

a large heavy stone rolled in front closing the opening so as to protect that body of Jesus; it all speaks volumes of the dignity of Jesus' death and burial.

A fifth surprise with Jesus' burial is that it all took place so quickly, so that in less than three hours, and before 6:00 pm on that Friday long ago, Jesus' body was in the tomb. This allowed also the fulfillment of Jesus' own prophecy in Matthew 12:40, that just as "...Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." His burial would touch three days, Friday and Saturday and Sunday, in exact fulfillment of God's holy Word.

There is a sixth surprise with Jesus' burial and that is the women who witnessed it all. The disciples were not there but some of the devoted women followers of Jesus saw and witnessed not only the crucifixion of Jesus but also His burial. God doesn't leave Himself without witnesses in all His gospel works, that we might be so convinced of the truthfulness of His gospel surprises in and through Jesus Christ the Lord.

There is still a seventh gospel surprise also with Jesus' burial and that is how the Jewish leaders remembered Jesus' words about rising from the dead, and how they asked Pilate to make sure the grave was sealed and did everything to prevent any taking away of Jesus' body and any idea of Jesus rising from the dead. Though the Jewish leaders did all they could to make the grave as secure as they knew how, yet nothing could or would stop the blessed and powerful resurrection of Jesus three days later! The gospel surprise here is again the way the unbelief and wrath of men proved to further highlight the greatness and glory of Jesus as Saviour of sinners.

Surprises, gospel surprises! Do you see them with me, one after the other here in Matthew with Jesus' death and Jesus' burial? The gospel message is that in and through Jesus Christ and His Person and work, turning from sin and trusting alone in Him, you will find sin-removing, soul refreshing, saving, sanctifying, splendid, superabundant, soothing, satisfying gospel surprises that are so enriching and blessed for body and soul, in life and death, for now and forever. Jesus Christ is the one and only most wonderful, gracious, glorious, living, loving Saviour of sinners, full of gospel surprises for all who come to Him and as often as you come to Him. You either follow after Satan who is only full of grim terrors for us, or Jesus Christ full of glorious gospel surprises for us. Who are you following after and living for and serving? Amen.

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BANNER OF TRUTH RADIO BROADCAST

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Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee that it may be displayed because of the truth. (Psalm 60:4)



GOSPEL SURPRISES!

Do you like surprises, pleasant and happy surprises? Who doesn't? Well, think of this now, what can compare to the pleasant and wonderful gospel surprises made known to us in and through Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Saviour? Will you notice with me, looking at Matthew 27:51-66, the surprises with Jesus' death and with His burial? These gospel surprises, as we note them, I pray will draw all to trust and follow after Jesus Christ, the Saviour of sinners.

Our text brings us before Jesus on the cross of Calvary. How He suffered there! But then came His last breath. And here we have surprise #1. When someone is dying, they become weaker and weaker, and one way that really shows itself is that they can hardly talk anymore. But what does Matthew tell us in verse 50 about Jesus when He died? "*Jesus, when He had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost [His spirit].*" Just before He breathed His last, Jesus spoke loud and clear, "*It is finished!*" and "*Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit.*" This is a surprise telling us that Jesus did not get overtaken by death, but He gave Himself over to death, and He did so consciously and willingly as Saviour of sinners. Jesus died because He would pay the wages of sin that He might as Saviour of sinners offer the gift of eternal life to His people, whoever repents of sin and believes on Him! Jesus died speaking with a loud voice even till His last breath. Don't you find this a very special reassuring gospel surprise too?

Surprise #2 is what happens the second Jesus breathes His last. "*And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.*" With this surprise God in heaven was declaring with Jesus' death in the place of sinners, now there is open access to the holy and righteous God for all who trust and follow the Saviour. That special thick curtain in the temple dividing the holy place from the Holy of holies symbolized the barrier of coming into the presence of God on account of our sins and sinfulness. In the Old Testament only the high priest would go into the Holy of holies and just once a year, always with the blood of the sacrifice with him. Now with Jesus' once for all sacrifice, no more sacrifices needed ever to be made, and there is free and open access to God the Father for all who come in the Name of Jesus, looking to Him as their one and only Saviour. The rent veil in the temple, what a special gospel surprise in honour of Jesus as Saviour of sinners! Don't you think it a most delightful inviting gospel surprise indeed?

Then is surprise #3. This one came probably at the same time as the rent veil, and that is the earth shaking and rocks splitting when Jesus breathed His last. This surprise worked by God the Father is telling us that God saw Jesus' death on behalf of sinners have such earth-shaking consequences. It shows, as one put it, "that the death of the Saviour had, and still is having, significance for the entire universe." In fact, there is going to be one day a new heaven and new earth, most splendid and sure, and Jesus' death in the place of sinners, His once for all righteous sacrifice, guarantees that new creation to come.

