

Mark 15:42-47

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[0:00] And turn again to Mark chapter 15. We're finishing our series in Mark. We've looked at the crucifixion. We've focused on the actual death of Jesus.

And today we are finishing by looking at his burial. Mark chapter 15, verses 42 to 47. And as we do come to the burial of Jesus, I expect we don't often think this is too important.

This isn't often a moment our hearts or minds go to when we reflect on the important things of our faith. Yes, we need the crucifixion. Of course we need Jesus' death.

But after that, well, let's just skip ahead to the resurrection. Those are the things that really matter, we might say. And they do matter, but we can very easily sideline the burial.

But surprisingly, that is not how the Bible wants us to think about this moment. Do you remember what the Apostle Paul says when he speaks of the Gospel?

[1:05] He says, I delivered to you as of first importance that Christ died, he was buried, and he was raised. Death, burial, resurrection.

In fact, we confessed it earlier in the Apostles' Creed, but we're going to sing it after the sermon as well. The heart of our faith. I believe in Jesus Christ, that he died, was buried, he descended to the dead.

This moment here in Mark, Jesus being laid in this tomb, this is of first importance in your life.

Which is why Mark doesn't just skip to the resurrection, but he spends so much time and detail on this.

It is of first importance. And that is because, for the believer, this burial makes an impact on your life every single day.

Your mind may not go to the tomb, but this moment is actually doing something for you, and in your heart, and in this world right now.

[2:16] This burial is not just a memory of the past, but for those in Christ, this burial is shaping your life moment by moment. And that is because this burial means three things, three C's today.

This burial is a completion. It is the full completion of Christ's humiliation, and so the complete end of your sin.

And this burial is a cleansing. It is a sanctifying and cleansing of the grave, which completely transforms your hope for the future.

And this burial is your burial too. This does not only belong to Jesus, but you. This is a co-burial, which marks the end of sin's reign in your life.

Three C's completion, cleansing, co-burial. And so this burial is what the world is so desperately in need of today.

[3:24] If you are needing hope, if you are needing change in your life, if you are facing death and don't know how to go on or where to turn to, then you need this burial.

It is of first importance. And let's see why it is so important. And so three things to see today. Three C's, and the first is this.

This burial is a completion. This burial is a completion. We are at Golgotha. It is a Friday afternoon. Evening is approaching. And in the middle of three crosses hangs a man. But there isn't any movement. No noise.

Jesus hangs there. No heartbeat. No more breath in his lungs. And by any standard, we can definitely say this man's life on earth is over.

[4:27] But while his life is over, I want us to see Jesus' work isn't over. The work of salvation isn't actually over yet.

This isn't to say Christ has more to suffer or more sin to bear. No, the curtain is torn. We are brought back to God. But here in this burial, something else is being achieved for us.

In this burial, this is Christ reaching the deepest depths of his humiliation to bring us up to glory. I helped clean out someone's pond a few years back.

And to clean it, we had to clear out all the bottom of the pond, which had been built up over the years with layers of just muck and goose poo and who knows what. It was pretty rank.

And it was contaminating all the water in the pond. And so we had to clear it out. But to properly clear it out, you couldn't just scrape the top layer of mud off and just grab, skim the muck and then take it out and throw it away.

[5:39] No. If you did that, that would just still leave loads of muck. No, to clean it, you had to stick your hand all the way to the bottom of the muck, as far as you could go.

Touch the plastic lining at the very bottom and then bring up all the muck from the bottom and throw it away. That was the only way. You had to reach the bottom.

Well, that is like the work of Jesus. In order to cleanse us from our sin, Jesus had to plunge down to the very depths of sin and misery and humiliation to then bring us back up into the fresh air and rescue us.

And what is the lowest point a person can reach? What is the deepest and darkest point sin can bring us to?

It is the grave. There is nothing more unnatural, nothing more humbling, nothing further from the heights of glory than being lowered into the ground, placed into a tomb, and belonging to the dead.

[6:57] And so while Christ isn't suffering anymore, this burial is so desperately needed for us. Because this is Jesus completing our salvation by reaching down into the depths.

