

The Gospel of Matthew

Lesson 38: The Burial and the Guard -- Matthew 27:57-66

The loud part is over. The shouting crowds have gone home. The soldiers have finished their grim work. And in the heavy quiet of late afternoon, Matthew introduces a man we have not met before: Joseph of Arimathea. He is rich, he is a member of the council, and he is, Matthew tells us, “a disciple of Jesus” (27:57). For three years he has believed quietly, perhaps fearfully, keeping his head down. But now, on the darkest day, when following Jesus could only cost and never gain, this quiet man steps into the light.

Watch what courage looks like. Joseph goes to Pilate, the very governor who just signed the execution, and asks for the body of Jesus (27:58). It is a bold, public request that aligns him forever with a condemned and crucified man. Pilate grants it. And Joseph takes the body, wraps it in clean linen, and lays it in his own new tomb, cut out of the rock (27:59-60). The man who had so much to lose gives his wealth, his reputation, and his own grave to honor the One the world has thrown away. He rolls a great stone across the entrance and goes away, and two faithful women, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, sit watching across from the tomb (27:61).

Then the scene shifts back to the leaders, and something strange happens. The very next day, the chief priests and Pharisees go to Pilate, troubled. They remember that Jesus said He would rise after three days (27:63). So they ask for the tomb to be made secure, lest the disciples steal the body and claim a resurrection. Pilate gives them a guard and tells them to make it as secure as they know how. So they go, seal the stone, and post the guard (27:65-66). They mean to bury the story for good. They have no idea they are setting the stage for it.

And so the long silence of Saturday settles in. The Savior lies in a borrowed tomb behind a sealed stone, guarded by soldiers. To everyone watching, it looks like the end. The enemies feel they have won. The disciples are scattered and grieving. But God is not finished, and the enemies' own precautions, the seal and the guard, will become unanswerable evidence that no one stole the body when the stone is found rolled away. For now, though, all is quiet. This is the day of waiting, the in-between day, when faith must hold on in the dark and trust the God who keeps His word even when nothing seems to be happening.

Group Discussion: For three years Joseph of Arimathea followed Jesus quietly, perhaps out of fear. Yet on the darkest day, when there was nothing to gain, he stepped forward publicly to honor Jesus. Why do you think it was this moment, of all moments, that finally drew his courage out into the open?

Personal Reflection: Saturday was the day of silence, when Jesus lay in the tomb and nothing seemed to be happening, yet God was very much at work. Where in your life are you living

through a long, silent Saturday right now, and what would it look like to wait there with hope rather than despair?

Read Matthew 27:57–66

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?

7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Isaiah 53:9, the servant assigned a grave with the rich though He had done no violence; John 19:38–42, the fuller account of Joseph and Nicodemus burying Jesus; 1 Corinthians 15:3–4, the gospel that Christ died, was buried, and was raised on the third day; Romans 6:3–5, our burial and raising with Christ pictured in baptism; Lamentations 3:21–26, the hope that waits quietly for the Lord in the dark.