

# Expository Thoughts On Matthew - Matthew

## 27:57-66

by J.C. Ryle

### Transcript

These verses contain the history of our Lord Jesus Christ's burial. There was yet one thing needful in order to make it certain that our Redeemer accomplished that great work of redemption which he undertook. That holy body, in which he bore our sins on the cross, must actually be laid in the grave, and rise again. His resurrection was to be the seal and headstone of all the work. The infinite wisdom of God foresaw the objections of unbelievers and infidels and provided against them. Did the Son of God really die? Did he really rise again? Might there not have been some delusion as to the reality of his death? Might there not have been imposition or deception, as to the reality of his resurrection? All these and many more objections would doubtless have been raised if opportunity had been given. But he who knows the end from the beginning prevented the possibility of such objections being made. By his overruling providence he ordered things so that the death and burial of Jesus were placed beyond a doubt. Pilate gives consent to his burial; a loving disciple wraps the body in linen and lays it in a new tomb hewn out of a rock, wherein was never man yet laid. The chief priests themselves set a guard over the place where his body was deposited. Jews and Gentiles, friends and enemies, all alike testify to the great fact that Christ did really and actually die and was laid in a grave. It is a fact that can never be questioned. He was really bruised; he really suffered; he really died; he was really buried. Let us mark this well: it deserves recollection. Let us learn for one thing from these verses that our Lord Jesus Christ has friends of whom little is known. We cannot have a more striking example of this truth than we see in the passage now before us. A man named Joseph, of Arimathea, comes forward when our Lord was dead and asks permission to bury him. We have never heard of this man at any former period of our Lord's earthly ministry: we never hear of him again. We know nothing but that he was a disciple who loved Christ and did him honor. At a time when the apostles had forsaken our Lord at a time when it was a dangerous thing to profess regard for him at a time when there seemed to be no earthly advantage to be gained by confessing his discipleship at such a time as this, Joseph comes forward boldly, and begs the body of Jesus, and lays it in his own new tomb. This fact is full of comfort and encouragement. It shows us that there are some quiet, retiring souls on earth, who know the Lord, and the Lord knows them, and yet they are little known by the church. It shows us that there are diversities of gifts among Christ's people: there are some who glorify Christ passively, and some who glorify him actively; there are some whose vocation it is to build the church, and fill a public place, and there are some who only come forward, like Joseph, in times of special need. But each and all are led by one Spirit, and each and all glorify God in their several ways. Let these things teach us to be more hopeful. Let us believe that many shall yet come from the east and the

west, and sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 8:11). There may be in some dark corners of Christendom many who, like Simeon, Anna and Joseph of Arimathea, are at present little known, who will shine brightly among the Lord's jewels in the day of His appearing. Let us learn for another thing from these verses that God can make the devices of wicked men work round to his own glory. We are taught that lesson in a striking manner by the conduct of the priests and Pharisees after our Lord was buried. The restless enmity of these unhappy men could not sleep, even when the body of Jesus was in the grave. They called to mind the words which they remembered he had spoken about "rising again": they resolved, as they thought, to make his rising again impossible. They went to Pilate and obtained from him a guard of Roman soldiers; they set a watch over the tomb of our Lord; they placed a seal upon the stone. In short they did all they could to make the sepulchre sure. They little thought what they were doing; they little thought that unwittingly they were providing the most complete evidence of the truth of Christ's coming resurrection. They were actually making it impossible to prove that there was any deception or imposition. Their seal, their guard, their precautions, were all to become witnesses, in a few hours, that Christ had risen. They might as well have tried to stop the tides of the sea, or to prevent the sun rising, as to prevent Jesus coming forth from the tomb. They were taken in their own craftiness (1 Corinthians 3:19): their own devices became instruments to show forth God's glory. The history of the church of Christ is full of examples of a similar kind. The very things that have seemed most unfavorable to God's people have often turned out to be for their good. What harm did the persecution which arose about Stephen do to the church of Christ? They that were scattered "went everywhere preaching the word" (Acts 7:4). What harm did imprisonment do St. Paul? It gave him time to write many of those epistles which are now read all over the world. What real harm did the persecution of bloody Mary do to the cause of the English Reformation? The blood of the martyrs became the seed of the church. What harm does persecution do the people of God at this very day? It only drives them nearer to Christ: it only makes them cling more closely to the throne of grace, the Bible, and prayer. Let all true Christians lay these things to heart, and take courage. We live in a world where all things are ordered by a hand of perfect wisdom, and where in all things are working together continually for the good of the body of Christ. The powers of this world are only tools in the hand of God: he is ever using them for his own purposes, however little they may be aware of it. They are the instruments by which he is ever squaring and polishing the living stones of his spiritual temple, and all their schemes and plans will only turn to his praise. Let us be patient in days of trouble and darkness, and look forward. The very things which now seem against us are all working together for God's glory. We see but half now: yet a little, we shall see all; and we shall then discover that all the persecution we now endure was, like "the seal" and "the guard," tending to God's glory. God can make the "wrath of man praise him" (Psalm 77:10)

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