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Lent Day 40: The Grave

3-4 minutes

Matthew 27:57-66 (ESV)

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.' Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can." So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.

The central claim of the historic Christian message is that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. Tempting though it may be for us to jump quickly from Friday to Sunday, from cross to resurrection,

Matthew pauses and brings us through the silence and stillness of the grave.

Many have tried to dismantle the hope of Christianity, suggesting that Jesus had not really died or that eager disciples had stolen his body to substantiate their claims of a risen Savior. Yet Matthew's interlude between final breath and first appearance speaks unequivocally of a death that was real, a grave that was silent, and a situation that appeared beyond hope.

Romans were thorough in carrying out capital sentences, particularly for those accused of treason. That Joseph was able to retrieve Jesus' body meant the executioners were satisfied with their handiwork. Jews, throughout the Old Testament, would heap rocks on the vilest of criminals to represent that for some, there would be no life beyond the grave. That a great stone would cover the entrance of the tomb meant that there was no expectation of life beyond this grave. The tomb is still, dark, silent.

This is the fate that should have been ours and the destiny of humanity. And yet, our hope is that through the one who went into the tomb before us, there is a way through and out into a new world of God's creating. It is the hope that because one transcended the grave itself, we too may experience new life with him. Matthew's description of the grave is a reminder that the tomb was silent and yet the silence would only last one more day.

Prayer

Our Father, remind us that the darkness of the grave will soon be overcome by the brightness of the third day. In Christ's Name, Amen.

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