Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

One thing we all learn pretty quickly is that every debt has to be paid. Boys and girls, if you borrow $2 from your brother, he is going to want his $2 back, eventually. Right? But $2 is an easy debt to repay. What is not an easy debt to pay is the debt that many countries all around the world are racking up. Because of Covid, country after country is busy printing new money, which means debt is increasing at extreme levels. And more and more people are asking, how and when can that much debt be repaid? In fact, is it possible that that debt will get so big that it simply cannot be paid back?

Well, that question, in a spiritual sense, is the concern of the Bible. Over the last couple of months, our Leviticus sermons have helped us see the enormous debt that we owe God because of our sin. So a very important question is: Can sin’s debt be paid? And **Romans 6:23** points us to the answer by saying, “*The wages of sin is death*.” **Question and Answer 11** of the Heidelberg Catechism put is this way: “*God’s justice demands that sin, committed against His supreme majesty, be punished with the supreme penalty, eternal punishment of body and soul*.” But notice that the ‘P’ word there is not *payment* but *punishment*. Our death and an eternity in hell is the appropriate *punishment* for sin, but it cannot pay for sin and secure eternal life in heaven. So we cannot pay sin’s debt.

But what Leviticus has also taught us, with the animal sacrifices, is the substitute principle **– God can accept the death of another as payment for sin’s debt**. Now, animals can’t actually do this, as we have repeatedly noted in our Leviticus sermons. Those animals pointed forward to Jesus, the Son of God, who could be the sacrifice that pays the debt of our sin. Because He is fully human, He could represent us on the cross, and because He is fully God, He could die and endure an eternity in hell in a short space of time, in our place.

So that is what **Question and Answer 40** is about: “*Christ had to go all the way to death because only the death of God’s Son could pay for our sin*.” And that is why the gospel is often boiled down to ‘You need to believe that Jesus *died* for your sins.’ But He also needed to endure an eternity in hell, as we have seen. And how and when He did that will be our focus this afternoon. But our focus this morning is the burial of Jesus. All four Gospels include accounts of His burial. Why? Is it important, somehow, that Jesus was buried? Most of us or maybe all of us will have stood by a graveside and witnessed the burial of a body. And we know that one day our bodies will also be buried. So is there a message for believers in the *burial* of Jesus?

And our answer to that question will be Yes! **The burial of Jesus speaks a message of hope and comfort for believers**. And we will see this as we first of all consider the **Account *of*** His burial; the facts as they are spelled out for us by Matthew and the other Gospels, and then as we consider the **Assurance *from*** His burial.

