailed to that cross after having been flogged and all of these other indignities. And to ensure that He is dead, He is stabbed in the side with a spear. His body, lifeless body, is demonstrated to be dead.

But from the moment that Jesus said, "It is finished"—and this is Barnhouse's great point—from the moment that Jesus said, "It is finished," there is no further disrespect to His body. He is taken down from the cross by friends. He is treated gently and so respectfully and reverently by these men who ask for His body, secure His body, and treat it with such great reverence and respect, and you see that with Joseph and Nicodemus.

So it is prepared, and it says that Joseph rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb and departed. This is a rock-cut tomb. Sometimes there was even a channel that was cut above and below so that, as the stone is rolled in place, it would basically wedge so that it couldn't be easily pushed aside. Because Joseph is rich, this is a very elegant tomb. It is a large tomb.

These were generally, if they went to the trouble to cut them out of rock, it would be a crypt in which several people would fit, but nobody had ever been in there as of yet. And so the Lord Jesus has the entire suite to Himself, if you will. But because it's a large tomb with a large opening, it has a large stone, large heavy stone, so much so that we'll see shortly that the ladies who are going to visit the tomb on Sunday morning wonder how they are going to remove the stone to be able to minister to His further embalming.

But he rolls it against the door of the tomb and departed. Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the tomb. It is not often recognized that as the body is being prepared, Joseph is there, Nicodemus is there, the two Marys are there, and evidently John was there based on the details that he provides.

So there is a group, and you would expect that two or three men would be required to move the body, arrange the body, assist in the preparations, bring in the 100 pounds of spices, and so on. There is help, and there may be others who are not mentioned. But the ladies remain and are there sitting opposite the tomb, and they will sit there until sundown, when they will need to leave. They can't remain out after dark. It is the Passover.

They're going to have to return to their homes to observe Passover. And so they remain as long as they possibly can, and then they return to the city.

Then on the next day, which followed the day of preparation—this is 15 Nisan, and this is Friday, the day following the day of preparation. If this had been Saturday, I think he would have just said, “On the Sabbath,” but all the accounts are careful to say that this is the day following the day of preparation.

You read many accounts and they say, “Well, every Friday was a day of preparation for the Sabbath.” That's really a stretch. The day of preparation is 14 Nisan. This is the day where the Passover meal had to be prepared and everything in place, including the sacrifice of the lamb between the evenings at 3 p.m. The lamb had to then be dressed and prepared for cooking. The unleavened bread had to be brought, that the houses had to be clean and swept so that there is no leaven, and so on. Much had to be done on that day in anticipation of that evening, which began at sundown, and then remaining indoors, sandals on your feet, staff in your hand, eat the Passover meal.

So the day on which Jesus was tried, the day on which He was crucified, was the day of preparation. This is the day where those who were planning to observe did not want to be defiled, and so they didn't want to go to Pilate's house and so on. The next day is a high Sabbath. It's an unusual Sabbath. It is the day following the day of preparation.

They've celebrated Passover in the night and in the darkness, and it's so tragic that as Jesus spends His first night in the tomb, those who put Him on the cross are observing Passover with the blood of the lamb and all of the symbolism: that deliverance from bondage and being set free, being guided by God, all of the foreshadowing of Christ our Passover, who was sacrificed for us, even as they eat that Passover meal. They utterly and completely miss its significance.

It is not enough to know the Word of God. It is not enough to have outward obedience and superficial comporting with what passes for righteousness. If it isn't in our hearts, it doesn't count. And the hypocrisy and the tragedy of celebrating Passover, having just personally seen to it that the actual Lamb of God was slain—not out of reverence, not out of understanding, not out of appreciation, not in humility, but in hubris, in arrogance, in supercilious bitter denunciation and mocking, and having seen to it that Jesus was not only rejected in terms of His claims and His teaching but to be vilified and to be physically abused, turned over to the enemy Romans to be executed—you can't think of anything worse.

But it begins with having a form of godliness and denying its power. And it should scare us that there were people at that time, and there are people today, who know the Scriptures backward and forward and are not living in their light, are living in a hypocritical counter life, having become enemies of the cross, fallen from grace, misusing, twisting, and abusing Scripture.

This is our study on Wednesday night, is the, the misuse of the Sermon on the Mount, which itself calls out misuse of the Law of Moses. And as Jesus calls out the misuse of the Old Testament Scriptures, we find ourselves in need of calling out misuse of the teaching on the hill, the Sermon on the Mount. Even in the act of correcting misunderstandings about how God's Word should be viewed and should be applied, that very teaching is today being abused, misused, and misapplied, twisted and distorted.

And it is not enough to know the Word. It is not enough to have teaching without the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, without the humility to go to God and ask and seek and knock, to claim His promise that He will give good things to those who ask Him. He will give the Spirit to those who ask Him. Even in the Old Testament age, that was a firm promise. God did not withhold His Spirit from those who were seeking.

Well, it's so tragic. So they've prepared the body. He is in the tomb.

And so the next day, this by my reckoning at least is Friday, this is the day after the preparation day, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate. There's been much made that these chief priests and Pharisees, by going to Pilate, were breaking the Sabbath, and that this was an example of how much they hated the Lord Jesus, that they would break the Sabbath to go to Pilate.

Simply going to Pilate, they could have gone outside his domicile or his palace there and simply sent word and asked him to come out onto a balcony. Going and talking to Pilate on the Sabbath doesn't break the Sabbath. And having been so careful about the preceding day and the preceding night, I seriously doubt that they could have looked at each other and said, “Well, we're breaking the Sabbath to talk to Pilate,” having this conversation within a Sabbath day journey of their location. I see no Sabbath violation here, but that's been the claim.

