

**Message #61****Mark 15:40-47**

As we saw last time, Jesus Christ accomplished everything on the cross that He needed to accomplish in order to save sinners. When He did that He cried, “it is finished.” Then he breathed His last and gave up His spirit. He was hanging on the cross and He was dead.

Now what? What happens next? The disciples are all gone. Jesus is hanging on the cross, so where do we go from here? The only people even in the vicinity of this were some women, but what could they do?

Since the judicial work of God was done, God is going to bury His Son’s body, because He is going to raise His Son’s body. **At the heart of the Gospel is the resurrection.** The Apostle Paul said that this burial is so important that it was a critical part of the Gospel: “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures **and that He was buried** and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (I Cor. 15:3-4).

Christ has now died on the cross and the next thing that needs to happen in the chronology is that He needs to be buried. Since Christ was executed for some trumped up charge of treason, His body could be just taken out of the city and burned. So what would God do?

God is in the business of raising up just the right people at just the right time to accomplish His will. The people He raises up are not the people you would expect. We would typically think His close disciples will come out of hiding and at least bury Jesus. We bury our pets when they die, so you certainly would think they would bury Jesus when He died.

But that is not who God used:

**GOD SOVEREIGNLY USED SOME WOMEN AND JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA TO WATCH OVER AND TAKE CARE OF THE DEAD BODY OF JESUS CHRIST.**

Now there are three participants who, according to Mark, play a key role right after Jesus died. These are not the participant we would expect to see:

**PARTICIPANT #1 – Three key women were critical to Christ’s death and burial. 15:40-41**

Jesus Christ had been abandoned by all of His disciples. He was mocked, beaten and crucified. He died hanging on that cross and His disciples were nowhere to be found. But in the shadows of all of this were some faithful and loyal women and those women are forever remembered because of their love, their loyalty and their ministry to Jesus Christ. There is no limelight glamour in what they did, but there is eternal glory.

It isn't the men who are remembered here, it is the women. The men had all deserted Christ (Mark 14:50). Peter had followed at a distance for a while, but then he cursed Christ and denied Him three times and fled (14:66-72). But these faithful women, although scared, did not run away. They were there because they cared and they wanted to help and serve any way they could now that Christ was dead.

Years ago there was a woman who came into a church and she wanted to be a leader. She brought in an impressive resume of things she claimed she had done. She went to the pastor and let him know what she wanted to do. The pastor said that is great. We praise God that He is leading you here. We are so thankful that you want to be a leader. Next Sunday we would like you to come early and make the coffee. Well that did not go over too well. So the woman said you must not have heard what I said. I said I wanted to be a leader. The minister said I heard you alright but apparently you don't understand what being a leader is in this church. "If you are not willing to serve, you are not qualified to lead."

The ministry of Jesus Christ was supported by some wonderful women who loved Him and loved the Word. When Jesus died, there were some women who were off in the distance watching all the events.

In **verse 41**, we learn that these women were part of a group who "followed" Christ and "ministered" to Christ. The word "minister" is the Greek word from which we get our English word deacon. So in the mind of God, these women were functioning at a very high ministry level. In the Jewish world, the women were not viewed as significant, but not so in God's world. Mark introduces us to some of the women who were there watching the crucifixion. Dr. Harry Ironside said that there is something "tenderly pathetic about this little company of faithful women" (*Mark*, p. 240). The pathetic point is the women are there but not the men.

Mark specifically names three of the women:

**Woman #1 - Mary Magdalene was there. 15:40a**

The first woman that he names is Mary Magdalene. What this means is this Mary was from Magdala. Magdala was a fishing village on the south-western shore of the Sea of Galilee.

We don't get any information about this Mary from Mark, but we do get information from Luke. Luke tells us that she had been possessed by seven demons (Luke 8:2). The Lord had delivered her from demon possession.

There is no evidence that she was a prostitute, which so many have suggested. But she was a woman who had been in the satanic world and Jesus had set her free and saved her. She had believed in Christ and she followed Him and ministered to Him. By the way, the heretical book "The Da Vinci Code" which claims that she was Jesus' wife or lust partner is a lie from hell.

Mary Magdalene is a highly honored and privileged woman. **She is listed first in lists of women and she was actually the first woman to see Jesus alive after His resurrection (John 20:1-2, 10-18).** She was off in the distance when Jesus was crucified.

