Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Have any of you seen the TV show **Casketeers**? It is a TVNZ, ‘Fly on the wall’ show about a West Auckland funeral home. You get to know the owners, Francis and Kaiora, and their staff, as they direct all the aspects of the funeral process. It is now in its third season and our church actually featured in the second series when parts of brother Ko Makaea’s funeral were filmed here in 2018. It is filmed very respectfully and tastefully, and it is actually quite humourous in parts. I spoke to the producer/director when they were filming here and she said that one of her motivations for making the show was to make death less of a taboo subject. And I think the show does that well.

But the fact of the matter is, you can laugh about some aspects of the process and you can make funerals as nice as possible, but we all know that the grim reality of decomposition has begun. And while a place like Waikumete cemetery would be visited by many if it were just a park, it is avoided by many because it is where bodies are buried. And even though we can push death to the back of our minds most of the time, funerals are a reminder that sooner or later death awaits us all.

And this is why we grieve at funerals. And yet, might suggest that a funeral is a time for complete sadness and hopelessness, **1 Thessalonians 4:13** says that believers do not have to “*grieve* *like those who have no hope*.” And the reason that believers can face their own death or the death of a loved one with hope is what we have been looking at in recent months – the ***death*** of Jesus Christ, what we see in this text, the ***burial*** of Jesus Christ, and what comes in ch. 20 – the ***resurrection*** of Jesus Christ.

And our focus today is His burial; we are going to see **why the burial of Jesus means believers can grieve with hope**. And we will see this as we first of all consider the ***report*** of Jesus’ burial and then, secondly, the ***reason*** for Jesus’ burial.

