

Buried and Sealed: Jesus in the Tomb

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John's Gospel tells us that near the crucifixion site was a garden. The Greek word for "garden" is *kepos*, and it refers to *any garden with trees and spices*. It can also be translated as *an orchard*. The same word is used in John 18:1 to describe *the Garden of Gethsemane*, which was *an olive tree orchard*.

All four Gospels suggest that this tomb was near the place where Jesus was crucified, but John 19:42 says, "...The sepulchre was nigh at hand." The word "nigh" is the Greek word *aggus*, meaning *nearby*. Most crucifixions were performed along a roadside. Evidently this garden was located in an orchard-like place, just down the road from where Jesus was crucified.

John 19:41 tells us that in the garden was "...a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid." The word "new" is the Greek word *kainos*, meaning *fresh* or *unused*. This doesn't necessarily mean that the tomb had recently been made but that it was a tomb that had never been used — thus, the reason John writes, "...Wherein was never man yet laid."

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record that this tomb belonged to Joseph of Arimathea, suggesting that it was the tomb he had prepared for his own burial. The fact that it was a tomb "hewn out in the rock" (Matthew 27:60; Mark 15:46; Luke 23:53) confirms the personal wealth of Joseph of Arimathea. Only royalty or wealthy individuals could afford to have their tombs carved out of a wall of stone or in the side of a mountain. Poorer men were buried in simple graves.

The word "hewn" in Matthew, Mark, and Luke comes from the Greek word *laxeuo*, meaning not only *to cut out*, but *to polish*. It implies that it was *a special tomb, a highly developed tomb, a refined tomb, or a tomb that was splendid and expensive*. Isaiah 53:9 had prophesied that the Messiah would be buried in a rich man's tomb, and the word *laxeuo* strongly suggests that this was indeed the expensive tomb of a very rich man.

John 19:42 says, "There laid they Jesus...." The word "laid" comes from the word *tithimi*, which means *to set, to lay, to place, to deposit, or to set in place*. As used here, it portrays the careful and thoughtful placing of Jesus' body in its resting place inside the tomb. Luke 23:55 tells us that after Jesus' body was placed in the tomb, the women who came with Him from Galilee "...beheld the sepulchre, and how his body was laid." The word "beheld" in Greek is *theaomai*, from which we get the word *theater*. The word *theaomai* means *to gaze upon, to fully see, or to look at intently*. This is very important, for it proves the women *inspected* the tomb, *gazing upon* the dead body of Jesus *to see* that it had been honorably laid in place.

Mark 15:47 identifies these women as Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus and says that these women "...beheld where he was laid" at the tomb. The imperfect tense is used in Mark's account, alerting us to the fact that these women took their time in making sure Jesus was properly laid there. It could be translated, "*they carefully contemplated where he was laid.*" If Jesus had still been alive, those who buried Him would have known it, for they spent substantial time preparing His body for burial. Then after His dead body was deposited into the tomb, they lingered there, checking once again to see that the body was treated with the greatest love and attention.

Once they were certain everything was done correctly, Joseph of Arimathea "...rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre,

and departed” (Matthew 27:60; Mark 15:46). It was rare to find a stone entrance to a Jewish tomb in biblical times; most Jewish tombs had doors with certain types of hinges. A large stone rolled before the tomb would be much more difficult to move, making the burial site more permanent.

However, the chief priests and Pharisees weren’t so sure that the site was secure. Fearing that Jesus’ disciples would come to steal the body and claim that Jesus had been resurrected, the Jewish leaders came to Pilate and said, “...Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first” (Matthew 27:63,64).

When the chief priests and Pharisees asked that “...the sepulchre be *made sure...*,” the Greek word *sphragidzo* is used. This word described a *legal seal* that was placed on documents, letters, possessions, or, in this case, a tomb. Its purpose was to *authenticate that the sealed item had been properly inspected before sealing and that all the contents were in order*. As long as the seal remained unbroken, it *guaranteed that the contents inside were safe and sound*. In this case, the word *sphragidzo* is used to signify *the sealing of the tomb*. In all probability, it was a string that was stretched across the stone at the entrance of the tomb, which was then sealed on both sides by Pilate’s legal authorities.

Before sealing the tomb, however, these authorities were first required to inspect the inside of the tomb to see that the body of Jesus was in its place. After guaranteeing that the corpse was where it was supposed to be, they rolled the stone back in place and then *sealed* it with the official seal of the governor of Rome.

After hearing the suspicions of the chief priests and Pharisees, “Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can” (Matthew 27:65). The word “watch” is the Greek word *custodia*, from which we get the word *custodian*. This was a group of four Roman soldiers whose shift changed every three hours. The changing shifts assured that the tomb would be guarded 24 hours a day by soldiers who were awake, attentive, and fully alert. When Pilate said, “Ye have a watch...,” a better rendering would be, “Here — I’m giving you a set of soldiers; take them and guard the tomb.”