Now what this Mary does teach us is not matter how godless a life or how Satanic a life some woman has led, she not only can be saved from all of her sins, but she can be greatly used by God and honored in eternity.

**Woman #2 - Mary was there. 15:40b**

The second woman that was there is another woman named Mary. Mary was the mother of James the “less” and Joseph. Now the noun “the less” could mean less in age (younger) or less in height (shorter) or less in reputation and prominence (unknown).

We don’t know much about this Mary other than she was a mother, who loved the Lord and followed the Lord and was courageous in the sense that she was in the distance at the cross of Jesus Christ.

Some have said this was Jesus’ mother; however, had she been Jesus’ mother, Mark would have mentioned that as the Apostle John did (John 19:25).

What this Mary teaches us is that average mothers and grandmothers can love the Lord and be greatly honored in eternity.

**Woman #3 - Salome was there. 15:40c**

Salome is identified in Matthew as being the mother of James and John (Matt. 27:56). She would have been the wife of Zebedee. This was the woman who went to Jesus and wanted her sons to be able to sit on His right and left hand when He established His kingdom (Matt. 20:20-23). We may recall in Mark that the two boys also agreed with this request (Mark 10:35-40).

Now there were other women there watching the crucifixion, but these were three key women that Mark mentioned who were also there.

These women are very important witnesses. In fact, they become critical eyewitnesses of events. They were right there when Christ died and they become critical participants after His death.

You know, when it comes time for funeral luncheons after someone has died, we do have some good men in this church who help in any way they can. But having said that, generally speaking, it is a handful of women who really minister at these events. Faithful women organize, make food, bring food, serve food and clean up after everyone else is gone. Those women servants will be honored one day for their behind scenes ministry.

**PARTICIPANT #2 – Joseph of Arimathea was critical to Christ's burial. 15:42-46**

I am certain that these women were wondering, what will happen to Christ's body. They were in no position to do anything and the disciples were nowhere to be found. These women were about to see God work, because even though there was nothing they could do, there was something God could do. God is a sovereign God and He had a sovereign plan and when we reach the end ourselves, we can always count on God.

The disciples had failed Christ, but God has another person, one would never expect, who will rise up to honor Christ. His name was Joseph. God is still in the business of raising up key men at key times.

For example, when the Roman church was dominating the world in the 1500's and things were so dark it didn't look like there was any more hope or help, God raised up Luther. When allegorical interpretations of the Bible were dominating the world so many had no idea as to what to believe in the late 1800's, God raised up Scofield. When religious institutions were moving ministers away from the Bible in the 1900's, God raised up Chafer. When Jesus needed a tomb, God raised up Joseph.

Now Christ died at about three in the afternoon, which was the ninth hour of the day (Mark 15:33). Deuteronomy 21:22-23 demands that bodies of executed victims be buried before nightfall and this would especially be the case if the next day was the Sabbath Day.

Mark is careful to point out that it was the day before the Sabbath, known as the "preparation day." No work was to be done on the Sabbath day so everything had to be done before sundown, including burying this body of Jesus.

Christ did not have a tomb. He had not met with funeral directors and prepared for burial. He was so poor that He only had the clothes on His back and they were now gone. But seven hundred years before this moment, Isaiah predicted that the God/Savior/Messiah/King would be with "a rich man in His death" (Isaiah 53:9). How in the world is that going to happen?

There was a man whose name was Joseph of Arimathea, who was a very prominent religious leader of the Council or Sanhedrin boldly and courageously, went to Pilate to ask if he could take the body of Jesus.

The exact location of Arimathea is debated. The most logical place where this was is Ramathaim-zophim, which was the birth place of Samuel which also was known as Ramah (I Sam. 1:1, 19; 2:11). It was located about twenty miles northwest of Jerusalem east of Joppa.

Any way according to **verse 43**, Joseph went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus Christ. This was a bold move for a couple of reasons. 1) Pilate could have become angry and taken it out on Joseph, but also 2) The Sanhedrin that just condemned Christ could view Joseph as a traitor. But regardless of these threats, Joseph was courageous and he went to Pilate and asked for the body.

