Who Is Jesus
Part Seventeen / Wednesday, April 17, 2019

THE GRAVE OF JESUS AND THE MAN WHO GAVE IT TO HIM

Jesus died on Calvary’s cross around 3 p.m. on Friday, April 7, AD 30 - based on the most complete estimate available. Sabbath was only several hours away (Sundown Friday to Sundown Saturday). Something had to be done with Jesus’ body. Either family members or friends could claim it, or the corpse would simply be tossed into Gehenna’s burning valley like so much refuse. God assured us that we could know what happened:

Matthew 27:57-66

When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathaea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple: [58] He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered. [59] And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, [60] And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed. [61] And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre.

[62] Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, [63] Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. [64] Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. [65] Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can. [66] So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.

Joseph came from the town of Arimathea. Next week I will drive very close to it as we leave the beautiful Israel International Airport at Lod to head toward Jerusalem. Why would this apparently rich man, who had been at best a “secret disciple of Jesus” risk so much for the dead body of the Christ? If there was ever a man who was a “dark horse” to fill that role, it was Joseph of Arimathea! John 19:38 And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus.

So much is interesting about this man, Joseph. Most sources list him as a member of
The Garden Tomb of Jesus, located just outside the famed Damascus Gate in Jerusalem. Though we cannot be 100% certain of its authenticity, many Christians are convinced this was the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea where Jesus was placed instead. You can see the “trough” in front of the grave in which a large round stone could have been rolled to close its entrance.

the Jewish Sanhedren, the ruling 70-member (plus 1 - the High Priest, making 71 total). the Jewish rulers of Israel. About the only limitation to the power of this group was enacting capital punishment which could be done only by the Romans. The Sandredrin could decree a death verdict but were not allowed to carry it out. This was the group that sentenced Jesus to die. But only the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, could ratify it.

Pilate had Jesus stand before him twice that fateful Friday morning and, with no credible witnesses against Him, the fatal sentence was given.

Why did Pilate “cave in” to those clamoring for Jesus’ death?

I want to suggest my “opinion” on this. I cannot prove it, but there are tie-ins to a Roman authority who was slaughtered on about this same date. His name was Lucius Aelius Sejanus, chief administrator of the Roman Emperor Tiberius. It is alleged that Sejanus was the murderer of Tiberius’ only son, Drusus Caesar and suspect in a plot to overthrow Tiberius and become emperor himself. Just five years earlier, Sejanus had
been refused Tiberias’ permission to marry Drusus’ widow Lavilla (who may have been
Sejanus’ accomplice in the poisoning of her husband. Two years later, Sejanus
persuaded the emperor to leave Rome and take up residence on Capri. This gave him
room to continue his efforts at undermining Tiberias. However, he fell under the
suspicion of Tiberias who had him summarily executed. The Senate and population of
Rome rejoiced as his body was dragged through the streets and a long reign of terror
followed against Sejanus’ former friends in high places. Whom I suspect Pontius Pilate
was a part.

Now at Jesus’ trial, what did the crowd howl? “Pilate, if you let this Jesus go free, you
are no friend of Caesar!” Although Pilate was so far away from Rome, it might not have
originally been in Tiberias’ interest to pursue him, with this charge Pilate would never be
safe. Thus he quickly gave the crowd what it wanted. (Please remember, this is only
your pastor’s opinion and cannot be proven.)

More About Joseph of Arimathaea

How fulfilling it would be to have more reliable information about this man. There have
been numerous legends about him. One such story is that Joseph was a purveyor of tin-
or some similar metal who perhaps did business as far away as Britain. We do not know
that as a fact. But one thing is sure: he was wealthy enough to have prepared a rather
elaborate tomb for himself (and perhaps his wife as there was room for two bodies within
it), one that only a well-off person could have afforded.

