

The Gospel of Matthew, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 38: The Burial and the Guard

Matthew 27:57–66

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, this short passage carries more weight than it first appears. Its central concern is the reality of Jesus' death and burial, which is essential to the gospel itself. Paul lists it among the matters "of first importance": Christ died for our sins, He was buried, and He was raised on the third day (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). The burial is not a footnote; it confirms that Jesus genuinely died, ruling out the notion that He merely fainted, and it sets up the empty tomb. Matthew deliberately records the sealed stone and the posted guard, because these very precautions, taken by the enemies of Jesus, will become powerful evidence for the resurrection. When the stone is found rolled away with the guard in place, no honest account can claim the body was simply taken. God turns the schemes of His opponents into testimony for the truth they tried to suppress.

At the same time, this passage is rich for the formation of the student. Joseph of Arimathea is a striking model of quiet, courageous discipleship. He believed for a long time in secret, but when it cost the most and gained the least, he stepped into the open and gave his wealth, his reputation, and his own grave to honor his Lord. He challenges every believer who has kept their faith comfortably private. And the silence of Saturday speaks tenderly to every student who is living through a season when God seems absent and nothing appears to be happening. The disciples did not yet know Sunday was coming; neither do we always see what God is doing. This passage teaches us to wait in the dark with hope, trusting the God who keeps His word.

So teach for both. Help your students grasp why the death and burial of Christ matter and how God turned the guarded tomb into evidence for the resurrection. And press the passage into their lives, calling the timid toward bolder discipleship and the discouraged toward faithful, hopeful waiting in the silence before the dawn.

Question 1

Student Question:

Joseph of Arimathea is introduced as a wealthy council member and "a disciple of Jesus" who boldly asked Pilate for the body (27:57–58). What does his courageous step, taken when there was nothing to gain, teach us about what genuine discipleship can look like?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with Joseph of Arimathea, a man Matthew introduces precisely at the moment of greatest cost. He is "a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of

Jesus" (27:57). The other Gospels add that he was a respected member of the council, the very body that had just condemned Jesus, and that he had been a disciple secretly, for fear of the leaders (John 19:38; Luke 23:50–51).

Let your students feel the timing. Joseph steps forward not when Jesus is popular, surrounded by crowds and miracles, but when Jesus is a condemned criminal hanging dead on a cross. This is the worst possible moment to declare allegiance. There is nothing to gain and everything to lose: his standing on the council, his reputation, his safety. And it is exactly here that Joseph goes public, "boldly" asking Pilate for the body (Mark 15:43).

This redefines what genuine discipleship can look like. We often imagine bold faith as dramatic and loud. Joseph's courage is quiet but real: a man who had believed in the background now lays everything on the line in a single costly act of devotion. The crisis did not destroy his faith; it brought it out into the open. Sometimes the deepest discipleship shows itself not in good times but precisely when following Jesus costs the most.

Hold Joseph up without despising his earlier quietness too harshly. There is a place for honesty about timid faith, but the emphasis here is on grace and growth: a secret disciple who finally stepped forward. God can take a long-quiet believer and bring their courage to full flower at just the right moment. The question for your class is whether they will step forward when their moment comes.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Genuine discipleship that counts the cost and steps forward when it is most expensive (Luke 14:27)
- Courageous confession of Christ over the fear of human opinion (Matthew 10:32)
- God bringing long-quiet faith to bold expression at the right time
- The fulfillment of Scripture in Jesus being buried by the rich (Isaiah 53:9)
- Devotion to Christ expressed in concrete, costly action

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it striking that Joseph stepped forward at the very moment following Jesus cost the most?
- What does Joseph teach us about the difference between quiet faith and cowardly silence?
- When have you seen someone's faith show itself most clearly in a hard or costly moment?

Question 2

Student Question:

Joseph had quietly believed for a long time before he finally stood up to be counted. Where in your own life is Jesus calling you to move from quiet, private faith to open, costly identification with Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes Joseph's costly step and turns it toward the student. Many believers hold a faith that is real but quiet, private, kept carefully out of view at work, among neighbors, even within the extended family. Joseph reminds us that there comes a time to stand up and be counted.

