

*“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, **and that He was buried**, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.” 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 (NKJV)*

JESUS DIED ON THE CROSS FOR OUR SINS **AND WAS BURIED ...**

The burial of Jesus is the second of the core doctrines of Christianity listed by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5. In fact, it occupies a significant amount of space in each of the four gospels: ten verses in Matthew, six verses in Mark, six in Luke, and five in John. ***But we do not generally think about Jesus’ burial very much.***

Why is that? There is a natural explanation, I suppose. After the death we move on instinctively to the good news of the resurrection since so much depends on it. It is proof that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the true God; that Jesus is who He claimed to be, the Son of God and the Savior; that Jesus’ death was accepted by His Father as an atonement for our sins; that those who believe in Jesus are in a justified state before God; that there is power for victory over sin for all who belong to Jesus; and that those who are united to Jesus by faith will themselves be raised from death to life in heaven. But between the death of Jesus and the resurrection ... the gospels and epistles place the burial. ***Why is the burial so important?***

There are several reasons why the New Testament stresses the burial of Jesus. One is obvious. The second can be found by careful Bible students. The third is not obvious at all.

1. The burial proves that Jesus was really dead. This is the obvious reason. If Jesus had not been buried or had not been not buried as He was—after the centurion had certified to Pilate that Jesus was truly dead (Mark 15:44-45); by Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin, accompanied by Nicodemus (John 19:39); after a careful preparation of the body; in a new tomb that had then been sealed with a large stone (Matthew 27:59-60)—if none of this had happened ... it would have been possible for skeptics to argue that Jesus had not really died, that He only seemed to have died, perhaps losing consciousness after extreme exhaustion, and that He was somehow able to revive and convince His followers that He had triumphed over death.

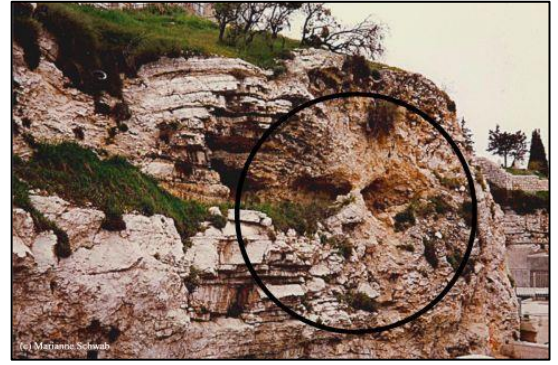
But a *resuscitation* like that is impossible in view of the burial and the way it was accomplished. **The burial of Jesus assures us that Jesus was really dead ... and that His resurrection was a true resurrection.**

The burial of Jesus ensures that the resurrection of Jesus was just that: a resurrection from the dead.

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus prepared Jesus' body for burial, and buried Him in a new tomb, in which no other body had yet been laid (John 19:38-42).

These men testified that there was no life in the body they buried. He had not "swooned," lost consciousness, or fainted. ***He had truly died.***

Therefore, if in three days He were alive, the burial proved that He had risen from death to new life!



It is significant that most scholars believe that Jesus was buried in a known tomb owned by Joseph of Arimathea. The burial in a known tomb by Joseph of Arimathea is considered historical because the Gospels describe Joseph as a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin that condemned Jesus. He is unlikely to be a person that Christians made up, since he would be a well-known individual.

The Garden Tomb

Located just outside the city walls of Jerusalem you will find The Garden Tomb, a possible location for the crucifixion, burial and resurrection of Christ Jesus. Near to the Damascus Gate and standing in the shadow of Skull Hill you will find this beautiful garden with its ancient empty tomb.



