

Of the Burial of Christ.

by John Gill

Christ's burial was a fulfillment of prophecy, a demonstration of his sacrifice for sin, and a token of his atonement, ultimately leading to his resurrection and the abolition of sin.

Scripture: Psalm 16:10, Isaiah 53:9, Matthew 12:40, John 11:39, Romans 6:4-6, 1 Corinthians 15:4, 2 Corinthians 2:14, Ephesians 4:9, Revelation 19:8

Topics: "Humiliation of Christ", "Assurance of Resurrection"

Description

John Gill emphasizes the significance of Christ's burial as the final act of His humiliation, fulfilling scriptural prophecies and types. He explains that Christ's burial was necessary to demonstrate the reality of His death and to signify the complete atonement for sin. Gill highlights that Christ's body was laid in a rich man's tomb, symbolizing both His lowly state and the glory of His resurrection. The sermon also reflects on the implications of Christ's burial for believers, illustrating how it sanctifies the grave and signifies the burial of their sins. Ultimately, Gill reassures that through Christ's burial, believers can find hope and assurance in their own resurrection.

Transcript

A Body of Doctrinal Divinity

Book 5--Chapter 5

OF THE BURIAL OF CHRIST

The last degree of Christ's humiliation, and which it ended in, is his burial, or his being laid in the grave; where he continued under the dominion of death for a time. This is one of the articles of the Christian faith, "that he was buried--according to the scriptures" (1 Cor 15:4). Therefore it will be proper to observe, 1. First, That Christ was to be buried, according to scripture prophecies and types of it; and what they were. 1a. First, Scripture prophecies; which are the following. 1a1.

Psalm 16:10. "For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell," or body in the grave. The whole Psalm is concerning Christ, and this verse particularly is applied to him, and strongly argued to belong to him, and not to David, by two apostles, Peter and Paul (Acts 2:25-31; 13:34-37). Indeed, they produce it in proof of Christ's resurrection; but it is, at the same time, a proof of his burial in the grave, from whence he was raised. Some understand it, of his "descent into hell;" as it is expressed in some creeds, that of the Apostles, the

Nicene, and the Athanasian creeds, though foisted into them in later times; and which the papists interpret of the local descent of the soul of Christ into hell, as it signifies the place of the damned, at least into an apartment of it, they call "limbus patrum;" whither they say he went, to complete his sufferings; to preach the gospel to the Old Testament saints; to fetch their souls from thence, and to triumph over Satan.

But it is certain, that the soul of Christ, upon its separation from his body, went not to hell, but to heaven, being committed by him into the hands of his Father: nor needed he to go thither to complete his sufferings, which ended on the cross, when he said, "It is finished": nor to preach the gospel, which belongs to the present life, and not to the state of the dead; and which had been preached to the old testament saints in their lifetime: nor to fetch their souls from thence, which were in heaven; as not only Enoch and Elijah, both in soul and body; but the souls of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and all the rest of the saints: nor to triumph over the devil and his angels, that he did when on the cross (Col. 2:15).

The passages of scripture which all this is chiefly grounded upon, and brought for the confirmation of, are in 1 Peter 3:19,20 and 4:6 which are misunderstood, and wrongly applied; for the words are to be understood, not of Christ's going down into the prison of hell, after his death, and preaching to the spirits there; but of his preaching by his Spirit, to the disobedient ones, who lived in the times of Noah; whose spirits, for their disobedience to it, were, in the apostle's time, in the prison of hell.

In like manner the dead, to whom the gospel is said to be preached, in 1 Peter 3: 4:6 are those that were then dead when the apostle wrote, but were alive when the gospel was preached unto them. Nor are the words in the sixteenth Psalm, and with which the article in the creed is allowed by some to agree, to be understood of the soul sufferings of Christ; the anguish and distress of his mind, under a sense of wrath, and under divine desertion; which have been spoken of in the preceding chapter: though Calvin, and many that follow him, so interpret the phrases, both in the Psalm and in the Creed: but these were what he endured in the garden and on the cross, before his death, and not after it.

By "hell," is meant the grave; and so the word is used in many places (Gen. 42:38; 1 Sam. 2:6; Isa. 38:18). And by "soul," is meant the dead body of Christ; as the word "nephesh" sometimes signifies; (see Lev. 21:1) and then the sense is, that God would not leave his dead body in the grave, at least not so long as to see corruption, to purify and corrupt, as bodies begin to do, usually, on the fourth day of their being laid in the grave (John 11:39), but Christ was to be, and was raised, on the third day, which prevented that.

