

# The significance of the empty tomb

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Preacher: Daniel Chapallaz

[ 0 : 00 ] We get really into it. So on Friday lunchtime, it was empty.! On Sunday lunchtime, it was also empty.

For the slow work of decay.

For the finality of death. But it wasn't. Because it held the body just for a few short hours, really. And then it was empty again. The grave was put out of business before it could even be open for business. Yes. The fact that there was a burial in a tomb is a thought that shouldn't be overlooked. It's significant enough for Paul to include it in that creed in 1 Corinthians 15. We said those words together. That he was buried all in accordance with the scriptures.

[ 1 : 20 ] A key piece of information. And actually, there are some that say Jesus couldn't have died on a cross. Jesus couldn't have been buried in a tomb.

That doesn't seem fitting with someone who was sent from God. Muslims. One example of a group of people that would believe this.

It says in the Quran, We killed the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the messenger of Allah. But actually, it says, But they neither killed nor crucified him.

It was only made to appear so. And so they might say someone like Simon of Cyrene died in Jesus' place. Jesus was not worthy of death. But actually, the details we have in our Bible is that Jesus really did physically die.

And he really did physically get buried in a tomb. And that tomb is now empty. And that is really important for us to see in the scriptures.

[ 2 : 28 ] And we're going to see that tonight. So do turn to Mark 15. Mark 15, we're going to look at verses 42 to 47 together.

Mark 15, verse 42. It was preparation day. That is the day before the Sabbath. So as evening approached, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body.

Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. Pilate. When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph.

So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.

Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Joseph, saw where he was laid. Let's just take a moment to pray, shall we, before we consider this together.

[ 3 : 58 ] Let's pray. Father God, thank you for your living words.

And we pray that this Easter Sunday evening, you would again speak to us through it. Please take the words that I will say and use them by the power of your spirit to speak to each one of us and to change our hearts, we pray.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. So we have the details here and actually in all four Gospels of the physical burial of the Lord Jesus.

We're in Mark this evening simply because we're in Mark on Good Friday, so it feels good to continue the narrative together. I'm going to ask three questions of the passage.

Firstly, did Jesus die? Did Jesus die? An important question to get very straight in our heads. If a body is going to be buried, we need to be sure that it's really dead.

[ 5 : 17 ] It would be tragic if it wasn't. And if people say elsewhere that Jesus didn't actually physically die, we need to see for certain that he really did.

And so we get some details about Jesus really being dead in verse 42. Just after Joseph comes and asks for Jesus' body, we'll get to that request in a moment.

But verse 44 says this, Pilate was surprised to hear that Jesus was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died.

When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. So to Joseph, I'll stop there. Pilate's had a bit of a terrible time really, hasn't he?

And he's probably not welcoming an interruption to his day. And we get the sense from him in verse 42 that he's surprised.

[ 6 : 23 ] Surprised to hear this request. Surprised because actually a crucified victim would normally not take hours to die, rather more likely days.

It would be a stretched out. And so he wanted sure confirmation before granting any request that Jesus had actually died.

Important for him to confirm this because if he wasn't dead, then perhaps this is some sort of conspiracy to get a criminal down from the cross. And the person to confirm to Pilate that he was dead was the centurion.

The centurion who we heard about on Friday. He's recorded there for us earlier in the chapter in verse 39. And when the centurion who stood there in front of Jesus saw how he died, he said, surely this man was the son of God.

God's, which coming from the mouth of a centurion who would have seen countless Roman crucifixions, it was a big statement.

[ 7 : 38 ] Clearly there wasn't a death like this that he'd seen before. This was an extraordinary death. And so he said, surely this was the son of God. And he had been right there, right there when Jesus had breathed his last.

The centurion knew for sure Jesus had died. So he's a reliable eyewitness through which many of the gospel accounts have come about through reliable eyewitnesses.

We can trust the sources that Mark uses. And Mark wants to be emphasizing to us for sure, I think, in verse 44 and 45, that Jesus really died.

Twice he uses the word dead in these verses. So verse 44, Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died.

When he learned from the centurion that it was so, that he was dead, he gave the body. And that word body that is used in the Greek is only referring to dead bodies.

[ 8 : 56 ] So if your translation that you're using this evening says corpse, that's a really good translation. It's a word only referring to dead bodies. Mark is emphasizing to us, Jesus has died.

And they're making sure in this narrative, Jesus is dead. And not only does the gospels tell us that, historians tell us that.

Josephus, the Jewish historian, absolutely says that Jesus was crucified by Pilate. Jesus died. Really important for us to confirm that.

Because if he hadn't died, then he can't be the great lamb of God to take away our sin. The point of a sacrifice is that a living being dies in the place of another.

And Jesus really did die in our place. Did Jesus die? Yes. Who buried him?

