

Our **GUIDE**

for little ones

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IN THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

Lesson 54

With the Rich in His Death

Matthew 27:55-61

Jesus has died.

What, now, will happen to His *body*?

That's an important question. Jesus must, of course, be *buried*. But what *kind* of a burial is He going to get?

Will His *disciples* be able to give Him a decent burial? No, His disciples, except for John, are not even *there*. They have scattered.

What about the *women*? They had done so much to serve Him while He was yet *alive*. Can they now honor Him in His death? No, they were watching, helplessly, from a distance. They knew that *they* could not interfere with what was going on at the cross. And John, who was close by the cross, probably thought the same thing. Everything

seemed to be so much *out of their hands*. Jesus' enemies are in *control*.

Who, then, *will* bury Jesus? The Roman *soldiers* will. It's their job. Pilate has commanded them to break the bones of the men on the crosses, so that they will die sooner, so that their bodies and the crosses can be removed by the end of the day. The soldiers are carrying out those orders. Soon they will take down the three bodies, drag them away, drop all three into one hole in the ground, and cover them up.

Would that be right?



Note to Parents: These papers are intended for the younger Sunday School students — grade 3 and below. Vocabulary and concepts are such that children in this age group, even the 3rd graders, will profit most if the stories are read *to* them, not *by* them. Most lessons have two stories, for two sittings if that proves to be beneficial. Our hope is that parents will find these lessons to be useful tools in the teaching of Bible stories and Bible truths to their children in the “off” season.

What do you think — if it was *right* for Jesus to be *crucified* with sinners, would it not be right *also* for Him to be *buried* with them? No, it wouldn't. Let's try to understand why not.

When Jesus was put on the cross, He *belonged* with malefactors. Not because He had sins of His *own*, but because He had all of *ours*. When He was on the cross He was under the wrath of God — as if He were the *chief* of criminals. But when He said, "It is finished!" the wrath was *gone*. All of it — because those *sins* were gone. No longer, therefore, did Jesus *belong with criminals*. He must not be dumped in a common pit with them and just covered up. He must be given an *honorable* burial.

In fact, Isaiah had predicted that He would. His grave, the prophet said, will be "with the *rich* in his death." Can you believe that? With the *rich*.

But how can that happen? It seems that there's no one at the cross who can do that. Unless someone with *authority* steps up, Jesus will very soon be buried, not with the *rich*, but with the *malefactors*.

But God is in control. The prophecy of Isaiah will be fulfilled. Astonishingly, it was two members of the *Sanhedrin* who stepped up. These were men of *authority*. They were men of *wealth*. They can talk to the centurion, and tell him that they plan to ask Pilate to give them the body of Jesus. They can go to Pilate and believe that he will *listen* to them.

Who would ever have expected that? Who would have thought that two of the *rulers* would decide to give Jesus an honorable burial!

Why did they do that? The Bible tells us that they had for a long time *believed in Jesus* — but *secretly*, for fear of the other rulers. Was that *wrong*? Should they have been willing to *confess* Jesus? Yes — even if it meant that they would be put out of the synagogue, and out of the Sanhedrin. A blind beggar, you remember, had once dared to do that. But these two rulers didn't. They didn't confess Jesus. And they *stayed in the Sanhedrin*. On this first Good Friday, therefore, they are still *rulers*. They can *do* something about the burial of Jesus' body. God, you see, had used even their *fear* — for *good*.

So there are two men, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, who are ready and willing to give Jesus an honorable burial. But ... where is the *grave*? The prophecy of Isaiah, remember, is that Jesus will be buried in a *rich man's tomb*. Joseph and Nicodemus cannot just grab shovels and quickly dig a hole in the ground. No, a rich man's tomb, in those



days, was cut into the side of a hill of rock. It was like a *cave* — a *small* cave, but high enough for people to stand up inside it. To prepare a tomb like *that* took a lot of *work*, and a lot of *time*. And Joseph and Nicodemus need such a tomb, not *tomorrow*, or sometime *next week*, but *now*.

God took care of *that* too. One of the two men, Joseph of Arimathea, had just recently dug a new tomb, in a nearby garden, for himself and for his family — with no idea that *God* had a *better* plan for that tomb. Yes, it was all *pre-planned*. Not by man — but by God. Joseph must have understood that — and *marveled*. We should too.