Now this prophecy manifestly implies that Christ's dead body should be laid in the grave, though it should not be left there; and though it should not lie there so long as to be corrupted, or that any worm or maggot should have power over him, as the Jews^[1] express it. 1a2. Another passage is in Psalm 22:15. "Thou hast brought me into the dust of death;" not only to death, but to dust after death; to lie in the dusty grave, according to the threatening; "To dust thou shalt return" (Gen. 3:19), and to which the body does return when laid in the grave; and the soul to God that gave it (Eccl. 12:7).

So Kimchi interprets the passage; "I am ready to be put into the grave, which is the dust of death. " 1a3. Some take the words in Isaiah 11:10 to be a prophecy of Christ's burial; "And his rest shall be glorious;" that the passage belongs to the Messiah, is clear from Isaiah 11:1,2 and following; and from the quotation and application of it to the times of Christ (Rom. 15:12). And the Vulgate Latin version of the words is, "His grave shall be glorious": and the grave, as it is a resting place to the saints, so it was to Christ; where his "flesh rested in hope" of the resurrection from the dead (Ps. 16:9).

And though his being buried was an instance of his humiliation, and a proof of the low estate into which he was brought; yet it was, in some sense, glorious, inasmuch as he was honorably interred in the grave of a rich man; as the next prophecy suggests. 1a4. In the passage in Isaiah 53:9 "and he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death;" in which words there is some difficulty: could they be transposed thus, "he made his grave with the rich, and he was with the wicked in his death," facts would exactly answer to it; for he died between two thieves, and so was with the wicked in his death; and he was buried in the sepulchre of Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man, and so had his grave with the rich; but it might be using too much freedom with the text to transpose it at pleasure.

The general sense of the words may be this, that after his death both rich men and wicked men were concerned in his burial, and were about his grave; Joseph and Nicodemus, two rich men, in taking down from the cross his body, and laying it in the tomb, enwrapped by them in linen with spices; and wicked soldiers were employed in guarding the sepulchre: or the first clause may respect the intention of the Jews, "he" or "it," the Jewish people and nation, "gave," appointed and intended that his grave should be with "the wicked," that he should be interred in the common burying place for malefactors; and the latter clause may respect the will of God, but "he made it," that is, God in his providence ordered it, that it should be "with the rich in his death;" that he should be buried in a rich man's grave when dead.

Aben Ezra says the word *twmb* translated "in his death," signifies a structure over a grave, a sepulchral monument; and so the sense may be, that though his grave was put under the care and watch of the wicked soldiers, yet he had a famous monument erected at the charge of a rich man, where he was laid.[2] 1b. Secondly, There was a scripture type of his burial, and which our Lord himself takes notice of; "for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40), that is, as Jonah was as it were buried so long in the belly of the whale, so Christ should lie a like time under the earth, called "the heart of it," as elsewhere "the lower parts" of it, into which Christ "descended," that is, the grave (Eph. 4:9). 2.

Secondly, As Christ should be buried according to prophecy and type, so in fact he was buried, as all the evangelists relate (Matthew 27:59,60; Mark 15:46,47; Luke 23:53,55; John 19:39-42), though with different circumstances, yet not contradictory; what is omitted by one is supplied by another; and from the whole we learn, 2a. That the body being begged of Pilate by Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man, it was taken down from the cross, and was wrapped or wound about in fine clean linen, as was the manner of the Jews; (see John 11:44), when he was bound hand and foot like a prisoner; and which may denote the dominion death had over him; for when the apostle says, "death hath no more dominion over him" (Rom. 6:9), it supposes that it once had; as it had when he was bound with grave clothes and was laid in the grave, until he was loosed from the pains or cords of death, and declared to be the Son of God with power by his resurrection from the dead: the fine clean linen, in which he was wrapped, may be an emblem of his innocence, purity, and holiness; who notwithstanding all appearances and charges, was holy, harmless, and as a lamb without spot and blemish; and likewise of his pure and spotless righteousness, now wrought out, and brought in by his active and passive obedience completely finished, called fine linen, clean and white, which is the righteousness of the saints (Rev. 19:8), and in which his dead members, his people, who are in themselves dead in law, and dead in sin, being enwrapped, or having his righteousness imputed to them, it is unto justification to life. 2b.

