

A RICH BURIAL
Sermon for Good Friday, 2021
Isaiah 53:9

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 is Isaiah 53:9: **He assigned His grave with wicked people but was with a rich man in His death, although He had done nothing violent, and there was no deceit in His mouth.**

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

Dear friends in Christ,

When someone famous or of importance dies, they are usually accorded a rich burial. Think of the pharaohs of ancient Egypt who built the pyramids for their tombs. If you have seen pictures of Princess Diana's burial place at Althorp Estate, you would see that it is rather stunning. A towering tombstone or a granite mausoleum is a lasting tribute to honour the inscribed name. On Good Friday, Christ's death was in the company of wicked people, but according to God's plan He received the honour of a rich burial. All baptised believers are buried with the lavish riches of God's grace in Christ, which promises resurrection and the priceless inheritance of eternal life.

Our Good Friday text is a carefully nuanced prophecy about the end of Jesus' earthly life, the circumstances of which are not haphazard accidents of history. Instead, the death of Jesus took place according to God's detailed, pre-ordained plan for Christ's grave to be "**with wicked people.**" This first phrase might imply a dishonourable interment for Jesus, a pauper's grave, a meagre memorial only suitable for a common criminal, yet Isaiah continues, "**but was with a rich man in His death.**" That second phrase would indicate an honourable, opulent burial. So which is it: shameful or honourable, poor or rich?

If it were not for the New Testament record, we may remain puzzled by this ancient prophecy. But as Jesus Christ died and was buried on this day nearly two thousand years ago, He fulfilled both halves of our verse. Jesus "**assigned His grave with wicked people but was with a rich man in His death.**" Moreover, His rich burial holds great promise for each of us.

The first part of God's plan made use of the scheme of Jesus' enemies. They had plotted to kill the One who had claimed to be the King of the Jews, even though His kingdom was not of this world.¹ They had bribed Judas to betray Him. Jesus was arrested and led through a series of sham trials before Jewish leaders and the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, who unjustly condemned Jesus.

In the narrative of Jesus' death we find violent criminals. Pilate had freed Barabbas, a murderous insurrectionist.² On Christ's right and left they had crucified two criminals.³ Thus Jesus "*was numbered with wrongdoers*" (Isaiah 53:12). The sinless Son of God pined away beside criminals, "**although He had done nothing violent, and there was no deceit in His mouth.**" Such was the humiliating death planned for Jesus by His enemies. In this way the first part of the text was fulfilled: God "**assigned His (Jesus) grave with wicked people.**"

Jesus' death in the company of abject sinners had capped His earthly ministry to and among sinners. Christ had come to be known as the "friend of sinners"⁴ because He had associated with tax collectors, prostitutes, the poor, and the lowly, those who were despised and scorned. Now also in His death, Christ identifies with sinners, executed as a criminal in the company of wicked men. His sole possession - a robe - had become the soldiers' gamble.⁵ Forsaken, stripped of all dignity, and bereft of any possession, He died in utter poverty.

Dear friends, this was God's plan to bring us salvation. Jesus' death in the place of sinners procured the forgiveness of sins for all humanity. A few sentences before our text, Isaiah had written, "*He was pierced for our rebellious acts. He was bruised for our wrongdoings. The chastisement that brought us peace was on Him, and through His wounds we have been healed*" (Isaiah 53:5).

Because of the work of Jesus, we receive wonderful blessings. We could not earn peace with God or healing for our sins through the theology of law. All the gold and silver in the universe could not buy such blessings. All good human

¹ John 18:36

² Luke 23:19, 25

³ Luke 23:32

⁴ Luke 7:34

⁵ John 19:23-24

efforts and noble intentions cannot erase sin and earn peace with God. No human could remove one sinful thought, word, or action by suffering the punishment deserved. Even criminals do not remove the guilt from their record by spending years in prison or even by suffering capital punishment; they only suffer the penalty they deserve. But, as the writer of Hebrews says, One “*who is holy, blameless, spotless, separated from sinners and has been made higher than the heavens... sacrificed for their sins once for all when He offered Himself*” (Hebrews 7:26-27). Isaiah identified the blessings of the Servant’s work in these precious words: “*The chastisement that brought us peace was on Him, and through His wounds we have been healed.*” These words stand as a wonderful witness to the truth of the Gospel. The pronouns are clear and unmistakable. Peace and healing come to those who have not suffered and died for their own sins. They come from Him who has suffered for the sins of others. Every believer includes himself or herself in the “us” and the “we,” just as Isaiah did. By the power of the Holy Spirit, every believer treasures the “Him” and “His.” So it has been and so it will be, as each sinner comes to claim the blessings provided by the Servant of the Lord, when each one confesses, that Jesus was crucified for me.

By grace alone, and through Baptism into Christ’s atoning death⁶, God the Father has taken our sins away and clothed us in the robe of Christ’s perfect righteousness. He who died in abject poverty now gives us a share in the victor’s spoils - the riches of eternal life. This too Isaiah foresaw when he wrote: “*Because of the anguish of His soul, He will see and be satisfied. Through His knowledge, My righteous Servant will justify many and bear their iniquities.*”¹² *Therefore, I shall divide Him a portion among great people, and He will divide the plunder with strong people, because He poured out His life to death and was numbered with wrongdoers*” (Isaiah 53:11-12).