It seems that Joseph takes the lead. Perhaps he talked first to the centurion, to be sure that the soldiers did not dispose of the bodies before they got back. Then Nicodemus went to buy the spices needed for the burial of Jesus' body, while Joseph hurried off to the governor's office to get permission to bury Jesus. Pilate was surprised to see a man like *this*, a rich ruler of the Jews, coming with such a request. And he was surprised, too, to hear that Jesus was already dead. After checking with the centurion, to be sure that Jesus was dead, Pilate instructed him to give the body of Jesus to Joseph.



So Joseph hurried back to Calvary, carrying with him the linen cloth needed to wrap the body. Nicodemus is there with the spices. Together they take the body of Jesus down from the cross. They wrap it in a clean linen cloth, and then carry it into the tomb of Joseph.



They must then have removed the linen cloth, washed the wounds, tore the linen into strips, and then wrapped the body of Jesus with those strips, putting the spices

between the layers of cloth. The head was then wrapped separately, with a special cloth. And, finally, they laid the body of Jesus to rest in one of the niches that had been cut out of the sides of the cave.

By the time they finished their work, everyone else must have been gone from Calvary — except for Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joses. There was nothing for these two women to *do* there, but they kept up their watch of love. They saw Joseph and Nicodemus carry the body of their beloved Master into the tomb. They couldn't see what was going on inside the tomb, but they stayed close at hand — until the two men came out and rolled a great stone in front of it. Then the two Marys also left — determined to come back again bright and early Sunday morning to put their own spices and ointment on the body, as their last labor of love to their dead Master.

They were not thinking at all about ... *resurrection*.

How Well Did You Listen?

1. How did the soldiers plan to get rid of the bodies on the three crosses on Calvary?
2. What prophet had foretold that the Messiah would be buried with the *rich*?
3. What two men decided to take care of Jesus' burial?
4. These two men believed in Jesus. Why had they before kept that a *secret*?
5. Who gave them permission to bury Jesus?

6. Who were watching the tomb while the body of Jesus was being prepared for burial? What did they plan to do on Sunday?

The Sealing of the Grave

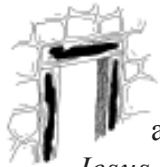
Matthew 27:62-66

What comes to your mind when you think about the *Passover*?

Most likely you think of Israel in the land of Egypt ... and of lambs being killed ... and of blood being put on the doorposts of houses ... and of the angel of death *passing over* those houses — and of all of this being a *picture of Jesus*, who is *the Lamb of God*.

If you understand all of that, that's *good*. But did you know that there was not only a *Passover lamb* but also a *Passover sheaf*? Like the *Passover lamb*, the *Passover sheaf* was a picture of *Jesus*. It was therefore a very important part of the celebration of the *Passover Feast*. Let's see if we can understand why.

Long, long before, God had commanded the people of Israel to take the very *first fruits* of their harvest and present it to the Lord. Yes, the *first fruits*. That is, before they take any of the harvest for *themselves*, they must cut down some of the plants, tie them into a bundle, or sheaf, and give it to the *Lord*. In this way they would be reminded, every year, that the harvest was from *Him* — because *He* gives the sunshine, *He* sends the rain, *He*



makes the plants to grow. The fields of grain, standing ready to be harvested, are from *Him*.

Now, at the time of the *Passover Feast*, the first of the grain crops in Palestine was standing ready to be harvested. It was time for the *barley harvest*. It was time, therefore, to offer the *first fruits* of the harvest to the Lord. The chief priests enjoyed doing that. They made a big show of it. On one day they would pick out, and mark, the spot from which they would take the first sheaf. On the next day they would lead a parade of happy people out to that spot. With everybody watching, the chief priests would take their sickles and cut down that barley, carry the first sheaf of it to the court of the temple, and there grind the grain into fine flour. Then the next day they would present the flour as an offering to the Lord in the temple. What a grand ceremony it was!