Help students locate their own arenas of hidden faith. For one it is the workplace, where no colleague knows they are a Christian. For another it is a friendship or a family relationship where faith has never been openly mentioned. For another it is the simple step of public confession and baptism they have long delayed, or a return to faithful, visible commitment to the Lord's church after drifting.

Be clear about why open identification matters. Jesus said, "Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven" (Matthew 10:32). Faith is meant to be confessed, not hidden indefinitely. This is not a call to obnoxious display but to honest, courageous identification with Christ when the moment calls for it.

Press gently for one concrete step. What would it look like, this week, for each student to move from private belief to open confession in some specific place? Perhaps a conversation, a willingness to be known as a Christian, a long-postponed obedience. Like Joseph, the time to step into the light eventually comes.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The call to confess Christ openly rather than hide our faith (Matthew 10:32–33)
- Costly, public identification with Jesus as a mark of discipleship
- The difference between wise discretion and fearful, indefinite concealment
- Obedience that steps from private belief into visible commitment

Discussion Prompts

- Where is your faith currently more private than it should be?
- What is one specific, costly step toward openly identifying with Jesus you could take this week?
- What fear most holds you back from being known as a follower of Christ?

Question 3

Student Question:

Matthew notes that Jesus was laid in Joseph's own new tomb, cut in the rock (27:59–60), and was "assigned a grave with the rich" just as Isaiah foretold (Isaiah 53:9). What does the care and dignity of Jesus' burial show us, and how does it fit God's larger plan?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Turn now to the burial itself and the care it shows. Joseph “took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock” (27:59–60). John adds that Nicodemus came too, bringing a costly mixture of myrrh and aloes (John 19:39). Two members of the council tenderly prepare and honor the body of their crucified Lord.

Note the dignity given to Jesus in death. Crucified criminals were often denied honorable burial, sometimes left exposed or cast into common graves. Instead, Jesus is wrapped in clean linen and laid in a rich man’s new tomb. The Lord who had nowhere to lay His head in life is given an honored resting place in death, by disciples who loved Him.

Show your students how this fulfills Scripture. Isaiah had said of the suffering servant, “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” (Isaiah 53:9). Condemned with criminals, yet buried in a rich man’s tomb, Jesus fulfills the prophecy with precision. Even the details of His burial were woven into God’s long-laid plan.

Draw out the comfort here. Nothing in Jesus’ death was out of God’s control, not even the place of His grave. The same God who ordained the cross ordained the tomb, and He was working His purposes even in the quiet act of a faithful man laying the body to rest. God’s plan runs through the smallest details, including those that look, at the time, like nothing more than grief and loss.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The genuine death of Christ, confirmed by His burial (1 Corinthians 15:3–4)
- The dignity and care given to Jesus’ body fulfilling prophecy (Isaiah 53:9)
- God’s sovereign plan reaching even into the details of the burial
- Faithful disciples honoring Christ in concrete, sacrificial acts
- The unity of Scripture: prophecy fulfilled in the burial of the Messiah

Discussion Prompts

- What does the care taken in Jesus’ burial reveal about the love of His disciples?
- How does the fulfillment of Isaiah 53:9 strengthen your confidence in Scripture?
- What comfort is there in knowing even the details of Jesus’ death were in God’s plan?

Question 4

Student Question:

Joseph gave his wealth, his reputation, and even his own grave to honor Jesus. What is God asking you to offer Him from your own resources, comfort, or standing for the sake of Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes Joseph’s lavish, costly generosity and presses it on the student. Joseph gave a great deal: his wealth in the costly burial, his reputation in publicly

aligning with a crucified man, and his own new tomb, a grave he had prepared for himself, now given to his Lord. He held nothing back.

Help students see that Christ has a claim on all that we are and have. The question is not whether we will give God something, but what we are holding back. For one it is money, tightly guarded. For another it is reputation, protected from any association that might cost social standing. For another it is comfort, time, or a treasured plan we are unwilling to surrender.

Use Joseph's tomb as a vivid image. He gave the very place meant for his own body. What is the equivalent for each student, the thing they assumed was theirs, set aside for themselves, that the Lord might be asking them to offer for His sake? Generosity toward Christ often means giving exactly what we had reserved for ourselves.