Luke tells us that he was a righteous and just man and at the meeting to condemn Christ he did not consent to it (Luke 23:50-51). He apparently kept quiet and did not speak up in Christ's defense. John brings out that Joseph had been a "secret" believer and disciple of Christ for some time (John 19:38). He was very afraid of the leading Jews, so apparently he kept quiet about his faith. But now that Christ was dead, he had kept quiet long enough so he went and asked for Christ's body.

According to **verse 44**, when Joseph asked Pilate for the body, Pilate wondered if he were already dead so he asked the centurion whether or not he was dead. A crucifixion could take days for a person to die, so he was surprised that this had only taken a few hours.

Now this centurion was the same soldier who acknowledged that "this man was the Son of God" (**v. 39**). According to **verse 45**, the centurion told Pilate that Jesus was dead so Pilate granted Joseph the body.

Now I want to point out two things that are critical here:

1) Back about 200 years ago a theory surfaced that said Jesus Christ did not really die on the cross, but He just fell unconscious (swooned). The theory has been called the "Swoon Theory." Those who hold to this position suggest that this death of Christ was some misdiagnosis and that Jesus was not really dead. So what happened is, Jesus was taken off the cross in a near death state and buried in a tomb and then revived and somehow was able to push a stone off the tomb that weighed several hundred pounds and crawl away. One of the biggest promoters of this theory are the Muslims. Some say Jesus wasn't crucified and He didn't die. But others say he was and just appeared to be dead but actually wasn't really dead.

**The problem is you have Pilate asking a trained centurion whether or not Jesus was actually and really dead and his answer is yes.** This centurion had witnessed many dead people in the course of his military career. He was trained to know whether or not someone was dead and he knew Jesus was in fact dead.

2) The word "granted" (δωρεω) (**v. 45**) is a rare word that means that Pilate gave Jesus' body to Joseph as a gift. He did not demand that Joseph pay him any money or bribe fee.

According to **verse 46**, as soon as Pilate said Joseph could have the body, he went and purchased a "linen cloth." A linen cloth was an expensive item, as was having a tomb in the area. Matthew brings out the fact that Joseph was a very rich and very wealthy man (Matt. 27:57).

This is important because this is a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. Now just think about this for a moment. Seven hundred years before Jesus Christ was born, God predicts there will be a rich man who will actually take care of the body of My Son when He dies. Who would know this? Who could predict this? **ONLY GOD!**

A dead body typically would be washed and then wrapped in linen cloth and then spices were used to cover up the smell of decomposition. According to John's account, Nicodemus, another leader helped Joseph by providing a large quantity of spices (John 19:38-42).

Matthew says that Joseph's tomb was a "new tomb" (Matt. 27:6) and Luke points out that no one had ever been buried in this tomb (Luke 23:53). John adds that this tomb was located near the place of the crucifixion (John 19:42). So Joseph had obviously purchased this pre-burial tomb for him and his family, but he decided to give it or donate it to Jesus Christ.

This quiet disciple was quiet no more. You know there are many Joseph-types who love the Lord who just quietly come to church to listen and learn. They are not loud. They are not limelight. They are not seen or hardly even known. But they love Jesus Christ and they love the Word of God and they use what they have behind the scenes to support the work.

God uses these people in His way and in His time. Only a handful of women saw what Joseph did. But this faithful, dear man of God was used in a major way in the most critical moment of all history—the burial of the body of Jesus Christ.

**PARTICIPANT #3** – Two key women were critical to seeing the actual grave. **15:47**

Now Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph were looking to see where Jesus' body was taken to be buried. They saw the very tomb in which Jesus body was placed.

Salome (**v. 40**) is not mentioned at this point, but she will resume the action in two days (16:1). This burial site was important for these women to see because they will return on the third day to anoint the body.

**These women become critical eyewitnesses of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.**

According to Judaism, a woman's testimony was not admitted in court. Josephus says, "But let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex" (*The Complete Works of Josephus*, Ant. 4:219).

Well the early church knew the value of women and our church today is built in part on their eyewitness testimony of the resurrection.

These women are critical to the story. They teach us all that women who love the Lord can be some of the most devoted and loyal servants of Jesus Christ. They were the ones with the backbone here. They were the ones who did not run away.

What this tells us is that God uses the most unlikely of people to accomplish His sovereign will. No matter what your past; no matter what your sin; no matter what you have or who you are, if you will believe on Jesus Christ, God will save you and use you.