[ 10 : 05 ] Who buried him? This passage shows us who was there burying him. Verse 43, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the council who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body.

If this was a drama, Joseph of Arimathea would have been waiting a long time for his appearance, had to wait throughout the whole life of Jesus before he appears.

That seems to be the case in all the Gospels. So we don't see a lot of him, but we do know a fair bit about him.

What do we know about him? Well, we know from Mark's account here that he is a very respected man, a prominent member of the Jerusalem council.

He's a respected guy. The Jerusalem council, the Sanhedrin, made up of various priests and Sadducees and Pharisees, important people.

[ 11 : 10 ] And Luke's gospel tells us that he hadn't actually consented to the council's decision to get rid of Jesus, which shows a measure of belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, believing him to be someone particularly special.

And here, he shows great courage, which is a change because actually John's gospel tells us that he was a secret follower of Jesus until this point.

But here, he shows courage, courage to go and knock on the door of Pilate and say, can I have Jesus' body? Can I have the body of that supposed criminal who's died on the cross? He requests his body, which is a big thing because Joseph realizes he doesn't deserve to be placed where all the other criminals' bodies would be placed. and in fact, some crucified victims would stay for days on the cross and birds would come and feast on them. It was horrible.

[12:30] Joseph thinks, no, he deserves much better. This is an amazing man, the Lord Jesus. He sees something different about him.

And we are told he's a man of faith. He is waiting for the kingdom of God to come. Perhaps he thought Jesus was the one who was going to bring it, but now with Jesus' death, those hopes in the Lord Jesus to bring about the kingdom of God may have been dashed away, but surely he thinks Jesus is significant in God's plan, hence wanting to provide him with a decent burial.

So he takes courage and he chooses to stand out as a follower of the Lord Jesus. And it's worth seeing in John chapter 19 that he isn't actually the only one who takes courage at this point.

John 19 John 19 verse 38 Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus.

Now, Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who had earlier visited Jesus at night, at night in secret.

[14:17] Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about 35 kilograms. And so it wasn't just Joseph of Arimathea who was willing to be courageous and say, I'm going to give Jesus a decent burial.

Nicodemus also joins him. They were very willing to handle Jesus' dead body, the body of Jerusalem's most wanted, the body of the man the Jerusalem council, the majority of whom wanted to get rid of and kill.

they were willing to be known for being followers of the one everyone else around them wanted to do away with. And it wasn't just them at the burial.

Notice who else is there down in verse 47. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid. This little passage at the end of Mark 15 is bookended really by the women's involvement.

They were the last people standing with Jesus at the cross and they were the last people there as his body was placed in the tomb.

[15:41] They remained with Jesus to the end even after others had fled away, even after Judas had betrayed him, even after Peter had denied him, they went all the way.

And each one of them were willing in Jesus' death to say, I stand with Jesus, I'm a follower of him, I'm a lover of him, even when it wasn't popular.

And so I guess the thought for us is are we willing to be standing out as followers of Jesus? Are we willing to be known as lovers of the Lord Jesus who died and was buried?

Are we willing to do that in the world around us that doesn't love the Lord Jesus like we do? Where it's not the most popular thing to be a Christian?

It might even be that through this Easter weekend we've ourselves become more and more convinced convinced about who Jesus is just as Joseph of Arimathea became more and more convinced on that Good Friday Jesus is someone I want to follow so he's someone I want to honour but maybe you haven't yet come out as a follower of him maybe you haven't yet called on him gone all the way and called on him for salvation today would be a great day to do that to be known as his ask him please forgive me my sin and help me to follow you and Joseph's courage here Joseph's courage that we see I think it's amazing fulfill!

[17:41] Scripture so Isaiah 53 9 we did see this a few weeks ago but let's see it again worth just going back and reading that verse Isaiah 53 verse 9 he was assigned a grave with the wicked that's that's where he should have been buried with the wicked with the other criminals but then it says and with the rich in his death and that's another detail that we don't get in Mark but we get in Matthew that Joseph was a rich man and you know he had to be rich to own a tomb like this well not quite the cardboard version here but because being buried in a tomb is expensive being buried in the UK is expensive enough burials on average cost five to six thousand pounds according to a quick very quick google search whilst the cremation is a lot cheaper for a tomb like Joseph's in

Jerusalem cut out of a rock in today's money some estimate that being around fifty to a hundred thousand dollars guess not much different in pounds that's huge huge cost and Nicodemus in John 19 who came along with all his spices that's potentially around a hundred to two hundred thousand dollars in today's money this is an extravagant burial extravagant costly sacrifice for these men it's amazing and Joseph himself as far as he's concerned at this point he's got to find a new tomb hasn't he he's giving up his own tomb but not only is it costly in terms of money but it's also reputationally costly that Joseph was willing to stand out by providing a tomb for a condemned hated and divisive figure