Keep the motive clear. We do not give to earn God's favor; we give because He first gave Himself for us. Joseph's lavishness flowed from love for Jesus. Genuine sacrifice for Christ is never a transaction; it is the natural overflow of a heart that has grasped what He gave. Invite students to name one specific thing they will offer the Lord this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ's claim on all that we are and have (Romans 12:1)
- Sacrificial generosity as the overflow of love for Jesus
- Identifying and surrendering what we have held back from God
- Giving as a response to grace, not a means of earning favor (2 Corinthians 8:9)

Discussion Prompts

- What are you most tempted to hold back from God: money, reputation, comfort, or plans?
- What is the equivalent of Joseph's own tomb, the thing you reserved for yourself, that Christ may be asking for?
- What is one specific thing you will offer the Lord this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Afraid that the disciples might steal the body, the leaders sealed the stone and posted a guard to make the tomb "as secure as you know how" (27:65–66). How does God characteristically work through the very efforts of those who oppose Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Now turn to the leaders' attempt to secure the tomb. Anxious that the disciples might steal the body and claim a resurrection, the chief priests and Pharisees go to Pilate, who tells them, "Take a guard. Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how." So they seal the stone and post the guard (27:65–66). They intend to slam the door on the whole affair forever.

Help your students see the deep irony, which is a pattern throughout Scripture. The enemies of Jesus, by their very efforts to suppress the truth, end up serving it. They wanted to prevent any claim of resurrection. Instead, by sealing the stone and posting trained soldiers, they made it impossible for anyone to later argue that the body was quietly stolen. Their precaution became God's evidence.

This is how God characteristically works. He is not thwarted by opposition; He weaves it into His purposes. Joseph's brothers meant to harm him, but God meant it for good (Genesis 50:20). Haman built a gallows for Mordecai and hung on it himself. The leaders sealed the tomb to bury the story, and turned their seal into a witness. The schemes of those who oppose God do not derail His plan; they advance it.

There is great comfort here for believers. We do not need to fear that the opposition of the world can defeat the purposes of God. The God who turned a guarded tomb into proof of the resurrection is more than able to bring His good purposes to pass through, and even by means of, those who set themselves against Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God turning the schemes of His opponents into the advance of His purposes (Genesis 50:20)
- The sovereignty of God over the opposition of human beings (Psalm 2:1-4)
- The enemies' precautions becoming evidence for the resurrection
- God's purposes never thwarted by those who set themselves against Him (Acts 4:27-28)
- Confidence for believers that opposition cannot defeat God's plan

Discussion Prompts

- How did the leaders' attempt to bury the story end up serving the truth?
- Where in Scripture or in life have you seen God turn opposition into good?
- How does this pattern give you confidence when God's purposes seem under threat?

Question 6

Student Question:

The leaders trusted their seal and their soldiers to keep Jesus in the grave. Where are you tempted to trust your own efforts to control or secure an outcome that ultimately rests in God's hands?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes the leaders' misplaced confidence in their seal and soldiers and turns it on the student. They trusted their own measures to control an outcome that was never in their hands. We do the same in subtler ways, trusting our own efforts to secure what ultimately rests with God.

Help students recognize their own seals and guards. For one it is obsessive worry, trying to control a child, a relationship, or a future by sheer mental effort. For another it is overwork, trying to secure financial safety as if everything depended on them. For another it is manipulation or control of people and circumstances, an anxious grasping to make sure things turn out the way they want.

Draw the contrast with trust. The opposite of the leaders' frantic securing is the rest of a heart that commits its way to God. Jesus taught us not to be anxious, because our Father knows what we need (Matthew 6:31–33). Peter urges us to cast all our anxiety on Him, because He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). There is freedom in releasing what we were never meant to carry.