You can almost say his death isn't complete without this burial. And for those here who have lost a loved one, we know something isn't complete until they're buried.

When they die, we have that time of grief. But we're waiting for the funeral. Something just doesn't feel complete. The goodbye doesn't feel complete until we've lowered them into the ground.

And after that, the grief remains. But we know there's been some sort of closure. It's why we care so much about bringing fallen soldiers back from abroad, back home to be buried.

In a way, their burial completes their story. Well, that is like the saving work of Christ. He needs to reach the depths and not only suffer, but he needs to go to the grave to save.

[8:15] This burial is a completion. Which is why Mark goes to such great lengths to show that Jesus really did die.

He really went down to those depths. Look at the details here. Verse 42. As evening approaches, Jesus is still hanging there.

And so Joseph of Arimathea, one of the Jewish leaders, he goes to ask the Roman governor Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus. And notice, just notice the wording, he doesn't ask for Jesus, does he? No, that wouldn't make sense. No, he must ask for the body of Jesus. And verse 44. Pilate is surprised Jesus has already died.

Sometimes crucifixions in those days could last for days. But Jesus was probably so brutally beaten beforehand that he died particularly quickly.

[9:18] And so, Pilate, being a bit unsure, he asked a soldier, a centurion, to go and double check. And Romans were experts in making sure people were dead.

And so, verse 45, the soldier confirms it. And so, what does Pilate do? Look at the wording. He granted the corpse to Joseph.

The Lord Jesus, the Lord of glory, now has the title of corpse. And so, Joseph took down the corpse, removed the nails, carried his body, and verse 46, wrapped him in a linen cloth, the burial custom of the day.

And he placed Jesus in a tomb. Now, these tombs were carved out of huge rock faces with a small entrance near the floor that you could stoop into.

And when you did, it would open up into kind of a little area. And you would see shelves carved out of the rock where bodies were laid. And Joseph takes the body of Jesus, lays him in that tomb, and rolls a huge stone to shut the entrance.

[10:42] Such careful details, aren't they? Why? Well, Mark is making very clear that without doubt, Jesus really did reach the lowest of depths.

Body, corpse, confirmed by soldiers, linen, entombed in the earth, shut off from the land of the living. Jesus truly belonged to the dead.

The population count in Jerusalem, it truly dropped by one that day. And if you were there in that moment, and someone asked you, where is Jesus right now? You must answer, he is not among the living. There is a saviour who truly knows the experience of death.

Jesus is not a far-off saviour who just watches our suffering and observes the misery of this world. No, Jesus is a saviour who actually knows death.

[11:50] And he knows it not only by weeping by the graves of his friends, but he is a saviour who has had a grave of his own. When we come face to face with death, there is someone not just with the advice to help you, but a man with first-hand experience of death itself.

Someone you can pray to. Someone who is with you in that dark valley. And Mark is so clear about this because this is what it takes to save us.

This is what the curse of sin demands. Do you remember what God said to Adam when he ate that fruit? Because you have eaten of the tree, you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

When you reach down into the depths of God's curse, you don't reach plastic lining, you reach dust. And to save us from this curse, someone must bear it for us.

And to bear it for us, they must reach down, touch the dust, and return to it. And Jesus does exactly that for us by laying here in this tomb.

[13:15] His corpse literally returning to the stony dust of the earth. This is Jesus completing your salvation. For those in Christ, we cannot sideline this burial because this is Jesus truly and fully bearing our curse.

As his body was lowered into that tomb, that was Jesus taking your sin down to the grave with him. As that stone rolled over the entrance, that was your guilt being sealed, shut, and buried.

Never to return again, complete. Brothers and sisters, if you ever wonder, where is my sin? And when we ask that, it feels like the answer should be, it's all over me.

It's in me. It's attached to me. It's attached to my name. And I can't escape it. And we think, when God looks at me, that's all he can see.

I'm covered in my sin. But when we wonder, where is my sin? Where is my guilt? Where is my past? Christian, you must realize, it has all been taken to the grave.

[14:37] Jesus bore it all on the cross, and when he was buried, it was all buried with him. And God, God does not see it anymore.

Jesus has truly reached down into the depths, the depths of all your sin, and taken it all off you.

