

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud 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. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb. The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.' 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." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can." So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.

In Christ Jesus, whose Father used both the services of friend and foe to keep Jesus' lifeless body safe and secure, dear fellow redeemed:

The questions concerning our Lord continued right up to His burial, when, of course, His lifeless body could not speak up any longer. First a friend of Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea, asked Pilate for Jesus' body to give it a proper burial. Permission was granted. The tomb was newly hewn out of rock, never used before this. A large stone was rolled across the entrance with Jesus' body lying within. That was on Friday. Then the next day Jesus' enemies, the chief priests and Pharisees, made an inquiry of Pilate that Jesus' grave be made secure. Pilate then ordered a guard of soldiers to stand watch 24/7 until Monday and sealing the stone it was made secure.

Joseph wanted to take that body and remove it from any scavenging birds or wild animals or even from Jesus' enemies. So freshly dead, Joseph, nor his helper, Nicodemus, nor the observing Marys, detected that in truth Jesus' body was not in the normal mode of decomposition. Jesus was truly dead, but the effects of death upon a sinful body were not setting in upon Jesus' holy body. Let us consider for our great comfort this early hour of Easter: **Jesus' Body Slept Peacefully Secure Until His Day of Resurrection.**

We are surrounded by bodies sleeping peacefully secure until the day of resurrection as well, but it is all based on this day of Jesus' resurrection. Most of these bodies and remains were deposited here by their loved ones who long for the day of resurrection. We even have at least a couple graves that are marked with no remains in them. Their bodies were not raised like Jesus' body, but were never found from the field of battle nor an accidental drowning. Why would these graves be marked by their Christian loved ones without a body? For Christians, such graves are not signs of defeat but of

impending victory over sin, death and hell. While these remains are not to be found here, they too shall rise wherever in the world they now rest.

The souls of these Christians whose graves are marked here are still living, their bodies are only asleep. Remember when Jesus said to grieving Martha, Lazarus' sister, "Your brother shall rise again."? Jesus ended up comforting her by declaring: "I am the resurrection and life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die." So again, far from being a place of sorrow, a Christian cemetery, or any Christian grave in whatever kind of cemetery, or even an unmarked grave for a Christian is not a place of sorrow and defeat, but rather a place of great anticipation, all made possible by what our Lord did on this His day of His rising from the dead.

Jesus told the believing thief on Friday when both of them would breathe their last and die that "*Today he would be with Him in paradise.*" So it is that this believing thief, though he died, would live and really never die. These stones should cry out to you this morning that we are among the living, not the dead.

Can you have any more glorious news than this today? You shall never die, even though you die, yet shall you live. It is all based on the work of Jesus your holy Substitute who was charged with all your sin, and stepped into your death having already suffered your eternal punishment for your every sin. But that was not the end of the story, even though Jesus declared "It is finished!" The payment was finished and the Father who sent the Son to take upon Himself the payment for all your sin was completely satisfied, so the Son arose defeating all that stood against you. The Father's wrath toward you was all meted out upon His Son. It was stamped PAID IN FULL when Jesus rose from the dead.

Jesus' enemies used this as their argument to make Jesus' grave doubly secure: "Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.' 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." Jesus' enemies took Jesus's promise of resurrection even more seriously than Joseph, Nicodemus, the Marys, the other women who prepared spices on Saturday and any of the fearfully hidden disciples.

Jesus' enemies called Him the imposter and His claim to rise again a fraud. But the real imposters were these Jewish religious leaders themselves who did not believe the promises of God. Their fraud upon the people was that sinners like themselves could get into heaven by following their system of laws. They imagined their level of self-righteousness, which fell woefully short of the glory of God in His law, would be sufficient.

If that could work, the Son of God did not have to come and endure all that He did in your place. However, your gracious Lord knows your dilemma as a sinner. You cannot lift one spiritual finger to move you from your deserved hell into heaven. All your efforts, even your best, would be judged completely insufficient. Jesus needed to do what you were helpless to do.

Jesus' body did sleep securely for those three days, unmolested by friend or foe. Death nor devil had a claim on it either. The Lord is risen! (*He is risen, indeed! Alleluja!*) On account of this great act in your behalf, your body will sleep securely too, until the day of your resurrection. Sleep well. Amen.