1. So first of all, the **Account** of His burial.
   1. And our first concern is the **time** of Jesus’ burial.
      1. All that Matthew says about this is “*when it was evening*.” But from the other Gospels we learn that Jesus died at 3pm on a Friday afternoon. Now, unlike us, who begin a new day at midnight, the Jews began a new day at 6pm in the evening. So 5:59pm was Friday but 6:00pm was when Saturday began. And boys and girls, what was special about Saturday for the Jews? It was the **Sabbath** Day. And work was not to be done on the Sabbath Day. So Mark and Luke and John all explain in their Gospels that Joseph approached Pilate when He did and used the tomb that He used, so that Jesus could be buried before the Sabbath Day began. And in this way, even in death, Jesus was obedient to the law of God.
      2. Now, the fact that Jesus was buried before the Sabbath Day began also fulfilled another requirement of the Law. And we cannot know whether Joseph intended this or not, but in **Deuteronomy 21**, there is a command given that if a man had been executed for covenant disobedience, his body was to be hung on a tree, but not left out overnight; it has to be buried that same day. So Jesus being buried *on the day that He was crucified* also fulfilled a requirement of the law.
      3. So the *time* of Jesus’ burial is relevant to the *obedience* of Jesus, which we shall return to in our second point.
   2. But our next concern is **Joseph**. Who was this man?
      1. Well, Matthew tells us that he was rich and that he was from a place called **Arimathea**, and that He was a disciple or follower of Jesus.
      2. Mark and Luke tell us that he was a **member of the** **Sanhedrin**, which was kind of the Jewish parliament.
      3. Luke also tells us that he was “*a good and upright man* … *[who] was looking for the kingdom of God*.” However, from John we learn that Joseph “*was a secret follower of Jesus, because he feared the Jews*.” So Joseph had being trying for some time to have a foot in the world of Jesus and a foot in the world of Jewish prominence and power.
         1. And there have been many like Joseph ever since that – people who loudly praise Jesus on Sunday but blaspheme or ignore His commandments or are afraid to tell others about Jesus during the week. And we can all be guilty of doing this, right? May God forgive us!
      4. But now Joseph chose to stand publicly for Jesus. So regardless of what it might have cost him, he “*asked Pilate for the body of Jesus*.” Mark says, he “*went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body*.” We can be certain that Joseph would have been very confused and upset by the death of Jesus, but regardless of what it might mean to him personally, he acted, publicly, to get Jesus decently buried before the Sabbath.
   3. So next we come to **the burial** itself.
      1. Matthew simply says that “*Pilate ordered the body given to Joseph*.” From Mark’s Gospel we learn that Pilate was surprised to learn that Jesus was already dead. But after questioning the centurion who confirmed Joseph’s words, he agreed to the request.
      2. In **verse 59**, we see that “*he took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud, and laid it in his own tomb, which he had cut in the rock*.”
         1. Now, we know from John’s Gospel that Joseph was assisted in the burial by another man, named **Nicodemus**. He obviously helped with the carrying of Jesus’ body, and applying the burial spices that were put on a corpse and wrapping the corpse in the linen shroud.
         2. And we also know from Luke’s Gospel that all of this was **done in a great hurry**. Luke explains that more spices were usually applied and the way that the corpse was wrapped usually took much longer. But with the approach of the Sabbath, there simply was not the time to do all of this. So “*Mary Magdalene and the other Mary*,” who Matthew tells us where there when Jesus was buried, intended to come back after the Sabbath to wrap Jesus’ body properly.
         3. And one last fact about the burial from Luke’s Gospel is that this was a tomb “*in which no one had yet been laid*.”
   4. And that brings us to the final part of the account of Jesus’ burial, which is the number of **witnesses** of His burial.
      1. To begin with there are the obvious four – Joseph, Nicodemus, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary.
      2. But Luke tells us that “*the women who had come with [Jesus] from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how His body was laid*.” So there were more women than just the two Marys mentioned in verse 61 who saw His burial. Matthew refers to these women in verses 55-56, and Mark says that “*many other women … came up with [Jesus]*.” So, from the various references to these many women in the Gospels, there were at least three other women besides the two Marys, but probably others as well.
      3. And to this list, we can add Pilate who knew that Jesus was dead and that Joseph wanted to bury His body. And then, as you carry on to **verse 62**, we see there that the Chief Priests and the Pharisees were concerned that the disciples would steal away Jesus’ body and claim that He had risen, so they were given permission by Pilate to seal the tomb and post a guard. So we can add all of these characters to the list of witnesses to the certainty of Jesus’ death and burial. And this last lot were not in any way sympathetic to Jesus or the claims of Christianity. So that makes the historical reliability of Jesus’ death and burial beyond question. The dead body of Jesus was 100%, for certain, really and truly, literally, buried.
2. And so, with all of these details from the **Account o**f Jesus’ burial, now we are ready to see the **assurance from** Jesus’ burial.
   1. And the first and most obvious one is the one that is made explicit in Question and Answer 41, which is that “His burial **testifies that He *really* died**.”
      1. From time to time you hear about someone leaving an iron on and the ironing board gets burned or even a house can burn down. So both times that I have ironed something, I have made sure to switch the wall plug off, and to pull the cord out from the wall. And that way I can be doubly sure that the iron is *really* off.
      2. Well, many people saw Jesus die. The centurion even testified to this fact to Pilate. But the spices and the linen shroud and the burial in a sealed tomb, with a guard posted outside, and the many witnesses to all these things, are the double proof that Jesus really died. He wasn’t just unconscious; He was *dead*. And this is important because the wages of sin is death; He had to die in order to pay for our sins.
      3. And so, when the disciples began to preach the Gospel in Acts, they said, *“[They crucified Jesus and] took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb*.” And when Paul laid out the essentials of the gospel in **1 Corinthians 15**, he said, “*For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried…*”
      4. So if you believe that Jesus is the Son of God and His death is your only hope for the payment of your sins debt and eternal life in heaven, then His burial is your extra proof that He truly died to secure these things for you!