Nicodemus, another rich man, brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight; which spices, along with the linen clothes, were wound about the body of Christ; which may denote the savoriness and acceptableness of the righteousness of Christ to God, and to sensible sinners; all whose

garments smell of myrrh, aloes, and cassia, as those his sepulchral garments did (Ps. 45:8), so the smell of the church's garments, which she has from Christ, is like the smell of Lebanon, or like the smell of a field which the Lord has blessed; as the smell of Jacob in his brother's garments was to Isaac (Song of Sol. 4:11; Gen. 27:27), also the savoriness of Christ's death and sacrifice, how agreeable to God, being satisfactory to his justice, and so of a sweet smelling savor to him (Eph. 5:2), and the savor of a crucified Christ diffused through the preaching of the gospel, which is like a box of ointment poured forth, and emits such a sweet savor as attracts the love and affections of souls unto him; and whereby the ministers of it become a sweet savor to God and men (2 Cor. 2:14,15; Song of Sol. 1:3). 2c.

The body being thus enwrapped was laid in Joseph's own tomb, a new one, in which no man had been laid; and this was cut out of a rock. As Jacob, the patriarch and type of Christ, was honorably buried by his son Joseph, so Christ, the antitype of him, and who is sometimes called Israel, was honorably buried by another Joseph, and he a "rich" man, which fulfilled the prophecy in Isaiah 53:9. Christ was laid, not in his own, but in "another's" tomb; which, as it is expressive of his meanness and low estate, who in his lifetime had not where to lay down his head to sleep in, and at his death had no tomb of his own to lay his dead body in; so it denotes, that what he did and suffered, and was done to him, were not for himself but for others; he died not for his own sins, but for the sins of others; and he was buried, not so much for his own sake, but for others, that they and their sins might be buried with him; and so he rose again for their justification: it was a "new" tomb in which Christ was laid, who wherever he comes makes all things new; he made the grave for his people quite a new and another thing to what it was; as, when he is formed, and lies, and dwells in the hearts of men, old things pass away, and all become new: and in this tomb "was never man yet laid;" and which, as the former circumstance, was so ordered in providence that it might not be said that not he but another man rose from the dead; or that he rose not by his own power, but by the touch of another body, as a man once rose by the touch of the body of Elisha (2 Kings 13:20), moreover this tomb was "hewn out in the rock," as was sometimes the manner of rich men to do, to prepare such sepulchres while living for the greater security of their bodies when dead (Isa. 22:16), and this prevented any such objection to be made to the resurrection of Christ, that the apostles through some subterraneous passages got to the body of Christ and took it away; and to all this may be added, that at the door of this new tomb hewn out of a rock a great stone was rolled, and this stone sealed by the Jews themselves; so that no pretence could be made for a fraud or imposture in this affair. 2d.

The tomb in which Christ's body was laid was "in a garden;" nor was it unusual for great personages to have their sepulchres in a garden, and there to be buried. Manasseh and Amon his son, kings of Judah, were buried in a garden (2 Kings 21:18,26). Christ's sufferings began in a garden, and the last act of his humiliation was in one; this may put us in mind of the garden of Eden, into which the first Adam was put, and out of which he was cast for his sin; and may lead us to observe, that as sin was first committed in a garden, whereby Adam and his posterity came short of the glory of God, so sin was finished in a garden; there it was buried, there the last act Christ's humiliation for it was performed; and hereby way was made for our entrance into the garden of God, the heavenly paradise above.

A garden is a place where fruit trees grow, and fruit is in plenty; and may direct us to think of the fruits of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection; who compares himself to a grain of wheat, which unless it falls into the ground and die, it abides alone; but if it dies, it brings forth much fruit (John 12:24), such as redemption, reconciliation, pardon of sin, &c. as also that as Christ's remove from the cross was to a garden, so the remove of saints at death will be from the cross of afflictions and tribulations, to the garden of Eden, the paradise of God, where there are pleasures for evermore. 2e.

The persons concerned in the burial of Christ, and attended his grave, were many and of various kinds, and on different accounts: the persons principally concerned in the interment of him were Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, both rich men; and though before they did not openly profess Christ, yet now being wonderfully animated, influenced, and strengthened by the power and grace of God, boldly appear in his cause, and are not ashamed to own him, and act on his behalf, though crucified and slain, and lay under so much ignominy and contempt.

