

Review

Last time, we were exposed to the brutality of the death of Jesus by torture and crucifixion. Fortunately, the story picks up wonderfully from here!

27:55-56 Women Who Followed Jesus

Remember that in that day and age, men would not talk to women in public. But Jesus never refrained from talking with women publicly - He always reached out to them compassionately. The woman at the well, the woman caught in the act of adultery, the woman with the issue of blood. He made women a key part of His ministry. As a result, many women had followed after Jesus. Ultimately, in world history, it was Christianity which made women free and equal, both in society and the kingdom of God.

When Jesus was crucified, it is no wonder that many of the women who had followed Jesus were watching.

27:57-58 Joseph Asks For The Body

A rich man of Arimathea, named Joseph, is suddenly thrust into the limelight. He'd spent a lot of time hiding from it. You see, Joseph was a prominent member of the Council (Mark 15:43) - the same Council that had obtained false testimony against Jesus and ordered His death (Luke 22:71). He had not consented to their plan (Luke 23:51), but he was afraid of the Jews (John 19:38).

He had believed in Jesus, becoming a disciple, but a secret one. But now was "do or die" time. He realized that it was time to go public.

You see, evening was coming, and the way the calendar had fallen, there were two Sabbath days in a row about to begin. No one would have the time to give Jesus a proper burial, and if no one claimed His body, the Romans would just bury Him in a common grave with the other criminals who were put to death that day.

And so, he decided to come out of hiding as a disciple of Jesus. He gathered up his courage (Mark 15:43), went in to the governor, Pontius Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. His request was granted.

27:59-61 The Burial Of Christ

There was almost no time to work before the sun set and the sabbath began. And so Joseph used his own new tomb in which to bury Jesus.

This turns out to be a fulfillment of prophecy. Isaiah foretold the conditions of Christ's death as...

Is. 53:9 His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death...

Jesus was crucified between two thieves, yet He was buried in this rich man's tomb.

Although Joseph - along with Nicodemus the Pharisee, another "secret disciple" - took care to wrap Jesus' body in a clean linen cloth and to bind in about a hundred pounds of spices (John 19:39-40), some of the women made note of where the tomb was, because they were going to come back. They were planning to come back after the two Sabbaths and anoint His body with more spices and perfumes (Luke 23:56).

As the sun set, the men rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and returned home.

27:62-66 Guarding The Tomb

It was the next day, the first day of the official feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev. 23:5-7). Though it is a bit confusing, the entire Passover season was often called Unleavened Bread (Matt. 26:17; Mark 14:1; 14:12; Luke 22:1; 22:7; etc.).

Although it was a Friday, most of the Jews were not out and about, because it was a day of holy convocation, a special Sabbath when no work was to be done. But this didn't stop the chief priests and Pharisees from meeting with Pilate to discuss a problem.

They had heard testimony the night before last about Jesus. Two witnesses claimed,

Matt. 26:61 ...“This man stated, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days.’”

It was clear that...

John 2:21 ...He was speaking of the temple of His body.

But the Jews pretended not to understand what He meant, so that they could accuse Him of threatening to destroy the temple - a building revered by the Jews and paid for by the Romans. In fact, they had understood clearly that Jesus was speaking of His body, which would be raised up from the dead in three days. They proved that they understood it when they went to Pilate and said,

Matt. 27:63 ...“Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I am to rise again.’”

They knew it, and they knew that everyone else knew it. So, to keep anything from happening on the third day, they insisted that Roman guards be posted at the tomb.

A seal was set on the stone of the tomb. This was a clear indication that anyone passing this point would be punished. A similar seal was used in earlier times, when King Darius had Daniel imprisoned in the lions' den.

Dan. 6:17 A stone was brought and laid over the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signet rings of his nobles, so that nothing would be changed in regard to Daniel.

A modern-day application would be the notices that are posted on houses by the police. "Warning. This house has been deemed off-limits by the police department. Entry will result in fine or imprisonment." And just to make sure no one goes in, they post three or four cops outside with guns! They had done everything they could do to insure that no one broke into the tomb to steal the body.

Of course, there was nothing that could be done if the body had wanted to break out of the tomb...

28:1-7 The Angel

Finally, both the Friday special sabbath for Unleavened Bread and the regular Saturday sabbath were over. Early on Sunday morning, the women came to the grave. But what they found wasn't at all what they'd expected.

They saw Roman guards incapacitated with fear. They saw the stone rolled away and an angel sitting on it. They saw that the tomb was empty.

The angel told them to tell the disciple that Jesus had risen from the dead.

28:8-10 Seeing Jesus

As they ran to tell the others about Jesus' resurrection, they saw Jesus.

28:11-15 The Denial Of The Resurrection

Meanwhile, the guards who had been posted at the tomb came back and reported what had happened. The chief priests and elders concocted a story that the guards had fallen asleep while on duty. They had to pay the guards a huge sum of money to make this claim, because falling asleep on duty in the Roman army was punishable by death. Besides, since the guard had been under the oversight of the Jews, the Jews weren't going to tell on them to Pilate.

And so this is Matthew's account of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Now, in recent years, I have heard many critics complain that there is no proof of the resurrection. And unfortunately, many Christians today can't - or won't - defend the historical fact that Jesus resurrected. That Jesus not only appeared to the women and the disciples, but it was proven as historical fact that he appeared to more than five hundred people at one time, most of whom were still alive and giving eye-witness testimony during the days of the apostle Paul (1Cor. 15:6).

Instead, what I have seen is people making an incredibly lame defense for their Christianity. They say to the unbeliever, "Well, if I'm wrong about the resurrection, at least I've lived a better life."

Do you know that if you make that statement, you're not only offering a pitiful argument, but you're not even presenting Christianity in truth?

Paul told the Corinthians,

1Cor. 15:17-19 and if Christ has not been raised, your faith

is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

Living the Christian life means self-denial. It means the pleasures of sin are not available to you. It means giving up what the world views as many of the best things in life. Do you really want to say, "Hey, maybe there is no resurrection. But at least I've gotten to suffer ill-treatment, and deny myself the pleasures of sin!" No, if there is no resurrection, then we are of all men most to be pitied. We've completely wasted our lives on fiction.

No, my life is being lived for a living Savior who has promised me eternal life.