Be gentle and practical. This is not a call to passivity or carelessness but to faithful effort held with open hands, doing our part while trusting God with the outcome. Invite students to name one specific outcome they have been trying to control, and one concrete way they can entrust it to God instead.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The futility of trusting our own efforts to control what belongs to God (Proverbs 16:9)
- Anxiety and control as misplaced trust in ourselves
- Casting our cares on God who genuinely cares for us (1 Peter 5:7)
- Faithful effort held with open hands, trusting God with the results

Discussion Prompts

- What outcome are you currently trying hardest to control on your own?
- What does your version of the seal and the guard look like?
- What is one specific way you could entrust that outcome to God this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

The enemies meant the guard and the seal to bury the story for good, yet these precautions became powerful evidence for the resurrection they were trying to prevent. What does this teach us about the certainty and the public, verifiable nature of the resurrection?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This doctrinal question looks ahead to what the guarded tomb makes possible: a resurrection that is certain and publicly verifiable. The leaders' precautions, intended to prevent a false resurrection claim, end up guaranteeing that the real resurrection cannot be dismissed as theft or legend.

Walk students through the logic. The leaders themselves named the alternative explanation in advance: the disciples might steal the body (27:64). To rule it out, they sealed the stone and

posted a guard of trained soldiers. So when the tomb is found empty, with the seal broken and the guard present, the one explanation the enemies feared is precisely the one their own measures eliminated. They built the case against their own later cover story.

Stress the public, verifiable nature of this. The resurrection is not a private vision or a vague inner feeling; it concerns a real body, a real tomb, a real seal, and real witnesses, in a known place at a known time. Paul could later appeal to more than five hundred witnesses, most still living (1 Corinthians 15:6). Christianity rests not on myth but on a historical event open to investigation.

Help your class see why this matters for faith. Our hope is not wishful thinking; it is anchored in something that actually happened. The same enemies who tried to keep Jesus in the grave unwittingly left us evidence that He did not stay there. God so arranged events that the resurrection stands on solid, testable ground, and our faith with it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The resurrection as a real, historical, publicly verifiable event
- The guard and seal eliminating the very theft theory the enemies feared
- Eyewitness testimony as the foundation of the resurrection claim (1 Corinthians 15:3–8)
- Christian faith grounded in historical fact rather than myth or feeling
- God arranging even the opposition to establish the certainty of the resurrection

Discussion Prompts

- How did the guard and the seal actually strengthen the case for the resurrection?
- Why does it matter that the resurrection is a public, historical event and not just a feeling?
- How does the evidence for the resurrection strengthen your own faith?

Question 8

Student Question:

The disciples spent that Saturday in grief and confusion, not yet understanding that Sunday was coming. When God seems silent and a situation looks hopeless, how do you tend to respond, and what would trusting Him in the silence look like instead?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question enters the silence of Saturday, the long in-between day. The disciples lived through that Saturday in grief and confusion. Their Lord was dead and buried. They did not yet know that Sunday was coming. To them it was simply the end, a day of crushing loss with no visible hope.

Help students recognize their own Saturdays. There are seasons when God seems silent, when prayers go unanswered, when a situation looks hopeless and nothing appears to be happening.

The illness drags on. The prodigal does not come home. The grief does not lift. The waiting stretches with no sign of change. These are Saturday seasons, lived between the loss and the dawn.

Ask honestly how each tends to respond. Some despair and conclude God has abandoned them or does not care. Some grow bitter or drift from faith. Some try to force a resolution in their own strength. Name these tendencies gently, so students can recognize themselves without shame.

Then offer the better way: waiting in the silence with hope. We have an advantage the disciples lacked, for we know Sunday came. We know that God was working in the very silence that looked like defeat. So we can wait, as Lamentations says, quietly for the salvation of the Lord, trusting that His mercies are new every morning and that He is good to those who wait for Him (Lamentations 3:22–26). The silence is not the end of the story. Sunday is coming.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faithful, hopeful waiting on God in seasons of silence (Lamentations 3:25–26)
- God at work even when nothing appears to be happening
- The temptation to despair, bitterness, or self-reliance in the waiting
- Hope grounded in the God who keeps His word and brings the dawn (Psalm 30:5)

Discussion Prompts

- Where in your life are you living through a long, silent Saturday right now?
- How do you tend to respond when God seems silent and a situation looks hopeless?
- What would it look like to wait in that silence with hope rather than despair?

Question 9

Student Question:

Christ truly died and was truly buried; the sealed and guarded tomb makes that certain (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). Why does the genuine death and burial of Jesus matter so much for the gospel, what hope does the silent tomb hold even before Sunday, and how does the New Testament connect Christ's burial and resurrection to the way we are saved?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal question of the lesson, so give it the fullest care. It draws together the reality of Jesus' burial, the hope hidden in the silent tomb, and the way the New Testament connects Christ's burial and resurrection to our salvation. Take your time with each strand.