Three O’clock That Fateful Day Of Days

Mid afternoon had come and three men were dying on crosses just outside the walls of
Jerusalem. With Sabbath and Passover at hand, the dying men would have to be lifeless
by nightfall. If the crucifixion itself had not killed them, the Roman executioners would
have to finish the killing by hand. Pilate had called two guards and told them to
accompany the priests back to Golgotha and there to apply the fatal board at once. One
of the executioners approached the dying man carrying a stout board about three feet
long. The thief on the cross saw him approach and knew what was about to happen: the
guard would break the thief’s legs with that board so that he could no longer stand on
them in order to draw in air into his tortured lungs – and - he would die shortly. The
thief’s eyes must have been filled with horror as he knew what was about to happen.
Now the guard moved to the man in the middle. Another guard carrying a spear waved
him off, crying out, “This man is dead already.” But to be sure, he took his lance
midway down the shaft and drew it back, aiming for the right side of the Messiah’s chest.
The spear drove inward between Jesus’ fifth and sixth ribs. It went through the pleura
This is the home just south of Jerusalem on Mount Zion known as Caiaphas' house. It is not the original, of course; that was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. However, the underground floors are the same as in Jesus' day and contain prison cells and the dungeon where we believe Jesus was held during the night before being taken to Pilate. The valley below is the Ophel, where David lived when he was King of Israel.

and the thin part of the lung and stopped in the pericardium. The right auricle of the human heart holds liquid blood after death and the outer sac holds a serum. When the soldier pulled the spear out of Jesus' chest, water and blood were seen to emerge and drip down the wide of our Lord's body. The pair then moved on to the third man on a cross who could only stare in mute horror as the man with the board took his stance beside him.... Syndicated columnist Jim Bishop from The Day Christ Died / pages 324-5 / Harper Publishing

None of Jesus' bones were broken, which fulfilled Scripture: John 19:33-36

But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: [34] But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. [35] And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. [36] For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken.

BUT NOW....WITH SABBATH AND PASSOVER APPROACHING, WHAT SHOULD BE DONE WITH THE BODY OF JESUS?
By law, the bodies of those executed by crucifixion were left on the crosses - food for overlying birds or roaming wild dogs....left there til there was nothing remaining or what was left of them had rotted away. This might have been the fate of our Lord’s body except for Joseph of Arimathea. Slipping through the gathering shadows in Jerusalem, Joseph went from street to street until he faced the forbidding Antonia Fortress which housed Pilate and his forces - and where his Lord Jesus had been whipped almost to death earlier that day. It must have taken incredible courage for him to enter that hated building - but he had a mission and that was to obtain the body of his Lord.

Pilate was surprised that Christ had died so quickly; often crucified victims remained alive for two or three days. Events at the cross around 3 that afternoon dispelled any notion that Jesus remained alive. He was dead! Of that the Romans were sure.

Jesus had not perished as most victims of the cross did. It was a shocking ending:

Matthew 27:51-54

And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; [52] And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, [53] And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. [54] Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.

Let’s discuss that earthquake for a moment:

1. The great veil of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. That was the veil that covered the Holy of Holies. No one could ever pass that point save the High Priest once a year. In that room was the Ark of the Covenant (until Babylon invaded) which contained the Ark of the Covenant. It was believed that the physical presence of God filled that Holy Room. But remember - you and I, nor anyone but the priest, could enter into the presence of God. All of us were stopped by that massive, heavy drapery. But at the death of Jesus, THAT BARRIER WAS DESTROYED, which meant we all could come to God. Hebrews 4:14-16 Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. [15] For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. [16] Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. The death of Jesus opened the portals of God’s presence for everyone of us - yes, even to come boldly into the throne of God.
2. Nearby graves were opened! So what happened to those saints who were brought back to life? Referring again to the raising of Lazarus from the dead: He was brought back to life, but not resurrected. All those saints later died and have remained in their tombs. That’s not resurrection! As Paul taught us, this is resurrection: 1 Cor. 15:42-44 So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: [43] It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: [44] It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. Yes, God raised those saints from their graves for a time only; but they still died later and remain in their tombs. But at the great resurrection, there will be NO RETURN to graves. As Paul taught us, we died when our bodies perished. But our new resurrected bodies will never perish again!