But they go to him, 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 that the last deception will be worse than the first.”

So here's another tragedy. Jesus' enemies remember His words better than His disciples. Where is the group of disciples saying, “You know, we need to get back to that tomb after two days and early in the morning on the third day, because the Lord said He would rise. Look at all the miracles. We've seen—look at the—He has raised others from the dead. He has healed every sickness and disease. He has authority over demons. He has power over creation. He stilled the storm, and He said He would rise.”

Turn with me back to Matthew chapter 26. Matthew chapter 26, verse 31. In verse 29, Jesus promised them that He would drink wine in the kingdom with His disciples. You remember that: “I will partake of the fruit of the vine, not now, not again, until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.” Verse 31, Jesus said to them, “All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.” After I have been raised.

How many times have we seen this over and over again? The Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of men. After three days, He will rise again. After three days, He will rise again. He told the disciples this repeatedly, repeatedly. Who remembers it?

This is why I would be so interested in, in getting to hear and, of course, having a perfect understanding of Aramaic, what Joseph and Nicodemus and perhaps John and the ladies were discussing during this brief period. They've only got a short time to prepare the body before sundown, when they've got to be indoors and observe Passover. But did they remember? Did it occur to them? Did they remember the words of the Lord or not? His enemies certainly remember it.

“Sir, we remember while He was still alive how that deceiver said, ‘After three days, I will rise.’” One would love to stop them at this point and say, “What exactly was the deception? What you're calling Him a liar. What is the lie?” Jesus challenged them several times and said, “You know, of what do you convict Me? Where do you find Me convicted of wrong?” And they couldn't answer. But they're calling Him a deceiver, that liar. That liar.

And this follows the pattern. This is satanically inspired. Jesus said Satan is a liar and the father of lies. He was a liar from the beginning. The very first words recorded from Satan in Genesis are lies. “You will not surely die. God knows that if you eat of the fruit, you will become like Him, knowing good and evil,” as though God is trying to prevent an improvement and a higher stage of evolution.

But what do people do? You can see it in politics. You can see it in common American culture. People will accuse others of what they themselves are guilty of. These very leaders lied to the Romans to get Jesus crucified, to get them to execute Him. They outright lied. They recruited and suborned perjury and false witnesses. And so now they are calling Jesus a liar when they themselves are the liars.

Now, here's the thing. They are worried about something happening on the third day, aren't they? Secure the tomb 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 why would this idea occur to them?

Ever since I was a small child, I can remember my father telling me from time to time, “Don't judge other people by yourself. Assume that they are doing, will do, or have done what you would do in their place.” For better or for worse, people are different. And why would they suspect that there might be some sort of falsehood perpetrated in the interest of the message? Because that's what they do. That's what they have done. That's what they are going to do.

And in the disciples' place, these men would try to perpetrate a falsehood and a deception, so they suspect others are doing what they themselves would do. Little do they know that the disciples are quailing in fear and hiding and won't even leave the upper room. They've got the locked door. They don't want to go anywhere. They are certainly not going to go out in public and be found at the tomb removing the body. They don't have that kind of courage at this point.

And in what way would it avail them? What profit do they get if they do? Let's say, hypothetically, they were to go steal the body of Jesus, secreted someplace else, then go around saying He's alive. He has risen. Without a personal appearance by the Lord Jesus, everybody would say, "Prove it. How can you prove He's alive? Where is He? Show Him to me. Show me any shred of evidence. You say He's alive. It's hearsay."

Jesus showed Himself alive by many proofs, as we will see here shortly, so that there could be no doubt that He was raised. But this would be a failed proposition. It's a ridiculous hypothesis to begin with. But these men are fearful that somehow what they have accomplished will be undone. They want the people to forget about Jesus. That's the main thing.

They don't want anybody talking about Him anymore. He died. It was an ignominious criminal's death. We don't want any more talk about this Jesus. We don't want somebody fluffing up the legend or myth by saying He's alive, by stealing His body. So they remember these words very well.

And I don't recall any public occasions where Jesus said anything other than, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." That's the only account in the Gospels where He said anything publicly about rising after three days. He told these things privately to His disciples. So how did they get this information? This is what's stuck in their minds. This is what they accused Him of at the trial, right about the temple and the three days. One wonders if they actually did understand the symbolism: "Destroy this temple," and He meant the temple of His body. And they were taking no chances.

So Pilate said, "You have a guard. Go your way. Make it as secure as you know how." And you wonder if this is sort of a sardonic reply, where Pilate is basically disgusted with these people because he feels certain that he has executed an innocent man and these guys can't let it alone. It's not enough that they got Him killed. They're just obsessing with Him.

It reminds you of, you know, former presidents, and people just can't let it go. The president's gone, but we don't want him ever coming back. We've, you know—and not just some of the most recent presidents. This goes back a ways in my lifetime.

So you make it as secure as you know how. Knock yourself out. You've got resources. You do it. Pilate's not going to send his troops. He says, "You've got a detachment of Roman guards that are assigned to you. Use them."

So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard. What does it mean to seal? This is pouring hot wax on it so that if the stone is disturbed, it can be demonstrated that someone has, in the same way that breaking the seal on a document means that somebody has, has opened it, and you're very difficult to restore the seal.

So this is where we leave it: sealing the stone and setting the guard. So the power of man has done everything it can to keep Jesus' body in the tomb. Well, we're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to move into chapter 28, our final chapter in this Gospel, and look at some parallel information, especially from the Gospel of John, that is exceedingly important to us in terms of our application.

Let's pause here and take our break.