

The Gospel According to  
**Luke**

***“Funeral for a Friend”***

Chapter 23:44-56

Introduction

I've never done a 'rush' funeral. No one has ever called and said that their loved one has just died and must be buried within the next three hours. We would think it strange – almost uncaring – to hurry a funeral. In many cultures, however, funerals are expected to be fast – sometimes within two or three hours after death.

The Jewish culture of the first century practiced fast-funerals. The burial of Jesus would have been a quick affair under normal circumstances. It was even more so because the Sabbath was approaching. From the time Jesus dismissed His spirit until the beginning of the Sabbath was only three hours.

For all its seeming haste, the burial of Jesus had been planned for a long time. Not that Joseph of Arimathea had gone done to the funeral home ahead of time to make arrangements. Jesus, His Father, and God the Holy Spirit had preplanned the burial. Listen to these words from the prophet Isaiah:

Isaiah 53:9 And they made His grave with the wicked -  
But with the rich at His death,  
Because He had done no violence,  
Nor *was any* deceit in His mouth.

Seven-hundred years before Jesus died as a criminal but was buried in a rich man's tomb, the prophet Isaiah let us know that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit had preplanned the events of that day.

When you plan a funeral, you include certain elements that will be meaningful in both remembering the deceased and comforting the survivors. There is usually an order of service; songs that are particularly appropriate; eulogies; things like that.

While it may seem, on first reading, that Jesus' burial had none of these things, in fact there was and is a depth to the preplanning that is not only meaningful, but moving.

We want to see those elements as we attend Jesus' funeral today. We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 Jesus Died And You Exit God's Wrath, and #2 Jesus Was Buried And You Enter God's Rest.

### #1 Jesus Died And You Exit God's Wrath (v44-49)

The crucifixion lasted from nine o'clock in the morning until three o'clock in the afternoon. During those six solemn hours, Jesus spoke seven separate times from the Cross:

1. He spoke three times between nine o'clock and Noon.
2. From Noon until three o'clock darkness covered the land and Jesus remained silent.
3. Then, at three o'clock, He spoke four more times in fairly rapid succession.

Luke focuses our attention on two miracles that took place during those final three hours.

Luke 23:44 Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour.

Luke 23:45 Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two.

The **sixth hour** of the Jewish day was Noon – six hours from sun-up. It was Passover, and the moon would be full – making an eclipse of the sun impossible. The **darkness** over the land of Israel, and at just that precise time, was a miracle.

The **veil of the Temple** was the veil that separated two inner chambers of the Sanctuary. It separated what was called the Holy Place from what was called the Holy of Holies. The Holy of Holies is where the Ark of the Covenant with the Mercy Seat was placed. It represented the very presence of God on earth. It could only be entered once a year, on the Day of Atonement, by the high priest. It

was a substantial veil, about 6-inches thick. Matthew tells us in his Gospel that it was torn from top to bottom. The tearing of the veil, and at just that precise time, was a miracle.

Luke 23:46 And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "**Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.'**" Having said this, He breathed His last.

By dismissing Himself to death, Jesus was showing that His death was voluntary. Jesus summoned death to serve Him. When you can die voluntarily; when you can summon death to serve you; then you have **conquered** death!

Jesus said, "**Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.**" It's considered by many a quote from Psalm 31:5. The words were a favorite bedtime prayer for Jewish children. Jesus died with a bedtime prayer upon His lips because He knew His death was like a sleep He would awaken from. **He knew He would be raised from the dead!**

There are at least two preplanned elements in Jesus' death on the cross. They relate to the two miracles we discussed. They are details that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit 'wrote' into Jesus' funeral in eternity past. They are a kind of cosmic choreography. You see them if you remember that all of this was occurring at Passover.

1. First, there was the three-hours of darkness over the land. The very first Passover, when the Jews were slaves in the land of Egypt, **was preceded by three-days of darkness.** You can hardly miss the symbolism.
2. Then there was the tearing of the veil. The Passover lambs were being slain. The high priest was offering incense to God in front of the veil. Jesus was on the cross. He was God's final sacrificial lamb – the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. The veil was torn as He offered Himself to God. The torn veil indicated that God the Father accepted Jesus' once-for-all sacrifice, and forever afterward the way into God's presence was open to all who come by faith in Jesus.

This was drama; this was choreography; this was liturgy. It had been meticulously planned from before the creation of the universe in which God would place mankind, watch us sin, then offer us salvation. It was as if God was using lighting, and using props, to explain the drama of redemption being played-out before your very eyes.

The folks at Jesus' death had a mixed reaction.

Luke 23:47 So when the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God, saying, "Certainly this was a righteous Man!"

Did the centurion get saved? The Amplified version of the Bible reports the words this way: *Now the centurion, having seen what had taken place, recognized God and thanked and praised Him, and said, Indeed, without question, this Man was upright (just and innocent)!*

We don't know if the centurion was saved that day. It's interesting that many people would say what he said, if asked about Jesus; but they *may not* be saved. For example: A large percentage of people in the United States say that they believe in God, and that Jesus was the Son of God. But many of them are not yet born-again.

Luke 23:48 And the whole crowd who came together to that sight, seeing what had been done, beat their breasts and returned.

