

The Burial

by J.C. Philpot

The sermon explores the significance of Jesus' burial and death, and how it relates to our salvation and sanctification.

Scripture: Psalm 16:10, Psalm 87:7, Luke 23:46, John 19:30, Romans 6:23, Romans 7:4, Romans 8:17, 1 Corinthians 1:18, Colossians 2:14

Topics: "The Cross", "Atonement"

Description

J.C. Philpot delves into the profound mysteries surrounding the death and burial of Jesus Christ, emphasizing the necessity for Him to die as the Sin-bearer and Surety to endure the penalty for sin. Philpot explores the separation of Jesus' body and soul at death, highlighting the preservation of His sacred body from corruption and the immediate entrance of His soul into paradise. He reflects on the disciples' struggle with faith after Jesus' death and the triumph of truth over evil through the cross, encouraging believers to embrace suffering with Christ before partaking in His glory.

Transcript

Chapter Six from the book *Meditations on the Sacred Humanity of Our Blessed Redeemer*

We last stood at the foot of the cross, where we saw by faith the blood-shedding and death of our adorable Lord; we viewed him yielding up his life by a voluntary act of his holy will, and heard his gracious words, "It is finished," just before he bowed his head and gave up the ghost. But we leave him not there. We have seen him die and by faith now view his sacred body still on the cross. But he did not long hang there as a spectacle to angels and men. {1} His immediate disciples had fled, but there were those who came to perform those offices of love by which a safe and secure place was provided wherein that sacred body might lie. We see, then, by faith, that pallid body of which not a bone was broken (though hands and feet were mangled and torn, and side pierced), taken down with all believing reverence and adoring affection by Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus, aided, doubtless, by those holy women whose names the Holy Ghost has recorded as afterwards beholding and sitting over against the sepulchre where that pure body was laid.

As the original penalty was, "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shall surely die," and as "the wages of sin is death," the Surety and Sin-bearer must endure the penalty, and literally, actually die in the sinner's room and place. Thus there was a necessity that the Redeemer of sinners should die; but as the Son of God could not die, Deity being incapable of suffering and death, the blessed Lord took a nature

which could die - not by inherent mortality or external violence, but by a voluntary act {2} - as voluntary as that by which he assumed that nature in the womb of the Virgin, or resumed his body at the resurrection.

Our thoughts, then, now lead us to the body of Jesus in the grave; and here we see much to engage our meditations. The first thing that strikes our mind in beholding this lifeless form is the separation of body and soul which took place when the adorable Lord by a voluntary act laid down his life. The last words that the Redeemer spoke were, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." By his "spirit" we are to understand his human soul which at once went into paradise, into the immediate presence of God, as he intimated in the words, "And now come I to thee." #Joh 17:13. Nor did he go thither that day alone. A trophy was soon to follow him - the soul of that repenting, believing malefactor, who, a partner with him in suffering, had become by his sovereign grace a partner with him in glory.

There was, then, an actual separation of the Redeemer's body and soul; but this did not destroy or affect the union of his Deity with his humanity. That union remained entire, as his holy soul went into paradise in union with his Deity, and thus he was still God-man as much in paradise as he was at the tomb of Lazarus, or at the Last Supper. But his sacred body, though by the act of death life was gone out of it, still remained as before, "that holy thing." Death did not taint that sacred body any more than sin did not taint it in the womb of the Virgin. The promise was, therefore, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell (rather, in Hades, or that paradise in which it was after death), nor suffer thy Holy One to see corruption." #Ps 16:10. This holy body was essentially incorruptible, as being begotten of the Holy Ghost, by special and supernatural generation, of the flesh of the Virgin; but as in all other acts of the sacred Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, were all engaged that no taint of corruption should in death assail it. The Father promised, and, as a God that cannot lie, performed by his almighty, superintending power; the Son, by the same innate, active, divine energy by which he assumed that body in the womb of the Virgin preserved it untainted, uncorrupted in the grave; and the Holy Ghost, who formed that body in its first conception, breathed over it his holy influence to maintain it, in spite of death and the tomb, as pure and as incorruptible as when he first created it. These things are indeed difficult to understand or indeed conceive; but they are heavenly mysteries, which faith receives and holds fast in spite of sense, reason, and unbelief. For see the tremendous consequences of allowing any taint of corruption to assail that blessed body. Could a tainted body be resumed at the resurrection? Corruption would have marred it as it will mar ours; and how could a corrupt body have been again the habitation of the Son of God? We are often instrumentally preserved from error not only by knowing and feeling the sweetness and power of truth, but by seeing, as at a glance, the tremendous consequences which a denial of vital, fundamental truths involves.

But we pass on to Jesus in the tomb. A sepulchre hewn out in the rock, and therefore pure, clean, and dry, and "wherein never man before was laid," so as to be free from any taint of corruption; a great stone rolled to the door of the sepulchre to preserve the sacred deposit from external violence or unbecoming intrusion; Roman soldiers forbidding all access of strange feet into the sacred precinct; a guard of angels watching over that body in which their God and Creator had dwelt; - how all these circumstances tended, and all worked together to the same result - the safe guardianship and inviolable preservation of that holy body which the Lord had assumed for the redemption of his people.