3. A centurion was usually an educated, courageous and faithful part of the Roman army. The centurion overseeing Jesus’ death declared, “Truly this man was the Son of God!” Matthew 27:54 Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.

One More Huge Earthquake To Come!

Zech. 14:1-5

Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. [2] For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. [3] Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle.

[4] And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south. [5] And ye shall flee to the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah: and the Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with thee.

Remember, when we meet the Lord in the air, that event is known as THE RAPTURE. But there is yet another event: when Jesus comes back to this earth physically! And who have earlier been raptured come with Him. Jesus’ feet will once again touch the summit of the Mount of Olives - just as the angels told the disciples: Acts 1:10-11 And while
they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; [11] Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

THE TOMB

John 19:40-42

Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. [41] Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. [42] There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand.

There are two sites in Jerusalem purported to be the possible locations of Jesus' tomb. One is the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, revered by Greek Orthodox, Armenian and Roman Catholic people. It is located inside the walls of Jerusalem and has some history behind it. However, in your wildest imagination you cannot create this site as that which
you read in Scripture. Just outside of the Damascus Gate, however, is Gordon’s Calvary, named after Major-General Charles Gordon, who visited Jerusalem in 1883, just a few years after the Civil War in America. When he first saw “Skull Hill” (Calvary), he wrote to his sister on January 17, 1883: *I feel, for myself, convinced that the Hill near the Damascus Gate is Golgotha. From it, you can see the Temple, the Mount of Olives and the bulk of Jerusalem. His (Jesus’) outstretched arms would, as it were, embrace it.*

Gordon’s Calvary, the garden tomb as it’s also known, corresponds to John’s description in his Gospel: John 19:41 *Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid.* John specified that Jesus’ tomb was located in a garden. There is a winepress and huge cistern there which have been cited as evidence that the area had once been exactly what John wrote: a garden!

The Garden Tomb is beautifully maintained by the Garden Tomb Association, a charitable British Trust which has faithfully cared for this place for well over a hundred years. There is no charge asked for visiting the place; however, offerings are accepted for the ongoing care of this holy site.

**FEAR IN PILATE’S PALACE**

Matthew 27:62–66

*Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, [63] Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. [64] Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. [65] Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can. [66] So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.*

This scripture relates that the chief priests and Pharisees went to Pilate on the next day, the day after the preparation for Sabbath. Jesus was crucified on the Friday, the day the Sabbath began at sundown. The hours from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. on Friday were called “The Eve” or The Preparation of the coming holy day, which we have already noted, would start at 6 p.m. - sundown. This means that the chief priests and Pharisees cut it very close: they broke the Sabbath Law by actually going into the Antonia Fortress - Pilate’s headquarters next to the Temple. This violated their own religious laws. This shows how desperately these authorities wanted to eliminate Jesus. In order to assure this happening,
they would even violate one of their most sacred laws.

Note their fear: They approached the Roman governor by quoting Jesus that He would rise after three days. They wanted special steps taken to assure everyone that this could never, never happen. The door of the tomb was therefore covered with a great round stone, and a seal and special guard would watch over it until those days ended. They could not comprehend that there was not a tomb in the world that could imprison the Living Son of God.

*In the next few days, I and those joining me in Israel will spend vital time in the Garden and in the Tomb. We will be given a special private place there in order to conduct a communion service as well as rejoice in the Resurrection of our King. Our next study in this series, “Who Is Jesus?” will be Wednesday evening, May 15th, the day we return from the Land of our Lord. We will have so much to tell you!*
Diagram of the Tomb

1 Entrance to antechamber
2 Low threshold to burial chamber
3 Low rock walls
4 Loculus (burial niche)
5 Slit for vertical stone slab
6 Antechamber (weeping chamber)
7 Small window