Matthew 27:66 says, “So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.” Wasting no time, the chief priests and elders hastened to the tomb with their government-issued soldiers and the special officers assigned to inspect the tomb before placing Pilate’s seal upon it. After a full inspection had been made, the stone was put back in place, and the soldiers stood guard to protect the tomb from anyone who would attempt to touch it or remove its contents. Every three hours, new guards arrived to replace the old ones. These armed soldiers guarded the entrance to Jesus’ tomb so firmly that *no*



one would have been able to come near it.

The purpose of the seal was to authenticate that Jesus was dead; therefore, we can know that His body was thoroughly inspected again for proof of death. There is no doubt that Jesus was dead, for He was examined again and again, even as He lay in the tomb. Some critics have claimed that only Jesus’ own disciples inspected His body and that they could have lied about His being dead. However, an officer from Pilate’s court also examined the body of Jesus. We can also be fairly certain that the chief priests and elders who accompanied the soldiers to the burial site demanded the right to view His dead body as well so they could verify that He was truly dead.

When Jesus came out of that grave several days later, it was no hoax or fabricated story. In addition to all the people who saw Him die on the Cross, the following individuals and groups verified that His dead body was in the tomb before the stone was permanently sealed by an officer from the Roman court of law:

- Joseph of Arimathea carefully laid Him inside the tomb.
- Nicodemus provided the embalming solutions, assisted in embalming Him, and helped Joseph of Arimathea lay Him in His place in the tomb.
- Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Jesus, lovingly examined His body and carefully contemplated every aspect of the burial site to ensure everything was done properly and respectfully.
- Rome’s official officer ordered the stone rolled back. Then he went into the tomb and examined the body of Jesus to verify that it was Jesus and that He was really dead.
- The chief priests and elders entered the tomb with Rome’s official officer so they could look upon Jesus’ dead body and put an end to their worries that He had somehow survived.
- Roman guards checked the contents of the tomb because



they wanted to know for sure a body was there. They didn't want to be guarding an empty tomb that would later be used as a claim of resurrection, while they got blamed for the disappearance of Jesus' body.

- After all of these inspections were complete, Rome's official officer ordered the stone rolled back in its place. While the chief priests, elders, and Roman guards watched, he secured the site and sealed it shut with the seal of the governor of Rome. Regardless of all these efforts to secure the site and to keep Jesus inside the grave, it was impossible for death to hold Him. When preaching on the day of Pentecost, Peter proclaimed to the people of Jerusalem, "...Ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain [Jesus]: whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it" (Acts 2:23,24).

Today the tomb in Jerusalem is empty because Jesus arose on the third day! Now He is seated on His throne at the right hand of the Father on High, where He ever lives to make intercession for you and for me (Hebrews 7:25). That means we never have to struggle alone. At any time of the day or night, we can come boldly before the throne of grace and ask for divine assistance (Hebrews 4:16).

There is no mountain in your life God cannot move. So make your requests known to Him, confidently expecting Him to move on your behalf. As you do, you *will* receive supernatural grace to help in time of need.

Think About It

- The purpose of the seal on Jesus' tomb was to authenticate that He was indeed dead and to secure the site. Pilate's soldiers, as well as the chief priests and elders, inspected Jesus' body to verify He was truly dead.
- Notice the ignorance and arrogance that led men to believe they had controlled and contained the Son of God. Are there any areas of your life that you have kept sealed and secure in an attempt to prevent God from stirring you to change?
- The religious leaders recalled that Jesus said He would rise from the dead. They heard the truth but did not comprehend its significance.
- Think about all that Jesus declared about Himself during His walk on this earth, and consider all He has spoken to you personally. Do you truly believe Jesus? Have you taken the time to meditate on the significance of His words?
- Jesus was the Father's promise of hope for mankind. When He died and was then buried, creation was shocked and His disciples were devastated. But God raised Jesus to new life. What seemed to be the end was actually only the beginning. Flip through the pages of your own life's story. What promise from God to you seems now incapable of coming to pass? What hope or dream in your life have you buried? Consider the power of the One who raised Jesus from the dead. Then, like Jesus, commit yourself into the hands of the One who makes all things new. He is faithful. Will you trust Him?

First John 3:16 (NKJV) states, "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren...." What are some ways you can lay down your life for others?

Jesus paid the price for your salvation, for your liberation, for your physical healing, and for your complete restoration. When the price for your forgiveness was complete, Jesus bowed His head and died. God's justice had been fulfilled. The Old Covenant had ended, and the New Covenant had begun. It was the fulfillment of one and the beginning of another.

Think of the price Jesus paid and what His death accomplished for you. Doesn't it make you want to stop for a few minutes to thank Him for what He has done for you? Where would you be today if Jesus had not died on the Cross for you? Why don't you take a little time right now to express your heartfelt thanksgiving to Jesus for paying the debt you never could have paid!



About Rick Renner

Rick is founder and pastor of one of the largest and fastest growing churches in Russia, The Moscow Good News Church. He is the author of more than ten books including the best-sellers, *Dressed to Kill*, *Sparkling Gems from the Greek*, *Ten Guidelines to Help You Achieve Your Long-Awaited Promotion*, *Dynamic Duo: The Holy Spirit & You*, and more. His daily television broadcast, "Good News with Rick Renner" can be seen by a potential 100 million viewers across Russia.