

**Building Our Faith**  
**Evidences of the Resurrection, #2**  
**The facts concerning Jesus' burial**

**Intro: The religion of Jesus, in contrast to all other faiths, provides a means of verifying its truth claims through God's acts in history.**

It is verified by the remarkable unity of the Scripture.

It is verified by fulfilled prophecy as God's prophets confirm that their message is from God by predicting the future (Isaiah's prophecies).

It is also verified by miracles that confirm God's presence and approval of the events and messages proclaimed.

The ultimate miracle of human history is the resurrection of Jesus from dead.

If it can be shown with reasonable certainty that Jesus was indeed raised from the dead, then we have every reason to put our faith in the gospel that He and His apostles proclaimed. The evidence is there for all to read and to consider.

Yet often people do not investigate thoroughly and see the impressive evidence God has given for our faith. This is our goal in this sermon series on the resurrection of Jesus.

**The doctrine of the resurrection hinges on four crucial questions.**

Did Jesus really die?

How and where was He buried?

Is there a naturalistic explanation that adequately explains why His disciples believed that He was raised from the dead?

Is there adequate testimony from proper sources to confirm His miraculous resurrection from the dead?

**In our last lesson we looked at the impressive evidence that shows without doubt that Jesus really did die upon the cross. So then the next question we must consider is, "How and where was He buried?"**

**Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus buried Jesus according to Jewish custom.**

*And after these things Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate granted permission. He came therefore, and took away His body. And Nicodemus came also, who had first come to Him by night; bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight. And so they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. (Jn. 19:38-40)*

According to ancient burial descriptions in Jewish literature the body of Jesus would have been laid on a table in the tomb and washed with warm water. Instead of typical clothing, linen wrappings would have been applied. There would be three distinct layers and with each wrap the aromatic spices would be added into the layers.

Among the spices were aloes, an aromatic wood pounded into dust and myrrh, a gummy substance from a tree. Note that in Jesus' case "100

pounds" (100 litras=75 lbs.) of such spices were used, so that the casement around Jesus body would have been quite heavy. His appearance would have been "mummy-like," with a wrapping going from feet to head; then another over the whole body including the arms and then finally a wrapping around the head itself.

One can see evidence of this kind of burial in the case of Lazarus.

When he was raised do you remember what the text says?

*He who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings; and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus \*said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." (Jn. 11:44)*

Likewise, the details of Jesus burial and the description of the garments left behind after his resurrection are completely in harmony with the Jewish burial customs just mentioned.

*Simon Peter therefore also \*came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he \*beheld the linen wrappings lying there, and the face-cloth, which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. (Jn. 20:6-7)*

But what we must envision is a body quite encumbered from movement by the wrappings. That is the state of Jesus' body after his death.

### **Jesus' body was laid in a new tomb near the place of his death.**

*Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had yet been laid. Therefore on account of the Jewish day of preparation, because the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there. (Jn. 19:41-42)*

The tomb was located in a garden, thus apparently a private burial place.

Have you ever had trouble locating a grave in a cemetery? The problem is that there are so many similar graves one after another so that it is hard to distinguish them.

But this was not the case with the place of Jesus' burial. It was a personal tomb located in a garden, not one of numerous cave tombs in some huge cemetery.

It had been carved out of the rock, probably limestone, by Joseph of Arimathea. You might imagine a tomb with a door large enough for an adult to enter, but perhaps only a few feet high (4-5 feet). Later when Peter and John came to the tomb, John stooped to look in (Jn. 20:5).

The tomb was closed with a large stone, probably circular, like a millstone with a trench prepared for it. It might be scotched until it was ready for use and then released to roll it in front of the doorway.

Several years ago some Georgia Tech engineers determined that a stone of sufficient size to cover the opening of the tomb would weigh 1 1/2 to 2 tons (Some have offered lower estimates; but still a very heavy weight or several hundred pounds at least.)

This explains why the women were concerned by how the stone would be removed; yet a couple of men could put it where it belonged when Jesus was buried.

**Jesus' burial was witnessed not only by Joseph and Nicodemus, but also by at least two other disciples.**

*Now the women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed after, and saw the tomb and how His body was laid. (Luke 23:55)*

*And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses were looking on to see where He was laid. (Mark 15:47)*

Though the disciples had fled after Jesus' capture and were in hiding during his burial, there were at least four witnesses who could verify the place where Jesus was buried.

**A contingent of Roman soldiers was granted by Pilate to protect the tomb from any attempt to steal the body.**

*Now on the next day, which is the one after the preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate, and said, "Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I am to rise again.' Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, lest the disciples come and steal Him away and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go, make it as secure as you know how." And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone. (Mt. 27:62-66)*

The evidence seems to favor the idea that Pilate ordered a contingency of Roman soldiers called "custodians" to guard the tomb.

The idea that these were a couple of Romans in mini-skirts with spears is ludicrous. These were highly trained and well-disciplined Roman soldiers; perhaps as many as 16 were present. Customarily they slept in shifts with four guarding while the others slept in a semi-circle in front of them.

Failure at their task would have evoked the death penalty. Their presence at the tomb was intended to guarantee that no one would gain access to the tomb.

And so we add this fact our accumulated evidence.

**An official seal prohibiting unauthorized access to the tomb was placed on the tomb to discourage any disturbance of the tomb.**

*And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone. (Mt. 27:66)*

It would appear that what occurred here is very similar to what happened when Daniel was thrown into the lion's den:

*And a stone was brought and laid over the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signet rings of his nobles, so that nothing might be changed in regard to Daniel. (Dan. 6:17)*

When we hear the word "sealed" we typically thinking of closing something up so that there is no access (like sealing an envelope or a jar). But here the "seal" is the provision of an official stamp indicating that the power of the Roman government stands behind the work of the guards in protecting the tomb from grave robbers.

McDowell suggests: Having confirmed that the body was in the tomb, the Roman commander would place a cord across it attaching it to the tomb on each side with a seal of the Roman government impressed in it.

The seal would comparable to a modern court order prohibiting any illegal access to the tomb by anyone. In effect this seal would say, under penalty of law this grave should not be disturbed by anyone. Any violation will be prosecuted by the full power of the Roman government.

You may or not be aware that archaeologists have discovered a marble plaque containing an edict of the Roman government in Nazareth warning of severe penalties for those who rob graves. Many believe this edict was precipitated by the conflicts that erupted after the preaching that Jesus of Nazareth was raised from the dead.

**Conclusion: With these facts established, we are prepared to consider the claim of the NT writers that they saw Jesus alive after His death. Even as we hear the evidence of Jesus' death and burial, we become even more keenly aware that some truly amazing occurred on the third day after Jesus' death, just as He had predicted.**

*Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death,<sup>19</sup> and will deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up." (Mt. 20:18-19)*

**Indeed the mounting evidence confirms the claim of the gospel--He is risen!**