

HOLY SATURDAY

Study Notes for the Christian Layperson

by: Rev. Mark Schlamann



Matthew 27:57-66 ESV

Author and Date:

The Holy Spirit, as the divine Author of Scripture, inspired the apostle and evangelist Matthew to write his Gospel sometime around 50 A.D. This reading takes place following Jesus' death, after the Day of Preparation.

⁵⁷ **When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus.**

- The early Church father Jerome: "Joseph of Arimathea is referred to as a rich man not because the writer of the Gospel wanted to boast that very wealthy and noble men were disciples of Jesus but rather in order to show why he was able to obtain Jesus' body from Pilate. For the poor and obscure did not have the right to approach Pilate, the representative of Roman power, and obtain the body of the Crucified. In another Gospel [Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50], this same Joseph is called... 'councilor' or 'senator.'" (*Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Matthew 14-28, 299*)
- LCMS theologian P. E. Kretzmann: "It was now the first evening according to the reckoning of the Jews, the time just preceding sunset, toward [6:00]." (*Popular Commentary: New Testament, Vol. 1, 159*)

⁵⁸ **He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him.**

- Lutheran theologian R.C.H. Lenski: "This man, who had been fearful and cowardly thus far, does an astonishing thing. He casts all his fears to the winds and boldly takes charge after Jesus had died. Joseph is a great and an influential man, and when he 'came' there on Golgotha that implied that he spoke to the centurion about his wanting the body and his going to Pilate to secure the possession. The centurion gladly consented to wait. At the request of the Jews the bones of the malefactors had already been broken and the spear thrust into Jesus' side.

"Joseph hurries to Pilate...right into the Prætorium in order to make his request of the governor. But we need not suppose that by thus entering a Gentile abode Joseph broke with the entire Jewish religion. He merely made himself liable to ceremonial pollution for that day. This the Sanhedrists had avoided when they brought Jesus to Pilate in the morning, but they did so only because they wanted to be fit to eat the *Chagiga* [Merriam-Webster: the voluntary sacrifices offered with the paschal lamb at the Passover and on other festivals by Jews on their pilgrimages to the temple at Jerusalem] in the afternoon. Joseph was not concerned about eating this sacrificial meal, he intended to bury Jesus and would at any rate be ceremonially unclean because he had handled Jesus' dead body." (*Matthew, 1136-7*)

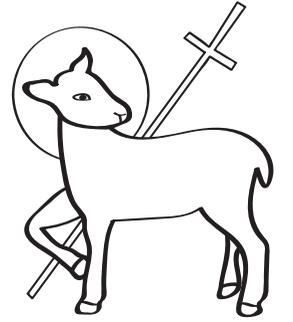
⁵⁹ **And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud ⁶⁰ and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away.**

- As one LCMS professor says: "There is, however, more to this scene than Joseph's messianic expectation. Although the verbs of [Luke] 23:52-53 describe what Joseph does, the focus is on the body of Jesus, the object of those actions. Unlike other members of the Sanhedrin, who mocked and abused Jesus, Joseph treats him with the honor due a great prophet. He asks Pilate for 'the body of Jesus', the corpse hanging on the cross. Next, Joseph takes down Jesus' body from the cross and wraps it in linen. Once again, [Luke] provides a frame for his gospel that links together Jesus' birth and his death, since at his birth Jesus was wrapped in cloth bands." (Just, *Concordia Commentary: Luke 9:51-24:53, 952-3*)
- Kretzmann: "He secured permission for obtaining the body of Jesus from the governor, after which he took down the body of the Lord from the cross with the aid of Nicodemus [John 19:39], wrapped it in a new linen burial-cloth, and finally deposited it in his own new tomb, a grave hewn into

