

Lenten Meditations On Isaiah Chapter 53 Buried with the Rich.

Text: Isa 53:9

Suggested Hymns:
61, 323, 48, 63, 51

- 1) The Burial Planned For Jesus By His Enemies
- 2) The Burial Provided For Jesus By His Heavenly Father

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Isaiah 53:9, *’ And they made His grave with the wicked -- But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in His mouth.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Between the nations of India and Tibet lies the independent state of Nepal. When King *Tribhuvan*, ruler of Nepal, died in Zurich, Switzerland, his body was brought home by a chartered plane to Katmandu, the capital of his kingdom. With the body went the king’s youngest son, and in another plane, the king’s two queens, veiled in grey from head to foot.

Three hundred thousand people were there to see the return of their dead ruler. They wept, threw themselves into the dirt, and many government officials shaved their heads, according to their ancient custom.

Only one man in the kingdom was not supposed to mourn: the king’s eldest son, the successor to the throne. Dressed in white robes, he sat in a tent on the palace grounds, receiving condolences from the envoys of many foreign nations.

Then began the funeral procession from the airport to the temple of the patron god of Nepal. Thousands followed slowly until they came to the temple area, and there, on the banks of the River, the body of the king was placed on his funeral pyre, a large heap of sandalwood. Then, with tens of thousands looking on, the late king’s second son, put the torch to his father’s funeral pyre, and so another of the great ones of this world came to his end.

We have been studying the picture of God's suffering Servant on Calvary, as painted for us almost 800 years before, by Isaiah the prophet in his 53d chapter. We have seen how Jesus was *"despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."*¹ We have heard how *"He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows;"* how *"He was wounded for our transgressions"* and *"bruised for our iniquities."*

In our last sermon we heard how, without the slightest show of justice, Jesus was cut off out of the land of the living, hurried off to the cruel and shameful death of crucifixion.

And now, in Isaiah's amazing picture, we come to the time of our Lord's burial. Thousands were present at the funeral rites of King *Tribhuvan*; but only two men and a few women came to the burial of our Lord.

And yet, in the providence of God, there was something about His funeral which tells us that this Jesus of Nazareth was greater than all the great ones of the world. Contrary to all expectations, Isaiah predicts that the suffering Servant of God would be Buried with the Rich. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Buried With The Rich

The Burial Planned For Jesus By His Enemies

They made His grave with the wicked says Isaiah. What that means is simply this: It was appointed, intended, and planned that His grave, His burial, His funeral should be like that of the wicked. We do not need to search far in the Scriptures to see what kind of burial that was to be.

We think, for example, of the burial of Absalom, a rebellious, vicious son of King David. Most of you will recall what happened to that fair-haired young man. After the battle in which his forces were defeated by his father's army, Absalom fled from the battlefield in the woods of Ephraim on the back of a mule, with some of the servants of David in hot pursuit.

Under the thick boughs of a great oak, his flying hair caught in a branch, the mule ran out from under him, and then, as he hung there, three darts were thrust through his heart to end his wicked career. And his burial? We read in 2 Samuel 18:17 that *they took Absalom and cast him into a large pit in the woods, and laid a very large heap of stones over him.*

And then there was Jezebel, the idolatrous spouse of King Ahab, who brought about the death of many of the Lord's prophets. Of her Elisha predicted, *'The dogs shall eat Jezebel on the plot of ground at Jezreel, and there shall be none to bury her.'*² That is exactly what happened. Some of her own slaves threw her out of a palace window, Jehu's horses and chariot passed over her, and when they came to bury her, the scavenger dogs had left nothing but a few bones.

Or finally, there was Jehoiakim, a treacherous and traitorous king of Judah. So great was the wickedness of this man that Jeremiah prophesied: *thus says the LORD concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah: "They shall not lament for him, Saying, 'Alas, my brother!' or 'Alas, my sister!' They shall not lament for him, Saying, 'Alas, master!' or 'Alas, his glory!'"*¹⁹ *He shall be buried with the burial of a donkey, Dragged and cast out beyond the gates of Jerusalem.*³

Such was the burial of the wicked. And such an end was likewise appointed, intended, and planned for the sacred corpse of our Saviour on Calvary. Late that Good Friday afternoon His enemies began to get worried about those three suffering figures outside the walls of Jerusalem.