Joseph risked his reputation risked his reputation as a respected member of the Jerusalem council and for us if we're going to be followers of Jesus it's a costly thing Jesus calls us doesn't he to take up our cross and follow him after all he really has taken up his cross and died for us surely we can do that for him then that means to take up the willingness to suffer for him to risk our reputation amongst family amongst friends amongst colleagues even if it's not popular to be a follower of him I was reminded by during the week in preparing of this book a chap called

Nabal Qureshi seeking Allah and finding Jesus a story of him becoming a Christian and it's a long old journey and just want to read this little excerpt for you this is not when he's a Christian not yet but as he's considering the Christian faith he's considering the cost that it would bring to him these are the costs Muslims must calculate when considering the gospel losing the relationships that they built in this life potentially losing their afterlife in paradise if they've got it wrong it is no understatement to say that Muslims often risk everything to embrace the cross but then again it is the cross there is a reason Jesus said whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me would it be worth it to pick up my cross and be crucified next to Jesus if he is not God then no I'll lose everything I'll lose everything I love to worship a false God a million times over no but if he is God then yes being forever bonded to my Lord by suffering alongside him a million times over yes and in the end he did see that it was worth turning to the Lord Jesus he became convinced about he became convinced that the cost was worth it because surely Jesus is the son of God as the centurion there at the cross exclaimed final question is the tomb empty is the tomb empty because this passage it's

[ 23 : 40 ] Friday isn't it and as that wonderful poem it's Friday but Sunday is coming as it says towards the end it's Friday Jesus is buried a soldier stands guard and a rock is rolled into place but it's Friday it is only Friday Sunday is coming and today is Easter Sunday we know that Sunday did come and it's absolutely essential to know that this tomb is now empty verse 46 so Joseph brought some linen cloth took down the body wrapped it in the linen and placed it in a tomb cut out of the rock then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb it was rolled over it was sealed and this caused the women early on that

Sunday it caused them questions verse three who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb stone this was a problem for them it was a problem before them because as we saw they were the last people there they saw where he was laid they saw the tomb stone go over the grave! verse chapter 16 verse 4 the story continues but when they looked up they saw that the stone which was very large had been rolled away they weren't expecting this were they and as they entered the tomb they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side and they were alarmed don't be alarmed he said you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene who was crucified he has risen he is not here see the place where they laid him the women get to the tomb and he is not there it is empty that tomb was really just borrowed by Jesus wasn't it borrowed by Jesus because he didn't need it for very long Joseph could have it back

Jesus is risen he really had died it was no illusion Joseph Nicodemus the two Marys had seen Jesus had died and went all the way up with him to his burial they had seen the place where he was laid and now they're invited by the angel to go and see the place where he once laid the tomb is empty what an emotional weekend it had been for them hadn't it there at the cross seeing their beloved saviour the Lord Jesus die going with him to his burial and now the tomb is empty what do they do with that verse eight no wonder they feel this trembling and bewildered the women went out and fled from the tomb they said nothing to anyone because they were afraid probably questioning is this true have people come and taken the body what what's going on perplexed but we know from the details in other gospels that things do change

Jesus met Mary in the garden who then goes and tells the disciples and people begin to lay eyes on the risen Lord Jesus no more fear but awe and wonder and peace knowing that their saviour had

risen knowing that there is an empty tomb knowing that Jesus was with his people again it was absolutely necessary that Jesus was buried because it was absolutely necessary for our salvation that he died and it was vital that he was raised so that he can genuinely become our living risen saviour our living hope and all of this is a picture all of this is what happens to us when we come to find faith in

[ 28 : 42 ] Jesus so Romans chapter six verse four is worth reading as we come to an end Romans chapter six verse four we were therefore 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 for if we've been united with him in a death like his we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his verse six for we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with that we should no longer be slaves to sin because anyone who has died has been set free from sin what happened to

Jesus on that resurrection weekend happens to each one who comes to place their faith in him as their savior we die to our sin because our sins are nailed with him at the cross he bears the punishment that they deserve and it's like they are buried in the tomb of Jesus and then with Jesus we rise to new life in him and we are of course waiting for our sure and certain hope when we will be physically raised and given new bodies because of this glorious resurrection day because he once was in the tomb and now is not an empty grave as the hymn says is there to prove our savior lives and because he lives we can face tomorrow and because he lives all fear is gone because we know he holds the future and life is worth the living just because he lives can we respond by singing this hymn up from the grave he arose as the victor over all his foes he arose in triumph from the dark domain and he lives forever with his saints to reign he arose he arose hallelujah christ arose we'll sing this hymn and then we'll take a seat and we'll say some prayers together before we sing a final hymn!