

April 3, 2022 An Act of Kindness Luke 23:44-56

Lee Strobel identified 4 questions that had to be answered, if the Christian faith was to hold any water at all. He assumed they were unanswerable. The 4 questions are: (1) Did Jesus die on the cross? We dealt with that one last Sunday. As Dr. Metherell said, "Speaking for Modern Medicine, there is no way Jesus could have survived the crucifixion." Question (2) is: Was the body of Jesus actually in the tomb? That is the question we are examining this morning.

First of all, it has to be acknowledged that Luke's Gospel is the most carefully written history of Jesus ministry. That said, the story of Jesus ministry is basic as to why the crucifixion occurred. As we have seen, the cross was an efficient, technologically sound, asphyxiation machine. It used body weight and muscles to make it impossible to breathe. Linked with a flogging of 39 lashes it was lethal. What happened to the body of Jesus?

Luke gives us the facts. The Jewish Sabbath begins at sundown on Friday. It lasts until sundown on Saturday. That is a matter of history. When the Romans were convinced that Jesus and the two thieves crucified with him were dead, they left the bodies hanging. It was a simple case of law and order by spectacle. Anyone who passed the hill called Calvary or Golgotha in Aramaic would see what happened if you ran afoul of the Roman authorities. And the bodies were hung close

enough to the ground that you could see every ugly and bloody detail of how these 3 died.

Remember that Matthew, Mark and John were definitely Jewish. They attest to the fact that the “Jews” wanted the bodies taken down before the beginning of Sabbath. What they mean is the Rabbinical Council of Jerusalem wanted the bodies out of sight before the Sabbath began. Enter Joseph of Arimathea. He was a rabbi. He was a member of the Rabbinical Council of Jerusalem. He was not without influence. Luke tells us he had not consented to their decision to see Jesus crucified. That does not mean he voted against the majority. He was too politically astute to do that. He did not attend the meeting. He along with his friend Nicodemus were sympathetic to Jesus. They witnessed some of the miracles of healing. They were impressed by Jesus’ teaching. HE knew the Scriptures and the Law of the Old Testament, and the Psalms and the Prophets better than most. Joseph was one of those Pharisees who listened to Jesus teach, and asked questions and took the answers and thought about them. He was a good man.

He knew what the Council had decided. He knew when it was smart to keep his mouth closed. He also knew what the Council wanted done. No dead bodies hanging on crosses during the Sabbath. Especially the Sabbath during Passover season. He either volunteered to take care of this detail, or he knew he could get it done. The door of Pontius Pilate was open to a member of the Council. He went. He made

the request for the body of Jesus. He was diplomatic, played nice, got permission.

Luke says he took it down himself. Did the soldiers help? I can't answer that definitively. But if he had a note from Pilate, the soldiers would certainly have been more than willing to help with the task. Joseph of Arimathea and his friend, colleague, secret disciple of Jesus named Nicodemus had access to a new tomb that had been created by hewing stone. It was a rich man's tomb. And as Jewish priests, they were committed to giving Jesus of Nazareth a decent Jewish burial. That is why I say, this was an act of kindness. They had liked what they had heard Jesus teach. They were comfortable with his theology. They recognized they did not have the power to stop the Crucifixion Train. So they went home. And then out of respect they tried to do the right thing, with Jesus body.

They would have taken it and washed it. They would have handled it with respect. Matthew says Joseph of Arimathea bought the tomb for himself. He also says Joseph bought the linen. John says Nicodemus provided 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes. 75 pounds of anything is hard to carry a distance. They wrapped Jesus' body in linen and added the spices to control the smell of decomposition. They laid the body in the tomb. Joseph rolled the stone into place to seal it. The sun was still above the horizon. Being priests, they probably said the appropriate prayers. They were trying to get something right out of all this terrible reality.

It was an act of kindness, on a day when there had been so much brutality. And that is not the end of the story. Matthew, Mark and Luke say that Mary Magdalene and the “other Mary,” that is not Mary Jesus mother, watched. They saw what Joseph and Nicodemus did. And they took note of the exact location of the tomb. When Joseph and Nicodemus left, so did they but they bought spices with the intention of anointing the body themselves. But they did not go out on the Sabbath. They observed the day of rest.

Meanwhile, other things were happening. A delegation from the Council paid yet another visit to Pilate Matthew tells us. They remembered Jesus had said he would rise on the third day. They asked for Roman soldiers to guard the tomb so that no one could come and steal the body. Pilate gave the order. A detail was dispatched along with the direction that the priests should make the tomb as secure as they could. So they put a seal on the stone. That meant it was undisturbed at the time. And the guard was posted to see it stayed that way.

What we can say without any doubt is that there was a time when the body was in the tomb, and the tomb was sealed, and a Roman guard detail was posted to see to its security.

Jesus died on the cross. His body was placed with respect and dignity in a new tomb, in a garden, the women saw it happen. The Rabbinical Council of Jerusalem placed a seal on

the stone in accordance with the directions given by Pontius Pilate. And Roman guards took up their station to see to it the body was not disturbed. The body was in the tomb!

Let us pray;

Lord Jesus, in some ways it is easy to believe given the facts that the writings of the disciples make available to us. Grant that we may continue this journey, and celebrate our faith in you. Glory to God in the highest. Amen