And this was so ordered by the wise providence of God, that it might appear, that though Christ was loaded with the reproaches of the multitude of the people of all sorts, yet he had some friends among the rich and honorable, who had courage enough to espouse his cause; and such faith in him, and love to him, as publicly to do the kind offices they did to him, in his greatest debasement and lowest state of humiliation. There were some women also who attended his cross, and followed him to his grave; and continued sitting over against the sepulchre, saw where he was and how his body was laid there; and who went and prepared spices to anoint it, and with which they came early on the first day of the week; but were prevented doing it by his resurrection from the dead; here the power and grace of God were seen in spiriting and strengthening the weaker vessels to act for Christ, and show their respect to him, when all his disciples forsook him and fled; and this conduct of the women was a rebuke of theirs.

Besides these, there were the Roman soldiers, who were placed as a guard about the sepulchre; and which, not only gave proof of the truth of his death, and of the reality of his burial; but also of his resurrection; though they were tampered with to be an evidence against it. The continuance of Christ in the grave, was three days and three nights; that is, three natural days, or parts of them; which answered the type of Christ's burial, Jonah; who lay so long in the belly of the whale (Matthew 12:40).

Christ was buried on the sixth day, and so lay in the grave part of that natural day, and the whole seventh day, another natural day, and rose again on the first day, and so must lie a part of that day in it; and in like manner, and no longer, it may reasonably be supposed, Jonah lay in the whale's belly. 3. Thirdly, The ends, uses, and effects of Christ's burial, require some notice. 3a. To fulfil the prophecies and type before mentioned; for as this was predicted of him, it was necessary it should be fulfilled in him. 3b.

To show the truth and reality of his death; for though there were other proofs and evidences of it; yet this must be a very convincing one, since he was taken down from the cross, and buried, not by his enemies, but by his friends, who would never bury him alive; nor, indeed, did Pilate, nor would he deliver the body to them until he was certified by the centurion that he was really dead; and if any doubt could remain after that, it must be removed by the burial of him. 3c. That it might appear, that by his death and sacrifice, he had made full satisfaction for sin, and a complete atonement for it; that as by his hanging on the tree, it was manifest that he bore the curse, and was made a curse for his people; so by his body being taken down from the cross, and laid in the grave, it was a token that the curse was at an end, and entirely abolished, agreeable to the law in Deuteronomy 21:23. 3d.

To sanctify the grave, and make that easy and familiar to saints, and take off the dread and reproach of it: Christ pursued death, the last enemy, to his last quarters and strong hold, the grave; drove him out from thence, and snatched the victory out of the hand of the grave; so that believers may, with pleasure, go and see the place where their "Lord lay;" which is now sanctified, and become a sleeping and resting place for them until the resurrection morn; and may say and sing, in the view of death and the grave; "O death, where is thy sting?"

O grave, where is thy victory?" For, 3e. In Christ's burial, all the sins of his people are buried with him; as the "old man was crucified with him; that the body of sin might be destroyed" (Rom. 6:6). So being dead, that, and its deeds, are buried with him; these may be signified by the grave clothes with which he was bound, and from which being loosed, he left them in the grave; signifying that the sins of his people, with which he was held, but now freed from, having atoned for them, would never rise up against them; being left in his grave, and cast into the depths of the sea, and, by the Lord, behind his back, so as never to be seen and remembered more; and which is emblematically represented in the ordinance of baptism, designed to exhibit to view the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and of believers in him (Rom. 6:4-6; Col. 2:12). 3f.

This is an instance of the great humiliation of Christ; not only to be brought to death, but to the dust of death. The man, when laid in the grave, is a "vile" body, mean, abject, and contemptible; it is sown in dishonor and weakness; and so was the body of Christ; he descended into, and lay in the lower parts of the earth, where death and the grave had dominion, and triumphed over him for a while; and so did the enemies of Christ, as the enemies of the two witnesses will, over their dead bodies, saying, as in prophetic language, "And now that he lieth," that is, in the grave, "he shall rise up no more" (Ps. 41:8).

But they were mistaken; though he died once, he will die no more; death shall have no more dominion over him; though while he was in the grave it had dominion over him; but now he is loosed from the cords and pains of death, and lives for evermore, having the keys of hell and death; and he is quickened and justified in the Spirit; and is risen again for the justification of his people: which is the next thing to be considered. ENDNOTES:

[1] Midrash apud Kimchium, in v. 9.

[2] See my Book of the Prophecies of the Old Testament fulfilled in Jesus, p. 166.

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