But may we not gather up profitable instruction here? The holy women who mourned and wept at the cross did not forget their dear Lord at the sepulchre. Thither their thoughts ran during that Sabbath Day on which they rested according to the commandment; and with the first dawn of the next day - the first day of the week, they sped their steps, with spices, to anoint that dear Object of their faith and love. The mystery of the resurrection was indeed hidden from their eyes; but they ceased not to love in death and in the

sepulchre that sacred form which they had loved in life. May not our thoughts turn to the sepulchre too; and may we not, with these gracious women, resort thither as to the sleeping-place of the body of Jesus? Nature shrinks from death, even apart from that which following after death makes it to so many a king of terrors. Even where grace has set up its throne, and mercy rejoices over judgment, many unbelieving, infidel thoughts at times will cross the mind and perplex the judgment about the separation of body and soul, and the launching of the spirit into an unseen, unknown world. Faith, it is true, can subdue these perplexing thoughts, better hinted at than described, but faith needs some solid ground on which to build and rest. If, then, the soul is blessed with any assured hope or sweet persuasion of interest in the blood and obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ, so as to remove guilty fears, how strengthening to faith is a view of his death, not merely as the only sacrifice for sin, but as the exemplar so to speak, of our own! We shall all have to die, and therefore to look by faith at the death of Jesus may be a profitable subject of meditation as a relief against the perplexing thoughts to which we have before alluded. Into his Father's hands the dying Lord commended his spirit. The Father received it, for him the Father heareth always; #Joh 11:42, and thus his spirit returned unto him who gave it. #Ec 12:7. Thus, by the act of dying, the soul and body of the blessed Redeemer were, for a time, fully and actually separated as fully and actually as ours will also be at death.

But follow by faith that soul of Jesus when he breathed it forth, and view it at once and immediately entering paradise, into the blissful presence of God. What food for faith is here! How strengthening, how encouraging to a believing heart which has often been perplexed by such thoughts as we have named, to view the soul of Jesus thus passing at once into paradise. And may we not, by faith, view the soul also of the believing malefactor, when the time of release was come, winging its flight into the same paradise whither the soul of Jesus had preceded it? If we know anything painfully and experimentally of the assaults of unbelief, the arrows of infidelity, and the fiery darts of the wicked one, and how they are all quenched by the shield of faith, we have found that faith, in order to stand firm, must have the word of truth, a "Thus saith the Lord," upon which to rest. Let us now, then, see how this stands as connected with the death of the blessed Lord. Fortified by his holy example, if blessed with faith in his Person, blood, and righteousness, the dying believer may commend his spirit into the hands of Christ as did martyred Stephen, in the same confidence that the Lord Jesus commended his spirit into the hands of his heavenly Father.

But, there is another sweet and blessed thought connected with the grave in which Jesus lay. We may have seen the grave open its dark mouth to receive a dear friend and brother, or some fondly-loved relative, who has left a sweet testimony behind of his interest in the finished work of the Son of God; and as we have looked down into that narrow cell, seen the coffin lowered slowly into it, heard the clods fall heavily on its lid, and felt how the beloved object was buried out of our sight, no more again to walk with us here below, how nature has shrunk from each gloomy sight and sound! What could then relieve the burdened mind, and soothe the sorrowing spirit, but a sweet persuasion by faith of these two things: First, that the soul of the departed one was with the Lord, which was far better than again to be burdened with the body of sin and death, now for ever laid down; and second, that the Lord Jesus, by lying himself in the grave, had consecrated it as his people's sleeping-place, and perfumed it, as it were, by permitting it to be the deposit of his own incorruptible body.

What a trial to their faith must the death of Jesus have been to his disciples and believing followers! When their Lord and Master died, their hopes, for the time at least, seem almost to have died with him. This seems evident from the language of the two disciples who were journeying to Emmaus. "But we trusted

that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel." #Lu 24:21. How staggering to their faith that the Lord of life should be put to death; the King of glory be covered with shame and ignominy; and that he, whom the heaven of heavens could not contain, should lie in the narrow precinct of a garden sepulchre.

But another thought strikes our mind as arising out of this fruitful subject of spiritual meditation - the apparent triumph of evil and of the powers of darkness, in the death and burial of the Lord Jesus.

To the eye of sense, truth, holiness, innocence, all fell crushed by the arm of violence as Jesus hung on the cross. To the spectator there, all his miracles of love and mercy, his words of grace and truth, his holy spotless life, his claims to be the Son of God, the promised Messiah, the Redeemer of Israel, with every promise and every prophecy concerning him, were all extinguished when, amidst the triumph of his foes, in pain, shame, and ignominy, he yielded up his breath. We now see that, by his blood-shedding and death, the blessed Lord wrought out redemption, finished the work which the Father gave him to do, put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, reconciled the church unto God, triumphed over death and hell, vanquished Satan, magnified the law and made it honourable, exalted justice, brought in mercy, harmonised every apparently jarring attribute, glorified his heavenly Father, and saved millions with an everlasting salvation. But should we have seen this as we see it now, had we stood at the cross with weeping Mary and broken-hearted John, heard the railing taunts of the Scribes and Pharisees, the rude laughter of the Roman soldiery, and the mocking cries of the Jewish mob, viewed the darkened sky above, and felt the solid earth beneath rocking under our feet? Where would our faith have been then? What but a miracle of Almighty grace and power could have sustained it amidst such clouds of darkness, such strength of sense, such a crowd of conflicting passions, such opposition of unbelief?