If you doubt it, then consider yet surprise #4, the moment Jesus died, which was graves opening by God's hand, and "*many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves*", and after Jesus' resurrection, they appeared to many in the city of Jerusalem. This of course was something astoundingly surprising, but think again what it is telling us. Through Jesus' death in the place of sinners, sinners like you and I may find life! Victory over sin, Satan, death, and hell are found in and through Jesus Christ, the Saviour of sinners! You want life and that more abundantly, and life eternal? You find it in and through Jesus Christ, the once crucified and now risen exalted Saviour so approved of God, as Matthew brings out. Jesus is the resurrection and the life, as He Himself had said in John 11, and it comes out so clear in such an amazingly surprising way, even as Jesus died on the cross. What wonderful gospel surprises with His death Matthew declares! Don't you think so too? Does it thrill your heart as well? Does it lead you to trust and lean on Him and love Him above all, Jesus Christ the Lord?

There is surprise #5 which so brings out, you can be sure, Christ Jesus is no fraud, but one ever reliable and true. I am thinking here of the testimony of the Roman centurion in charge of the whole crucifixion of Jesus. That centurion, and other soldiers with him, testified with all they saw and experienced with Jesus on the cross, "*Truly this was the Son of God!*" Who would have thought that the lead soldier involved in Jesus' crucifixion would end up glorifying God expressing so great truths about Christ the Saviour? The centurion's testimony is just another reassuring gospel surprise with Jesus' death as told in our divinely inspired text.

There are two more surprises with Jesus' death that Matthew doesn't tell us but you find it in the gospel of John. When Jesus died, we are told, because the Jews would have the crucifixions all over with and the bodies buried before 6:00 pm, which was the beginning of the Sabbath, that the whole process was speeded up. But here is surprise # 6, to speed up the process of death, the soldiers with hammers splintered and smashed the leg bones of the two crucified with Jesus, to suffocate them as it were, but with Jesus they did not do that for He had already breathed His last and was dead. At the same time, what did not happen to the other two crucified happened to Jesus, surprise # 7 you could say, namely, that He was pierced

in His side with a spear by one of the soldiers, as John 19: 34 tells us. This is so special for it shows so clearly Jesus is the God-promised Saviour of the Old Testament; He is the Messiah, indeed. So John writes in John 19:36-37, "*For these things were done, that the Scripture should be fulfilled, 'a bone of Him shall not be broken.'* And again another Scripture says, "*They shall look on Him Whom they pierced.*"

Do you agree with me, what beautiful, bountiful gospel surprises God gives with Jesus' death on the cross? What sinfulness and wicked unbelief not to believe on Him and trust and follow Him, and what blessing and delight, what grace and glory, to trust and depend wholly on Him, also as your one-time, all-time Saviour from sin and Lord of your life. Do you see too how our Scripture so would guide and encourage us in the way of true faith and repentance before God?

That you may be so led with all your heart, let us move on to the surprises, the gospel surprises, with Jesus' burial. Generally, the Romans showed no respect at all for the corpses of the crucified, either throwing the bodies in a mass grave and leaving it open even for the animals and birds or simply casting the bodies onto a burning garbage dump. But hear and see now the surprises with Jesus' burial.

Surprise #1 is that someone from the Sanhedrin, a follower of Jesus, by the name of Joseph of Arimathea, comes forward to ask for the body of Jesus that he may give His body a proper burial. We know too from John's gospel that another Sanhedrin member by the name of Nicodemus came to assist Joseph. Well, who would have thought there were these true believers in Jesus among the highest ranks of the Jewish leaders? It is a special surprise to have these men also now come boldly forward in honor of Christ. From this we can see God's leading hand and how that the Lord has His people in places you might not imagine.

What else is surprising is that these men were both rich men who could give Jesus a royal funeral. This would mean also another prophecy fulfilled for in Isaiah 53:9 which foretold about the Saviour that while His grave would be with the wicked, having been crucified with two criminals, yet Jesus would be with the rich at His death, and we see it here literally fulfilled! The Word of God proves accurate in every detail, powerfully so!

A third surprise yet with Jesus' burial is not just that this Joseph and Nicodemus came boldly forward and that they were rich people, but that Pilate grants Joseph permission to take the body of Jesus and arrange His burial.

A fourth surprise with Jesus' burial is the new tomb, never used before, ready at hand that Joseph had, and that it was in part of a garden plot that he owned. And that Jesus was buried with His body wrapped in clean linen cloth sprinkled with expensive spices of about 75 pounds in weight alone! That all tells us Jesus' burial was so royal-like, so very special, his body being laid also in a tomb that had never before been used, and with