   2. And the second reason for comfort and hope from the burial of Jesus is what we saw at the beginning of our first point – even in death, because He was buried before the Sabbath began and on the same day of His death, **Jesus obeyed God’s law, perfectly**.
      1. And this is reason for comfort because you and I need more than just to have our sins forgiven; what we need also is to be made righteous or perfect. We need to have our sin and guilt *removed* and we need to be *given* a perfect nature.
         1. Let me illustrate what I mean: Back in the days when there was such a thing as **international travel**, two things would prevent you from being allowed to enter another country – having a criminal conviction and not having a VISA. The criminal conviction was the negative thing that kept you out and the VISA was the positive thing that allowed you in.
         2. And it is like that with salvation and eternal life – being an unrepentant sinner will keep you out but you also need righteousness to be allowed in.
         3. And the good news of the gospel is that **Jesus deals with both things for us**! This was Martin Luther’s wonderful Reformation discovery – having spent years trying to be righteous by his own efforts, and failing miserably, he came to understand that the righteousness that God demands He supplies by way of faith in Jesus Christ.
            1. **Romans 1:17** says, “*For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed*.”
            2. **Romans 3:22**, “*This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe*.” So we cannot *earn* it; we just have to *believe* it and *receive* it!
            3. And **2 Corinthians 5:21** explains how God made this possible: “*God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God*.” We call this the double exchange – our sins were put on Jesus so that God could give all those who believe in Him the righteousness of Jesus.
         4. Here is a **trick question** for you: Is salvation by works? Is salvation about obeying God’s law, perfectly? And this is a trick question because if you say ‘No,’ meaning *your* works/obedience, you are absolutely right. But if you say ‘Yes,’’ meaning Jesus’ works/obedience, you are also absolutely right. For you to be saved, Jesus had to obey God’s law, perfectly.
         5. And His burial is a part of His perfect obedience. So in your prayers, you can say, ‘Lord Jesus, thank you for entering the tomb; thank you for your perfect obedience, which included even your burial.’
   3. But the wonderful assurance that arises from the burial of Jesus continues: In our earlier reading from **Isaiah 53:9**, we read these words: “*He was assigned a grave with the wicked. Yet He was with a rich man in His death*.” So 700 years before the Lord Jesus was even born, it was prophesied that He would be buried in a grave of the rich!
      1. And this is exactly what happened as Matthew explains. If Joseph had not intervened, Jesus would have been buried with the rest of the common criminals. But because of Joseph’s intervention, Jesus was buried in the tomb of a rich man.
      2. Do you see the message in this? Do you boys and girls know what a **parabola** is? It is a line that goes down and down until it gets to the low point and then it turns up and up. Well, up until this moment, the trajectory of Jesus’ life had been down and down. He left heaven and all its glory; He lived in poverty; He was constantly rejected and ultimately crucified, and now He was buried. That’s the absolute low point. But He was buried in the tomb of a rich man! And that is a sign of glory or favour or prestige or exaltation. So the burial of Jesus is also the beginning of His exaltation. And soon He would rise from the dead and then ascend to heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father. And there He is ruling as the King of kings and Lord of lords. And eventually He will come back and reveal His glory and majesty to all people who have ever lived.
      3. So the tomb preaches the end of His humiliation and the beginning of His exaltation!
   4. And if you are at all, wondering, well, that’s nice for Him, but **how does that comfort me**? Then let me remind you of what God said to Adam would happen if he ate from the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil; He said, “*On the day you eat from it, you shall surely die*.” And after Adam had eaten, God said to Him, “*By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return*.”
      1. And ever since that time there has been one statistic that never changes and never gets better; and that statistic is ‘**10 out of every 10 people die**.’ One day, whether that be sooner or later, you will die.
      2. And we can make cute documentaries about death and we can play Abba songs and we can raise a toast in honour of the dearly departed, but the body of someone who lived and someone we loved is now dominated by death and the grave, and has begun to decompose. It is awful! And it awaits all of us.
      3. But our Saviour was also buried. But listen to this prophecy from **Psalm 16**: “*My body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay*.” Yes, Jesus’ dead body was placed in a tomb. But He was not dominated by death and decay; there was no decomposition. And after three days in the tomb, He rose and soon ascended to heaven. And so, for Jesus, the grave was a temporary resting place.
      4. And this is the great comfort and hope of believers who attend the burials of loved ones who loved the Lord Jesus and who will one day be buried themselves. This is why Paul says in **1 Thessalonians 4:13** that believers need not fear death or “*grieve like the rest of men*, *who have no hope*.” For as we read in **1 Corinthians 15**, “*The body that is sown [meaning buried] is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body … [When Jesus returns] the dead will be raised imperishable … For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality*.” And Jesus said, “*Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms … I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am*.”
      5. If you have confessed your sins and repented of your sins and believed in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins, then His burial and resurrection are the assurance that one day your imperishable and immortal body will rise from the grave and go to be with Him in eternity!

And so, in closing, I think I have told you this story before but it is a quite delightful illustration of what we have learned:

*Once upon a time, there was a little girl who lived in a big city.*

*And this little girl liked to skip. Wherever she went she would skip.*

*And as she skipped she would whistle a happy tune, always.*

*However, every day, as she went home from school, she had to pass through this big, dark, overgrown cemetery. And some children who were watching her one day saw her skip, whistling happily, right through this cemetery.*

*So the next day they asked her how she could skip and whistle, so happily, as she travelled through the big, dark, overgrown cemetery. And she replied, “It’s easy, my home is just on the other side.”*

Is this how you view death and the grave? Are you confident that your body will rise and go to be with Jesus in heaven? I pray that you are! Amen.