1. So first of all, let’s walk through John’s **report** of the burial of Jesus Christ.
   1. And in case you didn’t know, all four Gospels contain reports about the burial of Jesus that are about the same length and that contain pretty much the same information. And one very important fact that we glean from the four reports is **the number of people** who knew for certain that Jesus really died and was buried – there are the soldiers who did not break Jesus’ legs because they saw He was dead, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, Pilate, the Centurion who assured Pilate that Jesus was dead, the chief priests and Pharisees who were with Pilate, John – the author of this Gospel, Mary Magdalene and another Mary and some other women, and the guards who were posted outside the tomb. So that’s a pretty impressive list of witnesses to the certainty of Jesus’ death and burial.
   2. Well, as we saw last week, the law of God demanded that the body of an executed criminal be buried the same day that the person died. And while our days begin at Midnight, a Jewish day began at 6pm in the evening. So given that Jesus died just after 3pm, that didn’t leave a whole lot of time to get Him buried. And we are told that a Jewish man named **Joseph of Arimathea** took the lead in getting Jesus buried. And all that we know about Joseph is what we read in the four Gospel burial accounts; he is not mentioned before or after this moment.
      1. Mark and Luke tell us that he was a **member of the Sanhedrin**, which was the Jewish council. And it was the Sanhedrin that unjustly tried Jesus and unanimously found Him guilty before sending Him to Pilate for His Roman ‘trial.’ But all that was needed for such a vote was a quorum of the council and not the full council, and Luke says that Joseph did not consent to their decision and action. So it is likely that he was not present when the vote was held but made his position clear when he found out what had been done.
      2. Luke tells us that Joseph was “***a good and righteous man … and he was looking for the kingdom of God***.” And this means that Joseph tried to obey God’s commandments and he was waiting for the promised Messiah and hopeful that Jesus was the One.
      3. And this is why John describe Joseph as a **disciple** of Jesus. However, in v38, John notes that Joseph was a disciple “***secretly****, for fear of the Jews*.” And it was the same with Nicodemus, who was with Joseph now. Nicodemus was also a member of the Sanhedrin. We met him in ch. 3 of John’s Gospel. And John was very specific there that **Nicodemus visited Jesus at night**. And the most probable explanation of his night time visit was that he didn’t want to be seen by anyone else, because he too was a secret disciple of Jesus. And in **chapter 12** John had some strong words to say about secret disciples; he said, “*Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in Him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God*.”
         1. Now, you might be thinking to yourself, ok, but here they were, right, publicly asking for Jesus’ body. Mark actually says that it took courage for Joseph to do this. It is noteworthy, also, that Jesus’ 11 *public* disciples where nowhere to be seen! So this act must surely be to the credit of J&N? Well, the absence of the 11 disciples really says more about their miserable failure than anything else. And as far as the Chief priests and Pharisees were concerned, Jesus was dead now so what was done with His body was not a major concern. We get no sense that they were opposed to Joseph’s request or that it would get him in trouble.
         2. So J&N provide us with a good opportunity for a little bit of **self-reflection**. NZ is what is called a ‘post-Christian’ country. It wasn’t long ago that the majority of the population identified as Christian and it was relatively easy and comfortable for us to do the same and to say what we believe. But if you identify as a Christian today and say that you believe what the Bible says about a raft of subjects, you will be laughed at as an idiot at best, or people will be highly offended, or you may lose your job or miss out on some opportunity, and in my opinion, it will not be too long before you will face the danger of arrest.
         3. Way back in 1890, the preacher Alexander Maclaren said, It is pretty easy for the bulk of people to say that they are Christians today. “But when it comes to a real [declaration], a real carrying out of a true discipleship, there are as many and as formidable, though very different, [obstacles] in the way today, from those which blocked the path of the two cowards in our text. In all regions of life it is hard to work out into practice any moral conviction whatever. How many of us are there who have beliefs about social and moral questions which we are ashamed to [declare] in certain company for fear of the finger of ridicule being pointed at us? … The political, social, and moral conflicts of this day have their ‘secret disciples,’ who will only come out of their holes when the battle is over, and will then shout the loudest.”
         4. And the preacher and author James Montgomery Boice asked, “Why is it that in a day when every vice of humanity is coming ‘out of the closet’ and [demanding approval] … many believers (or alleged believers) fail to come out for Christ? It is fear, fear of what someone may say.”
         5. Have you ever chosen not to say what the Bible says out of fear about how people might respond? I know I have. Boice went on to say, “If you do not confess Christ openly and stand with Him even in the face of ridicule, I do not see what right you have to consider yourself any different from [J&N].”
         6. Way more importantly than Maclaren or Boice, Jesus calls us to take up our cross and follow Him. And crosses are always painful. He also said, “*Whoever confesses me before men, I also will confess him before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven*.”
         7. What we can say about J&N is that it took the death of Jesus for them to act in this publicly courageous way. And it is only those who truly understand who Jesus is and what He suffered for them and that He reigns in heaven as the King of kings who will take up their cross and confess Him in public. It is only knowing that Christ truly is your Saviour and King that will free you from fearing the response of others or at least help you to put the fear below your duty to speak or act. (Sat – March for Life).
   3. Well, Joseph and Nicodemus were given permission to bury the body of Jesus. And having been given permission, they placed His body in a tomb that was nearby so that it could be done before 6pm. And we also learn from Matthew that the tomb they used was a tomb that belonged to Joseph. John tells us that it was “*a new tomb in which no one had been laid*.” The other Gospels explain that it was “*cut out of the rock*.” And they wrapped His body in linen strips and an amount of spices that history reveals was usually reserved for a king! So all this adds up to Joseph being a wealthy man as tombs like this and that amount of spices could only be afforded by the uber-rich.
      1. And we have already referred to this in earlier sermons but this is another explicit fulfilment of an OT prophecy from around 700 years before this moment. In **Isaiah 53:9**, Isaiah said, “*He was assigned a grave with … the rich in His death*.” So although Jesus was poor in birth and life, and He died with criminals, He was buried in the tomb of the rich.