Now, what do *you* think? Was that really all it was — just a *grand ceremony*? Oh, no! In the *first fruits of the harvest*, God gave to His people in the Old Testament another picture of ... *Jesus*. Trouble is, Old Testament pictures were like *shadows*. Think of that. Can you know what something really looks like, what it really *is*, if you can see only its shadow? Well, maybe you can tell that it's a shadow of a *person*,



or of a *building*, or of a *tree*. But if you want to see the *real thing*, you have to turn around and look to see what's *making the shadow*. The people of God in the Old Testament could see *only the shadow*. They could not yet see the *real thing*. The real thing was ... *Jesus*.

Now think of *this*. At the time of our story for today, the chief priests are going about the business of preparing the first sheaf of the barley harvest.



That, remember, is the *shadow*.

Not far away, in a little garden near Calvary, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus are quietly laying the body of Jesus to rest. *That* is the *real thing*.



Try hard to understand that. The sheaf that the *chief priests* were so busy with was the first fruits of the *barley* harvest. Soon those first fruits will be presented to the Lord in the temple — in thankfulness to Him for the *whole* harvest, which was now *sure to follow*. The body that Joseph and Nicodemus are putting in the ground will be the first fruits of a different kind of harvest — not *barley*, but *bodies*. *Sleeping* bodies. That is, *dead* bodies. Bodies that are in the *ground* — just like *Jesus'* body was then in the ground. But His body will soon come *out* of the grave. He will be raised — not, you see, for Himself *alone*, but as the *first fruits* of them that slept. The rest of *that* harvest is now also *sure to follow*. That's *us*. Because *He* arose, *we* will rise. *Our* resurrection is *sure*. Guaranteed!

Almost side by side, therefore, there was the Old Testament *shadow* (the sheaf of barley) and the New Testament *fulfillment* (Jesus). Oh, how the chief priests *liked* the shadow. They eagerly looked forward to presenting the first fruits (of mere *barley*) in the temple. But they didn't *want* the fulfillment. They want *Jesus* to *stay in the grave*.

On Saturday morning, these chief priests begin to worry that Jesus might *come out of the grave*. They start remembering things that Jesus had said — about *rising the third day*. Then they think about the scary three hours of darkness, the earthquake, the splitting of the rocks, and the rending of the veil. Yes, they have *reason* to be afraid. But they don't even want to *think* about a resurrection. So they talk instead about what the *disciples* might do. The disciples of Jesus might come at night and *steal Jesus' body* — and then tell everybody that Jesus arose. What is needed, they think, is a *lock*, and an *armed guard*. They will see to it that that body stays in the grave!

But for that, they need the approval of the governor. So off they go to Pilate. "Sir," they say, "we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulcher be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away."

Rise after three days?! That's the first time Pilate heard about that. And he didn't like it any better than the leaders of the Jews did. "Make the sepulcher as sure

as you can,” he told them. That is, put a *strong lock* on that stone door. And here’s an *armed guard* — Roman soldiers with *weapons*. Now, they think, *no one* will be able to get into, or out of, that tomb.

Jesus’ *friends* expect Him to *remain* in the grave. His *enemies* are doing their best to make sure that He *does*. But He won’t. He will rise ... on the third day ... as He said. No rock, or lock, or armed guard can stop Him. He will come out of that grave — as the *first fruits* of them that sleep. Think of that! His resurrection will make yours, and mine, *possible* — and *sure*.

How Well Did You Listen?

1. What was the Passover *lamb* a picture of? What was the Passover *sheaf* a picture of?
2. Why did the chief priests, on Saturday, go back to Pilate?
3. How did Pilate and the chief priests try to keep Jesus in the grave? Why was that foolish?

How Well Do You Understand?

1. Why was it right for Jesus to be crucified with malefactors? Why would it not have been right for Him to be *buried* with malefactors?
2. Why was Pilate surprised that a man like Joseph of Arimathea wanted to give Jesus an honorable burial?
3. How did it happen that there was a new tomb all ready for

Jesus on Friday afternoon?

4. How did Joseph and Nicodemus prepare the body of Jesus for burial?

5. What had God commanded the people of Israel to do each year at the beginning of harvest? Do you know why the chief priests enjoyed doing that? Did they know what it was a picture of?

Memory Verse

Matthew 27:64 “Command therefore that the sepulcher be made sure until the third day.”

**Color
the sheaf of barley.**