So it ever has been, so it ever will be, in this time state. Truth, uprightness, godliness, the cause of God as distinct from, as opposed to error and evil, have always suffered crucifixion, not only in the person, but in the example of a crucified Jesus. It is an ungodly world; Satan, not Jesus, is its god and prince; and, therefore, not truth but falsehood, not good but evil, not love but enmity, not sincerity and uprightness but craft and deceptiveness, not righteousness and holiness but sin and godlessness prevail and triumph as they did at the cross. This tries faith; but its relief and remedy are to look up, amidst these clouds, to the cross, and see on it the suffering Son of God. Then we see that the triumphing of the wicked is but for a moment; that though truth is now suffering, it is suffering with Christ; and that as he died and rose again, so it will have a glorious resurrection, and an eternal triumph.

One or two thoughts more before we close this part of our present subject of meditation.

To be partakers of Christ's crown, we must be partakers of Christ's cross. Union with him in suffering must precede union with him in glory. This is the express testimony of the Holy Ghost: "If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." #Ro 8:17. "If we be dead with him, we shall also live with him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with him." #2Ti 2:11,12. The flesh and the world are to be crucified to us, and we to them; and this can only be by virtue of a living union with a crucified Lord. This made the apostle say, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." #Ga 2:20. And again, "But God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world." #Ga 6:14. An experimental knowledge of crucifixion with his crucified Lord made Paul preach the cross, not only in its power to save, but in its power to sanctify.

But as then so now, this preaching of the cross, not only as the meritorious cause of all salvation, but as the instrumental cause of all sanctification, is "to them that perish foolishness." #1Co 1:18. As men have found out some other way of salvation than by the blood of the cross, so have they discovered some other way of holiness than by the power of the cross; or rather have altogether set aside obedience, fruitfulness, self-denial, mortification of the deeds of the body, crucifixion of the flesh and of the world. Extremes are said to meet; and certainly men of most opposite sentiments may unite in despising the cross and counting it foolishness. The Arminian despises it for justification, and the Antinomian for sanctification. "Believe and be holy," is as strange a sound to the latter as "Believe and be saved," to the former. But, "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord," is as much written on the portal of life as, "By grace are ye saved through faith." Through the cross, that is, through union and communion with him who suffered upon it, not only is there a fountain opened for all sin, but for all uncleanness. #Zec 13:1. Blood and water gushed from the side of Jesus when pierced by the Roman spear.

This fountain so dear, he'll freely impart;

Unlock'd by the spear, it gushed from the heart,

With blood and with water; the first to atone,

To cleanse us the latter; the fountain's but one.

"All my springs are in thee," #Ps 87:7, said the man after God's own heart; and well may we re-echo his words. All our springs, not only of pardon and peace, acceptance and justification, but of happiness and holiness, of wisdom and strength, of victory over the world, of mortification of a body of sin and death; of every fresh revival and renewal of hope and confidence; of all prayer and praise; of every new budding forth of the soul, as of Aaron's rod, in blossom and fruit; of every gracious feeling, spiritual desire, warm supplication, honest confession, melting contrition, and godly sorrow for sin - all these springs of that life which is hid with Christ in God are in a crucified Lord. Thus Christ crucified is, "to them who are saved, the power of God." And as he "of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption," at the cross alone can we be made wise unto salvation, become righteous by a free justification, receive of his Spirit to make us holy, and be redeemed and delivered by blood and power from sin, Satan, death and hell.

Nor is there any other way to become dead to the law, our first husband, so as "to be married to another, even him who is raised from the dead, that we may bring forth fruit unto God." #Ro 7:4.

By the baptism of the Holy Ghost (of which water baptism is a type and figure) we are baptized into Jesus Christ, and specially into his death. #Ro 6:3. By his blood-shedding and death he fulfilled the law, bearing its curse, and thus he "blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, nailing it to his cross." #Col 2:14.

{1} As the blessed Lord breathed out his life about the ninth hour, or three o'clock in the afternoon, and the preparation of the Passover begun about four o'clock, it would seem that his dead body did not remain above, and most probably under, an hour upon the cross before taken down for burial.

{2} It is remarkable that three of the evangelists use three distinct words (in the original), to express the voluntary way in which the Lord Jesus yielded up his life. In #Mt 27:51, it is "yielded up the ghost," literally, "dismissed his spirit;" in #Mr 15:38 and #Lu 23:47 it is the same word, "he gave up the ghost," literally,

"breathed it out," and #Joh 19:3, "gave up the ghost," literally, "delivered it," all implying a voluntary act.

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