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the rock in his own garden. Jesus, in His death, received all the honors which the prosperous Jews expected for themselves, far more than He had ever been accustomed to during His life [Is. 53:12]. It was a fine token of veneration and affection, and teaches some lessons. ‘That is, then, the fruit of the death of Christ the Lord, that the weakest, most fearful hearts come forward without dread or fear, confess Christ, bury His body, which was hanging there in all dishonor, with all signs of respect, in order to testify to the Jews, the high priests, Pilate, and all enemies of Christ that they regard Him as the Son of God, and thus glory in Him, hope in His kingdom, and are full of comfort even now that He is dead and every one is of the opinion that His career is definitely ended. For that is what Mark and Luke mean when they say that Joseph waited for the kingdom of God, that is, he hoped God would by this man organize a new kingdom on earth, forgive sins, give the Holy Ghost and eternal salvation. For that is really what the kingdom of God means, as it is promised in the prophets to be organized by Christ or the Messiah....’” (*Popular Commentary: New Testament*, Vol. 1, 159)

61 Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

- Lenski: “These two Marys have been mentioned in v. 56; Luke tells us that the women who had come out of Galilee with Jesus also followed to the tomb and saw how the body was laid in its place in the tomb. When Joseph left after the tomb had been closed, these women, with the exception of the two named, departed. These two lingered on, [loath] to leave until the shadows fell.” (Matthew, 1141)
- Just: “They will be the first eyewitnesses of the resurrection.” (*Concordia Commentary: Luke 9:51–24:53*, 954)

62 The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate ⁶³ and said, “Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise.’

- Good Friday was also the Day of Preparation. The day after was Passover Sabbath, the greatest of the Sabbaths. The chief priests and Pharisees had the gall, out of their hatred of Jesus, to set foot on Gentile property, thus making themselves ceremonially unclean. Little did they know that Jesus, the Lamb of God, would by His death fulfill the ceremonial requirements of the Law (Hebrews 9).
- Kretzmann: “Whether it was due to a bad conscience or to vindictiveness, cannot be determined, but the Jewish chiefs even now were not satisfied. The day of preparation closed at sundown, and they were so anxious about a certain matter that they disregarded the rules of the great festival. Jesus was hardly laid into the grave when their delegation attended upon Pilate.” (*Popular Commentary: New Testament*, Vol. 1, 160)

64 Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, ‘He has risen from the dead,’ and the last fraud will be worse than the first.”

- Lenski: “We see how evil minds work. If these Jews had known the state of the disciples, they would have seen how foolish their fears were. But providence was again at work. These Sanhedrists, the implacable enemies of Jesus who cannot be content with his death, must proceed involuntarily to aid in establishing the certainty of Jesus’ resurrection. By having the tomb guarded they made certain that no deception had been perpetrated, that the body most certainly had remained in the tomb and that, therefore, Jesus truly arose on Sunday.” (*Matthew*, 1144-5)
- 65 **Pilate said to them, “You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can.”**
- Kretzmann: “Pilate, in a somewhat gruff manner, as though heartily disgusted with the whole affair, granted the request: Have your watch: there will be mighty little need of it, I am sure; secure the tomb as ye know how!” (*Popular Commentary: New Testament*, Vol. 1, 160)

- The Early Church Father Chrysostom: “What then saith Pilate? ‘Ye have a watch; make it as sure as ye can. And they made it sure, sealing the sepulchre, and setting the watch.’ He suffers not the soldiers alone to seal, for as having learnt the things concerning Christ, he was no longer willing to co-operate with them. But in order to be rid of them, he endures this also, and saith, ‘Do ye seal it as ye will, that ye may not have it in your power to blame others.’” (Homily LXXXIX)

66 So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.

- Lenski: “It was a simple matter that did not require the private seal of Pilate or that of the Sanhedrin. The circular flat stone lay close against the wall of rock. All that needed to be done was to make a connection between stone and wall, one that, if it were broken, could not be restored. ...Quietly Jesus rested in his tomb. Presently he would arise. In vain are all the foolish proceedings of his enemies.” (*Matthew*, 1146)

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