Begin with why the genuine death and burial of Jesus matter. Paul places it among the matters of first importance: "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day" (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). The burial confirms that Jesus truly died; He did not merely faint or swoon. A sealed and guarded tomb leaves no room for the idea that

He was somehow still alive. If Jesus did not really die, He did not really bear our sins, and there is no real resurrection to follow. The burial guarantees the reality of the death on which our salvation rests, and it sets the stage for the empty tomb that will vindicate it all.

Then draw out the hope the silent tomb holds even before Sunday. To every eye, the buried, sealed, guarded tomb looked like final defeat. But God was not finished. The very stillness that seemed to spell the end was the quiet before the greatest victory in history. This is the pattern of our hope: God brings life out of death, dawn out of darkness, resurrection out of the grave. The silence of Saturday is never the last word for those who belong to Him.

Now connect Christ's burial and resurrection to how we are saved, and let Scripture set the pattern clearly. The New Testament ties our salvation directly to union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, and it locates that union in baptism. Paul writes, "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 have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Romans 6:4-5). In baptism, the believer who has heard the gospel, believed that Jesus is the Christ, repented, and confessed Him as Lord is buried with Christ and raised to walk in newness of life. The buried and risen Lord saves us by uniting us to His own burial and resurrection.

Teach this as a free gift received through an obedient, living faith, never as a work that earns salvation. We bring nothing to merit it; we simply come to Christ on His terms, trusting and obeying the gospel (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:26-27; Mark 16:16). Keep the tone full of wonder and hope. The tomb that looked like the end was the doorway to life, and through baptism into the buried and risen Christ, His victory becomes ours. Even now, in our own Saturdays, we wait as people who know the grave could not hold Him, and one day will not hold us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The genuine death and burial of Christ as essential to the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)
- The burial confirming a real death, ruling out the idea that Jesus merely swooned
- Hope in the silent tomb: God bringing life out of death and victory out of apparent defeat
- Union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection through baptism (Romans 6:3-5)
- Salvation received through hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, and being baptized into Christ (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:26-27)
- Salvation as a free gift of grace received through an obedient faith, never earned by works (Mark 16:16)

Discussion Prompts

- Why does it matter so much for the gospel that Jesus genuinely died and was buried?
- What hope does the silent, sealed tomb hold even before Sunday arrives?
- How does the New Testament connect Christ's burial and resurrection to the way we are saved?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over this quiet, in-between scene: the courageous burial, the sealed tomb, the waiting silence. Name one specific way Jesus is forming your heart through it, whether toward bolder discipleship, deeper trust in the silence, or surer hope in the God who keeps His word.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Use this capstone to gather the whole quiet, in-between scene and press it toward the heart. The class has watched Joseph's courageous burial, the sealing of the tomb, and the descent into the silence of Saturday. The aim now is not to add information but to invite transformation.

Encourage students to be specific. A real answer might sound like, "I have kept my faith too private, and like Joseph I will step forward and be known as a follower of Jesus," or "I am in a long, silent Saturday, and I will choose to wait with hope rather than give in to despair," or "I have been trusting my own efforts to control an outcome, and I will entrust it to God."

Give people room to let it land. A moment of silence to write one sentence before sharing often yields the most honest and lasting fruit. The goal is that each person leaves with one clear way they are responding to the Christ this passage reveals.

Close with hope, for that is the note this scene finally strikes. The tomb is sealed and the guard is set, but Sunday is coming. Lead your class to wait as people who know how the story ends, trusting the God who keeps His word and brings life out of the grave. Let every step of obedience and every act of patient waiting flow from that confident hope.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The integration of doctrine and daily transformation
- Bolder discipleship, hopeful waiting, and deeper trust as fruit of this passage
- Hope in the faithful God as the proper note on which to wait
- The lifelong process of being formed into the likeness of Christ

Discussion Prompts

- Which part of this scene speaks to you most, and what is Jesus saying to you through it?
- What specific step will you take this week in response?
- How can this class pray for you as you take that step?