At sundown the Sabbath would begin, and that particular Sabbath was an especially high day, because it was the Sabbath of the Passover. And so, piously, they suddenly became concerned about those three bodies, lest they remain there and pollute the holy Sabbath!

A delegation was sent to Pilate, asking him that *"their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away."* Then came the soldiers, and with a heavy club and *broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with [Jesus].*⁴ Thus, with this added brutality, the lives of these criminals came to an end.

And what happened to their bodies? The Bible does not tell us the story of their funeral, but of one thing we may be quite certain: they were not given a decent and honourable burial. Just southeast of the city of Jerusalem lay the Valley of Hinnom, the Valley of Lamentation, a place of horror ever since the days when little children were sacrificed there to the fiery god Moloch at a place called Tophet.

In the course of time this loathsome place also became a sort of city garbage dump, its flames always rising skyward, its fires never quenched. It is this, very probably, which became the grave of the wicked, those criminals executed with Christ on the cross; and it is this place, very probably also, which His enemies planned as the burial place for the suffering Servant of God, our Lord Jesus Christ!

That is what the prophet means when he says, “*they made His grave with the wicked,*” or more literally, “they gave His grave,” they planned His burial to be the same shameful, dishonourable thing which was given to criminals.

Down through the ages, men have continued their fanatical efforts to bury the Christ of God as a fake and a deceiver. They tried it by persecution.

We think, for example, of that first martyr for Christ in the Christian congregation at Jerusalem, Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, who “*did great wonders and miracles among the people.*”⁵ The wisest heads from the camp of the enemy rose up to debate with Stephen, but, as Scripture says, ¹⁰“*And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.*”⁶

And so they tried another angle. They brought him into court, and there false witnesses, hired for the purpose, cried out, “*This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law;*”¹⁴ “*for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us.*”

Soon a mob was stirred up, a lynching bee was organised, and Stephen was dragged outside the gates of the city. There he testified once more to the faith that was within him. Looking up to heaven and “*being full of the Holy Spirit,*” he cried out, “*Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!*”⁷

And that was too much for them. Screaming with rage, they grabbed up rocks and stoned him to death. ⁶⁰“*Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.*”⁸ It wasn't really Stephen that those people were after; it was not this man against whom their rage was directed; no, their fury was aroused by the faith

which Stephen boldly confessed; their hatred was directed against the Christ for whom Stephen was willing to lay down his life.

And it has always been like this. No matter when or how the followers of Christ have suffered persecution, whether by being nailed to crosses as was the Master, whether by dying as living human torches of fire, whether by serving as meat for ravenous beasts in the Roman arena — always the real fury and the real hatred have been toward the gentle Man of Galilee, who turned the world upside down, by claiming and proving that He was the Son of God Himself and the Heaven-sent Substitute for every sin-cursed human soul.

And for that reason, the very fiercest persecutions ever unleashed against Christians have never succeeded in burying the Christ and destroying the faith which countless millions still have in Him to this very day.

You may have heard the story of Julian, the apostate emperor of Rome. Once a Christian, he turned pagan again and made it his life effort to wipe Christianity out of the empire. In 363, on his campaign against Phesia, one of the soldiers in his army said to a Christian who was being mocked by the others, *“Where is your carpenter now?”* Steadfastly that Christian soldier replied, *“He is making a coffin for your emperor.”* A few months later Julian received a fatal wound in battle, and according to the legend, when death was approaching, he dipped his hand into his own blood and threw it heavenward with the cry, *“O Galilean, You have conquered!”*

The days of persecution have not passed, and yet, in our own time, men’s efforts to bury the Christ of God have taken another form. They try it by attacking the truth of the Bible.

Around the year 1800 a wave of what history calls rationalism swept over Europe, namely, the mistaken notion that human reason is supreme and that belief in God, in the hereafter, in anything supernatural, is an insult to man’s intelligence.

There was a funeral procession coming down the streets of Berlin. The coffin is carried by six young students, with a large number of others following after. They are all giggling and snickering. At the cemetery one of them takes a black book and reads the funeral service. While the coffin is lowered into the

grave, the student body sings, “This body in the grave we lay.” You will never guess whom they buried, for it was a Bible that was in that coffin.

And so it has continued down to our own time. Although the science of archaeology almost daily turns up further evidence for the truth of Holy Scripture, yet we are told that science and religion do not agree. But this accusation, too, is nothing new, and therefore we believers should never be disturbed by it.