         1. And that fact preaches a message about Jesus. You see, up till now His life has really been an utter humiliation. He left heaven to live as a human, He lived in poverty, He was constantly rejected and ultimately crucified, and He was buried. But, soon He will rise and ascend to heaven and reign as the King of kings and Lord of lords. So His burial in a rich man’s tomb is the end of His humiliation and the beginning of His **exaltation**! And boys and girls, exaltation means to lift high and praise! The tomb preaches the humiliation and exaltation of Jesus!
2. Well, I hope you agree that all of this makes the death and burial of Jesus an undeniable, verifiable, historic fact! So let’s turn our attention now to the **reason** for His burial. And the reason He was buried has two parts – the physical reason is to conclusively prove that He was dead and the spiritual reason is to give believers hope and comfort in the face of death. And we concentrate in this point on that spiritual comfort; we want to see why Jesus’ burial gives us this comfort. And it does so because of two things that we have already noted in the first point:
   1. The first is that His body had to be buried the same day He died because the law of God demanded this for the bodies of executed criminals. So even though Jesus was not actually a criminal, and even though He was dead and didn’t bury Himself, still **every aspect of God’s law that related to Him was being fulfilled**. And that is a necessary part of our salvation.
      1. You see, the Saviour that we sinners need must be a *righteous* Saviour. Our chief problem is that we are unrighteous, disobedient sinners. And this began in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve, as we read earlier. But God promised to send a descendant of Eve who would crush the head of the serpent. And Jesus is that descendant. And that means He had to obey every aspect of God’s law. So even this *passive* obedience, meaning He did not bury Himself but was buried by others, is broadcasting the message that Jesus is the Saviour we need.
      2. And that already gives us reason for hope. You see, if we were to stand at the grave-side of a loved one and their eternal destiny depended on them doing more good than bad? we would have no reason for hope whatsoever. The Bible is very plain about us all falling short of the glory of God. We are sinners and the wages of sin is death and judgment. But God sent His Son. And His Son took our sins from us and paid the price on the cross, so that when we believe that He did this for us, our guilt is taken away and we are ‘clothed’ with the righteousness of Jesus! So those who repent of their sins and believe in Jesus are given the ‘**uniform’** of salvation.
         1. Have you boys and girls worn a uniform? School/cadetsGEMS. And uniforms make a person easy to recognize. If it is a school uniform for instance, and you are at some event where there are different schools, your teacher will easily recognize you by your uniform.
         2. Well, when we believers stand in the throng of humanity on Judgment Day, God will not be looking at a book to see who has done enough good, He will be looking for those who are dressed in the ‘uniform’ of Jesus, which means they believed in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins in this life. Are you wearing that ‘uniform’?
   2. But the second d thing that we have already noted that gives us this hope and comfort is that **Jesus was buried in Joseph’s tomb**. If you boys and girls have read through the stories of the kings of Israel, do you remember how the story of the kings that were sons of David ends? Here is one example from **2 Chronicles 32:33**: “*And Hezekiah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the upper part of the tombs of the sons of David*.” So the kings that were sons of David were buried in the tombs of the sons of David. And Jesus is a Son of David. That is the point of those genealogies that begin Matthew’s Gospel. He had to be a Son of David to qualify as the Messiah. But He was not buried in the tombs of the sons of David! And neither was He buried in a common grave, which is where executed criminals were usually buried. And He was not buried in a grave that was purchased just for Him. He was buried in a tomb that belonged to Joseph. And this fact preaches a message about Jesus also: And the message is that *Jesus does not belong with the dead*. For Him, the grave was just a temporary resting place. Earlier we sung **Psalm 16**. It contains this prophetic line: “*My body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay*.” So the body of Jesus did not decompose and it came out of the tomb three days later.
      1. And that gives us reason for hope and comfort because, as we read earlier in **Genesis 3**, the curse of sin is that our bodies “*return to the ground, since from it [we] were taken; for dust [we] are and to dust [we] will return*.” So much of life is about the body, right? We pamper it, we admire it, we display it, we decorate it, and we celebrate what it can accomplish in art and sport and science, but in the end it has to suffer the unbearable indignity of decomposing to become part of the dust of the earth.
      2. But the Bible tells us that at the moment of death, the souls of those who followed Jesus as Saviour and Lord go immediately to be with Him in heaven.
         1. A very sick Christian was once asked by a visitor if he thought he would die soon and he replied, “I do not know; but it makes little difference. If I live, Christ is with me, and if I die, I will be with Him!” And while that is good, we can improve on it by quoting the Apostle Paul from Phil. 1:23. For speaking about living or dying, Paul said, “*I desire to depart and be with Christ for that is far better*.”
         2. Do you have that comfort? Is that your hope? And will others have that hope when they grieve for you? Is your faith in Christ so visible in how you talk and behave that others will be able to grieve with a certain hope that your soul has gone to be with Jesus?
      3. But also, even though you sometimes hear people talk about the grave as a person’s final resting place, that is not the case. The Bible is plain that just as Jesus rose from the grave, so one day every *body* will rise from the grave. And our bodies will be reunited with their souls for Judgment Day. And then we will all stand before Jesus. And as we read earlier, the soul and body of those wearing the ‘uniform’ of Jesus, which means that they knew Him as Saviour and Lord in this life, will be welcomed into the joy and wonder of eternal life in heaven. But those who did not believe in Jesus in this life will be condemned to an eternity in the horror and misery of hell.

So the burial of Jesus preaches a message – It speaks of His exaltation and it invites us to believe in Him so that we might not grieve like those who have no hope. When people die, there are some who think that that is the end but there are many who like to comfort themselves by saying that their loved one has ‘gone to a better place.’ What we have seen though is that you only go to a better place if you are a follower of Jesus. Are you a follower of Jesus? Do you believe that He is the Christ, the Son of God, and that He died on the cross for the forgiveness of your sins? It is the question we are being asked in pretty much every sermon from John because it is why he wrote His Gospel. I hope it describes you. Amen.