“3 Peter therefore went out, and the other disciple, and were going to the tomb. 4 So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. 5 And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying there; yet he did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying there, 7 and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself. 8 Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed.” -- John 20:3-9 (NKJV)



2. The details of the burial fulfilled Scripture. The most obvious passage is Isaiah 53:9. *“He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.”* (NASU)

Matthew does not call attention to this verse, though earlier in the gospel he cites many other texts that he says were fulfilled by Jesus. Nor does John mention the verse, though in this same chapter (chap. 19) he refers to four other verses that he says were fulfilled at the time of the crucifixion: Psalm 22:18 in verse 24; Psalm 69:21 in verse 29, Exodus 12:46 (and others texts) in verse 36, and Zechariah 12:10 in verse 37.

Nevertheless, Matthew probably has Isaiah 53:9 in mind ... since he alone of the gospel writers says that Joseph of Arimathea was *“a rich man”* and *“rich”* is the critical word in Isaiah 53:9.

Jesus taught that His death, burial and resurrection was foreshadowed by the experience of Jonah in the belly of the great fish: *“Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”* (Matthew 12:40) Had Jesus not been buried, He would have been proved wrong, or worse, a liar. But He was indeed in the heart of the earth; Scriptural typology, and Jesus' prophecy, were fulfilled.

- ***To deny or ignore the burial of Jesus is certainly to deny or ignore a truth "of first importance" for Christians.***

3. The burial has theological significance. To say that Jesus not only died but was also buried in the grave means that He descended as low as he could go in order to raise us up to heaven. H. N. Ridderbos wrote, *“Jesus endured not only pain and suffering and the curse of death but even the terror of the grave, so that he could save his people from this forever.”* Also read: Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:29-31; Ephesians 4:7-10.

- Jesus did not die and then immediately come back to life. His suffering and humiliation descended to the point of remaining under the power of death from Friday through Sunday.

Yet there is more. In Romans Paul speaks of Christians having being buried with Jesus in His death, just as they are raised with Him in his resurrection. He does this while explaining why believers cannot continue in sin. For example, *“We were...buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life”* (Romans 6:4).

When theologians work out these parallels, they have little trouble showing how we have been crucified with Jesus, raised with Him, or made to ascend into heaven with Him. But they have trouble with the burial.

How can we be said to be buried with Christ? What does this add that is not already covered by our death to sin?

I suggest that the reason burial is an important step even beyond death ... is that burial puts the deceased person out of this world permanently. A corpse is dead to life. But there is a sense in which it can still be said to be in life, as long as it is around. When it is placed in the ground and covered with earth, it is removed from the sphere of this life permanently. It is gone. That is why Paul, who wanted to emphasize the finality of our being removed from the rule of sin and death to the rule of Christ, emphasizes it. He is intensifying what he said about our death to sin earlier. "You have not only died to it," he says, "*You have been buried to it.*" **To go back to sin once you have been joined to Christ is like digging up a dead body!**

I do not think the gospel writers had this in mind when they wrote about Christ's burial. But guided by the Holy Spirit, they were laying down as a detail of history what Paul in particular would later unfold in its full theological significance.

The first response by the Jewish leaders clearly admits to Jesus' body missing from the known tomb. In Matthew 28:11-15, Matthew reports that the Jews claimed from the beginning that the disciples stole the body of Jesus out of the tomb. More than that, Matthew states that the Jews were still claiming this decades later (at the time when Matthew wrote his Gospel).

It would not help him to say that the Jews are circulating this false story if they weren't actually doing so. ***If those who rejected Christianity (the Jewish leaders) accept the empty tomb, then historians have excellent reason to believe it is historical.***

- The Jewish leaders were not reporting that Jesus was disposed of in some unknown way; *rather, they admitted that he was buried in the tomb and that the body was missing. They just tried to explain away the resurrection.*

Ultimately, we don't have any competing burial story from the first century that would contradict the report in the Gospels that Jesus was buried in a tomb by Joseph of Arimathea and that the tomb was found empty by women.

Not only is there no competing account about what happened to the body of Jesus, but the empty tomb is historically plausible for the reasons given above. ***By far the most reasonable historical conclusion is to accept ... that Jesus was buried in a tomb and that the tomb became empty!***

TO BE CONTINUED ...