Long after all the critics of Holy Scripture lie mouldering in their graves, and their souls lie smouldering in hell, that word of Christ will still be standing, ***“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away.”*** Just as the enemies of Christ on Good Friday were foiled in their plans to make ***“His grave with the wicked,”*** so even the most fanatical efforts of His enemies to bury Him today are still being brought to naught by Him of whom it is written, in Psalm 2:4, ***‘ He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The LORD shall hold them in derision.***

2. Buried With The Rich

The Burial Provided For Jesus By His Heavenly Father

Speaking of that burial, Isaiah tells us that Jesus would be ***“with the rich,”*** literally, “with a rich man in His death,” ***“Because He had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in His mouth.”***

Pilate’s soldiers put those two criminals out of their misery, but, the Bible says in John 19:33 that ***when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs.*** Yet, even though they saw that He had died, they wanted to make absolutely sure that He was dead. And so ***“one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.”***¹⁰ This spear thrust into His heart, unnecessary as it was, proved beyond any shadow of doubt that God’s Servant on Calvary had come to the end of His sufferings.

In the meantime another figure appears on Calvary as the shadows of the afternoon lengthen toward evening. Scripture says, ⁵⁷ ***Now when evening had come, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph.***¹¹ Notice, that he is specifically called a rich man, and then think of Isaiah’s prediction that the

Saviour would be with a rich man in His death. Marvellous indeed is the Word of God!

But now, how is it that this Joseph, this rich man from Arimathea, showed such an interest in the sacred body of our Lord? Scripture also informs us that the man was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, out of fear of the Jews.

Therefore his position in society and public affairs had kept him from boldly confessing his faith. That was wrong, of course, but to his credit let it now be said that when none of Christ's professed followers appeared to do the last honours for our Lord's body, it was Joseph who now came forward to serve His Master.

And the same thing was true of a second man who likewise came to Calvary about the same time: Nicodemus, the same man who came to Jesus at night to talk about the way of salvation and who was from then on, likewise a secret disciple of the Lord. With him he brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, the aromatic spices used by the Jews for the embalming of the dead.

Gently, lovingly these two men then took down the body of our Lord, wound it in linen with the spices, and then carried it off to a nearby garden — a park-like area which belonged to Joseph of Arimathea. In fact, this was to be Joseph's own resting place someday, for out of the rocky hillside he had already hewn a tomb for the day of his own burial.

Into this virgin tomb, then, never before used for a burial, they laid Jesus, the Virgin's Son. And so was fulfilled Isaiah's amazing word that in His death He would be with a rich man. Did this all just happen that way? By no means:

Jesus was buried in this way because He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in His mouth. In other words, by the kind of burial which God provided for Him, our Father in heaven Himself testified once more that this was truly a lamb without blemish and without spot!

What a comfort that is as we think of that inevitable day when we ourselves shall be laid into our last resting place. We read in Psalm 116:15 that ¹⁵ *Precious in the sight of the LORD Is the death of His saints*. Can that really be true? Isn't that too good to believe?

Often in the past we have confessed in our Worship Service: **“O almighty God, merciful Father, I, a poor miserable sinner, confess to Thee all my sins and iniquities with which I have offended Thee and justly deserved Thy punishment in time and in eternity.”** Can we, with a confession like that, expect to be classed as saints whose death is a precious thing in the sight of the Lord of all life? Thank God, we can, and we should!

But I am heartily sorry for them and earnestly repent of them, and I pray Thee of Thy boundless mercy, and for the sake of the holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death of Thy beloved Son Jesus Christ, to be gracious and merciful to me. There is the answer.

Because Jesus holy blood was shed for me, because of His innocent, bitter suffering and death as my Substitute, I can, yes, I should believe that by faith in Christ I am one of God’s saints, cleansed of all my guilt, washed whiter than the snow; and therefore I also know that my death is “precious” in His sight.

Our Lord Himself was buried with the rich, as a testimony to His innocence of any violence or deceit. Because that same Lord bled and died to pay for my sins, I shall someday be buried with the riches of divine forgiveness — that forgiveness in His blood whereby I have become a precious saint in the sight of God. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Isa. 53:3

² 2 Kings 9:10

³ Jer. 22:18,19

⁴ John 19:31,32

⁵ Acts 6:8

⁶ Acts 6:10

⁷ Acts 7:55

⁸ Acts 7:60

⁹ Matt. 24:35

¹⁰ John 19:34

¹¹ Matt. 27:57