These were unbelievers. Something had stirred in them. They had some conscience of guilt for the death of this innocent Man. The cross was having an effect upon them. Many of these would hear Peter preach some forty days later, on the Day of Pentecost, as give their lives to Jesus.

Luke 23:49 But all His acquaintances, and the women who followed Him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

These were the believers. They were confused – having misunderstood Jesus' words about His own death and resurrection. Remember, though, that this was prior to Jesus giving them the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. Let's be harder on ourselves than we are on them.

At the first Passover, the lambs died, and the wrath of God passed-over those who had applied the blood to their doors. They exited those doors into freedom. As Jesus died, the wrath of God against sinners passed-over them. They could now exit God's wrath and go out into a life filled with God's promises. All you need do is apply the blood of the Lamb; all you need do is believe on Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior.

You not only exit God's wrath; you enter God's rest.

## #2 Jesus Was Buried And You Enter God's Rest (v50-56)

One man comes boldly to the forefront of the story – claiming Jesus' body for burial.

Luke 23:50 Now behold, *there was* a man named Joseph, a council member, a good and just man.

Luke 23:51 He had not consented to their decision and deed. *He was from* Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who himself was also waiting for the kingdom of God.

I've heard a lot of critical talk about Joseph being a 'secret believer.' All I can say is that Luke gave him high praise as a **good and just man**. He stepped forward at just the time God had prepared him for.

Maybe you feel as though you're not doing much for God. It could be true, *and you need to get in gear!* But it's also true that God raises-up individuals at just the right time to accomplish His eternal purposes. Spend time with God, in His presence, seeking first the **kingdom of God** – as Joseph did. Then step-out boldly when the Lord touches your heart.

Luke 23:52 This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

Luke 23:53 Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a tomb *that was* hewn out of the rock, where no one had ever lain before.

We've already mentioned that this was in fulfillment of a 700-year old prophecy. Joseph wasn't trying to fulfill prophecy. God was fulfilling it through Joseph. Often unbelieving scholars try to get you to think that Jesus and His followers schemed and planned to fulfill ancient prophecies. Or that the Bible was written deceitfully, in a way to

make it seem as though prophecy was fulfilled. **It takes more faith to believe that than it does to take God at His word!**

Luke 23:54 That day was the Preparation, and the Sabbath drew near.

They would need to be done before Sundown – before 6pm. They were thus in quite a rush – when you consider that Jesus dismissed His spirit at 3pm.

Luke 23:55 And the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid.

Luke 23:56 Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment.

They didn't really have time to anoint Jesus' body the way they would have liked. They noted where He was buried; then went home and **prepared** to return after the Sabbath.

There is more drama, more to marvel at, in this seemingly hasty funeral. Luke twice noted it was the **Sabbath**, the seventh day of rest. It's your clue something more is being communicated.

Jesus had been on the cross from 9am until 3pm – **exactly 6 hours**. It was followed by the Sabbath. The number '6' and the Sabbath ought to remind you of something. God created the universe, working for 6 days; then on the seventh day – on the Sabbath – He rested.

Scripture declares it was Jesus who created all things (Colossians 1:16; John 1:3; Hebrews 1:2). So we could say that Jesus worked for 6 days to create the universe, then rested on the Sabbath. Now Jesus had worked for 6 hours to redeem His lost and fallen creation, and was resting on the Sabbath.

When Jesus rose from the dead on the Sunday following the Sabbath, it wasn't the beginning of another new week; it was the beginning of a new way of life.

**Everyday could (and should) be a Sabbath of rest in the Lord as you cease from your work and allow Him to empower you from within.**

There is no more keeping a Sabbath day, once a week. You are to live a daily life, 24-7, of supernatural rest as you walk with God. Those who try to 'keep' a 24-hr, weekly Sabbath are trying to return to a way of life that was finished and fulfilled by Jesus. They are in some sense returning to a life of works rather than a life of faith. They are limiting God rather than honoring God.

When people ask you if you 'keep the Sabbath,' you should say, "Yes – *every day!*"

It was really quite a funeral! What seemed to be a hasty, thrown-together, last-minute affair by Joseph and a few godly women, was really preplanned from eternity. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are masters of drama and timing, of lighting and props – all to communicate to you that eternal life is yours for the asking.

### Applying the Word

If you are a Christian, you should remain at rest. "Rest" is a spiritual quality of life that is available to Christians every moment of everyday. It is independent of circumstances and sufferings. It is a matter of walking by faith regardless your trials and tragedies. You are to cease from your own efforts and energies and be empowered from within as God the Holy Spirit applies God's life-giving, transforming Word.

One other thought for believers: God raised-up Joseph of Arimathea. Joseph was stirred-up by the cross. Get going; get involved; volunteer to serve the Lord and you will see Him raise you up.

If you are not yet a believer... Wrath is the word you need to be concerned about. It's not that God is angry; it's that sin has separated you from God. He must judge sin; He cannot ignore it. Sin was judged and punished once-for-all on the cross as Jesus substituted Himself for you and offered Himself as the full, final sacrifice for the sin of the whole world. You must believe in His work on the cross; you must receive Him; you must accept Him.