And now the curse is once and for all lifted. And though he isn't suffering in the grave, Jesus continues to bear this curse because something so unnatural has happened to him.

We are meant to be body and soul united. That is the glorious image of God, body and soul. But in death, body and soul are torn apart.

Which is why, when someone dies, we might say, she's not with us anymore. Even though her body is in the ground, she is there, yet she is not there.

[15:50] Because body and soul are not together. Which is what Jesus experienced for himself. His body in the tomb, but his soul in paradise, in heaven.

Yes, in the glory of his father, but still unnaturally separated. Which is why resurrection must come next.

And that is precisely what Jesus' burial secures for us. Because this burial is not only a completion, not only the removal of the curse now.

But this burial is a hope for the future. A transformation of what the grave means to us now. Jesus went to the grave with a purpose.

He went to the grave to cleanse the grave for us. And this is the next C. This burial is a cleansing. This burial is a cleansing.

[16:54] This unnatural state of death is why, in the Old Testament, dead bodies are considered so unclean. It's really interesting.

There are loads of laws in Leviticus and Numbers about the handling of dead bodies. And if you touch a dead body, you become unclean for seven days.

You couldn't come to the tabernacle. You couldn't approach God. You were unclean. And you had to be purified from that uncleanness with a sacrifice. And dead bodies were considered unclean not because being dead is sinful, but because death is the complete opposite to the living God.

A dead body exists as the clearest sign of a humanity alienated from God. The corruption of death is a complete contradiction to God's holiness.

And so God declares it unclean to say, this is so far from what it should be. This is so far from who I am. That heaviness that you feel around death, that crushing feeling, that darkness, that is the uncleanness of the grave.

[18:19] And dead bodies are labeled unclean as a way of God declaring to the world, in your sin, you cannot be with me. Death is the judgment for running from me.

Death is the fate you will get without me. And so God provides a way to be clean.

He provides that because without him, without that cleansing, death becomes hopeless. And all this is part of the reason why Joseph requests Jesus' body.

Notice again the details of the timing. When does Joseph of Arimathea take down the body? Verse 42. When evening had come. The day before the Sabbath.

And this timing is significant. Usually bodies were left up just for days for the vultures to get at. But Joseph was so eager to take down Jesus' body before sundown.

[19:23] Because the law in Deuteronomy says this. If a man is put to death and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree.

But you shall bury him the same day. For a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land. This type of execution, crucifixion, was reserved only for the worst type of sins.

Idolatry and blasphemy. And crucified men were so cursed in the eyes of God that they needed to be buried as quick as possible.

And so not only were dead bodies unclean, but crucified bodies were considered so cursed, so impure and unclean in the eyes of God, it ceremonially infected the land.

And that would be even worse on a holy day, the Sabbath. And so Joseph requests the body. And when he gets it, Jesus is laid in that grave as a cursed man.

[20:37] He is laid in that grave unclean. And unclean not just by touching a corpse, but by being a corpse.

But have a think with me. What happens whenever Jesus comes into contact with the unclean? Just scan your mind through the Gospels right now.

Think of the lepers. Usually, if you were to touch a leper, you become unclean. But when Jesus touches lepers, what happens?

Jesus doesn't become unclean. No, he makes the leper clean. Heals them. And their lives are transformed. Think of the bleeding woman.

Just touching the hem of Jesus' robe, she becomes clean. And her life is transformed. And think of the dead Jesus encounters.

[21:40] He touches the hand of a little girl. A dead body. He says, talitha kumi. And the dead becomes living. The unclean becomes clean.

And the hopeless is transformed into hope. And if that is what happens when Jesus meets the unclean, what happens when he not only touches death, but plunges headfirst into it and lays in the uncleanness of his own grave?

Jesus cleanses the grave. He transforms it. He sanctifies it. He transforms it from a place of hopelessness into a place of hope.

This burial is not death polluting Jesus. No, this is Jesus cleansing death itself. Just like he bore our sins and transformed our guilt into freedom.

Well, here in this tomb, he has borne the grave. Borne that uncleanness. Entered the realm of the dead. And cleansed it.

[22:54] And transformed it into something else. For those in Christ, death is no longer a sign of being alienated from God.

Death no longer means being further from God. No. Death now means being with God. Because when you trust in Jesus, when we enter the grave, death is not a mystery for the believer.

It is a known certainty. We go to the paradise of heaven. And we go to be with Christ. Jesus entered this tomb to cleanse it and to clear a path for us.

And that path leads straight to heaven. For everyone in Christ here today, we need to know, we need to know this. As we all approach death, someone has gone before you.

And someone has gone before everyone we love who has died in Christ. And someone is waiting for you on the other side, the one who was laid in this tomb.

[24:07] And instead of a place of hope, the grave now for you is a place of anticipation. It's a place of waiting.

It's a place of waiting. Do you know what they used to call graveyards outside of churches? You know the graveyards you would have to walk through to go to a Church of England church? Do you know what they used to call those graveyards? God's. They used to call them God's acre. Meaning God's harvest field. God's garden. Because those bodies that have gone into the ground, they are like seeds that God has sown.

They have fallen into the ground for a time. But one day, they will spring up into new life. And that is because Jesus has cleansed the grave.

And turned it into a garden. And so when we enter the grave, it is not down into hopelessness. It is waiting for resurrection life.

[25:15] But if we are to have this hope, and if we are to enjoy this cleansing, we can't just know about this burial. And we can't even just have sympathy for Jesus in this burial.

No. No. We need to be buried in this tomb with him. And this is the final C to end on.

This burial is a co-burial. This burial is a co-burial. Notice who is present at this scene, at the tomb. Verse 43. We have Joseph of Arimathea.

And then verse 47. There's Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Jesus. There's three people at the tomb. But I want us to see someone else is present here.

Christian, you are laid right here in this tomb. Listen to these remarkable words from Romans 6. Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

[26:28] We were buried, therefore, with him. By baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

For the Christian, this burial marks not only the end of the guilt of your sin, but it marks the end of the power of sin in your life.

And so not only our guilt, but our old self, the old you, who you once were, that was buried here in this tomb with Christ.

This burial is a co-burial. Sin once had a hold on you. It once ruled over you. But that you is now buried.

And your baptism shows that. Your baptism is God declaring to you, you were here in this tomb.

And while sin may still be a painful reality in our lives, it will be a painful reality in our lives.

[27:39] While that may be true, sin is not winning. Sin cannot win. And it cannot rule over you.

But you now walk in the newness of life in Christ. This is why, whenever we face temptation, whenever we are so tempted to just walk away, and we feel that strong pull towards sin inside of us, in that moment, we need to remember our baptism.

Say to yourself, I am a baptized man. I am a baptized woman. I am a baptized boy. I am a baptized girl.

Because when we say that, when we feel that drawer of sin, in that moment, we are saying, no, that is not who I am anymore. I have been buried with Christ.

Sin's power is broken in your life. You are a new person because you have been buried. And so if you are here today, and you wonder, how can I overcome all this sin in my life?

[29:00] How can my addictions be broken? How can my despair be turned into joy? How can my hopelessness be turned into hope?

How can the ruin of my life be turned into true life and true freedom? Well, the answer is not just by trying to turn your life around all by yourself.

Ultimately, it is not about self-help. It is not about techniques or education or new habits. No, ultimately, if you want your life to be transformed, you need to be buried here in this tomb with Christ.

And that can only happen, it can only happen when you put your trust in him. And this burial will become yours.

Jesus will take your sin, he will take your old self down to the grave with him and it will all be ended. And so I ask you, why not now?

[30:11] Trust in Christ. Be baptized. Be buried with him. And Jesus will transform everything. The curse will be lifted, the grave will be cleansed, and you will truly live.

True life, it's actually found in the grave. This is why Jesus' burial is of first importance in our life. For the believer, this moment is something we live off every single day.

this burial is a completion. The curse has ended. This burial is a cleansing. There is now a hope in death.

Your future is transformed. And this is a co-burial. This burial belongs to you. And as you go into your life, as you go into this week, sin will never win.

You will never be lost. Because Christ was buried. And we were buried with him. Let's pray.