What wonderful comfort for us! The Servant is righteous. He has no sin. He is innocent and a perfect match to the will of God and the mind of God. He has not deviated from the standard of God in any point. God then declared many to be as righteous as the Servant. To declare someone just or righteous, that is, to acquit, is a forensic act, a courtroom decree. God has made this declaration, whether or not many respond to it. Remember that Isaiah has us view this act from God’s perspective. God has done it; His decree does not depend on any human action. Instead, it is an act of God’s independent and free love. The Servant’s work has bought back, or redeemed, many from the bondage of sin and death. Those whom the Servant has redeemed with His suffering and death will be His eternal portion and inheritance. The Servant claims us by His work; we, as believers, are His.

In ancient Israel, as today, it was an honour to be buried next to your relatives. A man buried in the family plot was said to be sleeping with his fathers.⁷ It was a dishonour to be consigned namelessly to a public cemetery.⁸ To be denied any burial was an abomination and God’s curse.⁹ According to the Bible, even the most accursed criminals who were impaled (an early form of crucifixion) were to be buried, lest the corpse defile the land.¹⁰ But the Romans, who lacked God’s Word, often left crucified victims on the cross to be attacked by birds of prey and other scavengers, to suffer the most horrific humiliation even after death. No doubt, Christ’s enemies may have wished such a dishonour for Him.

But God the Father would not permit such disgrace to mock His Son after His death. As Jesus prayed, “*Father, into your hands I commit My spirit*” (Luke 23:46) and breathed His last, He completed the redemption of all humanity for all time. Now Jesus’ state of humiliation had ended, and rich glory awaited.

God’s plan was that after Christ had died in the company of “**wicked people,**” He was to be “**with a rich man in His death.**”

Joseph of Arimathea was a Jewish man who believed in Jesus Christ, though he had kept quiet out of fear of unbelieving Jews.¹¹ But now he took a bold step of faith. God moved him to ask Pontius Pilate for the body of Jesus. Joseph wished to give Christ His last honours. It took a brave man to request the body of a criminal, for by doing so he declared his allegiance to the one who had been executed, and he could be next.

This Joseph was a rich man.¹² His wealth included ownership of a garden near Golgotha. In that garden, Joseph had gone to the expense of having a tomb hewn out of solid rock - the most secure type of grave (though it could not hold

⁶ Romans 6:1-4; Colossians 2:11-14

⁷ Genesis 47:30; Deuteronomy 31:16; 2 Samuel 7:12

⁸ cf. 2 Kings 23:6; Jeremiah 26:23; Matthew 27:7-8

⁹ Deuteronomy 28:26; 1 Kings 13:22

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 21:23

¹¹ John 19:38

¹² Matthew 27:57

the risen Lord). It was not his ancestor's tomb, but a new one, for no one else had ever been laid in it. Perhaps Joseph had prepared it to be his own resting place. But out of love for the Lord who had taken his place on the cross, Joseph wanted Jesus to take his place in his costly tomb. Into the virgin tomb was placed the Virgin's Son.

The sin of the first Adam had caused humanity's expulsion from the garden paradise.¹³ But the second Adam leads humanity back into paradise through His burial and resurrection in another garden. Today the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem marks the traditional location. According to our text, Christ's sepulchre was holy because "**He had done nothing violent, and there was no deceit in His mouth.**" By His rich burial, God the Father had testified that His Son is the Lamb of God without spot or blemish.

The ancient pharaohs of Egypt filled their pyramid tombs with gold and every precious commodity (long ago plundered by grave robbers) in the false hope that their wealth could secure a blessed afterlife. But no one can rob us of God's priceless riches in Christ, which do avail. The forgiveness of sins is ours through Christ's crucifixion "**with wicked people,**" and the promise of resurrection is ours through His temporary rest "**with a rich man in His death.**"

May you all have a holy and solemn Good Friday, as we ponder such a great sacrifice given for us. Amen.

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

PRAYER FOR GOOD FRIDAY

O God the Father Almighty, we praise You for Your eternal wisdom and mercy, in which You ordained that Your Son should be the sacrifice for our sin. We praise You that, by His being lifted up on the cross, He draws all people to Himself, taking away their iniquity, and granting them peace.

In this holy hour we thank and praise You for His sacrificial love, for His perfect obedience, for His patience in suffering, for His willingness to endure even the cross, and for His submission to death.

Help us to see, in the darkness that accompanied His dying, in the shaking of the earth, and in the splitting of the rocks, how great an evil was done by sinful people, how great a life was ended, and how great a death was inflicted. But through the tearing open of the veil of the Temple, and the opening of the graves of the saints, show us our sure entrance into the heavenly Holy of holies.

We thank You, O Father, for all that Jesus Your Son, our Lord, has done, for all that He has suffered, for all that He has given us, and for all that He has promised us.. We bow in adoration, and offer our prayers from the depths of grateful hearts. We join with the angels and with all Your redeemed people of every race, tribe, nation, and language in raising our song of thanksgiving: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honour, glory, and praise for ever."

As we remember our Saviour's passion, grant that we may treasure the things that belong to our salvation. As we remember His suffering, make us ready to pass through many troubles to enter the kingdom of God. As we remember His wounds, equip us to cope with every painful struggle. As we remember His crucifixion, teach us to crucify our worthless passions and desires. As we remember His death, help us to be ready to place our spirit in Your hands. As we remember His burial, help us to remember that He has transformed the graves of all His believers.

We rejoice, O Father, that we have received Your mercy and seen Your glory in the face of Jesus Christ. Give us Your continuing grace through Him who died and rose again for us, and who reigns as the Lamb on the throne for ever and ever. Amen.

GOOD FRIDAY

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

¹³ "Look! My Servant will be successful. He will be high, be lifted up and be highly exalted. ¹⁴ As there have been many who have been horrified because of You, — since His appearance has been more disfigured than any other man and His form more than any other human being, — ¹⁵ so He will sprinkle many nations. Kings will shut their mouths because of Him.

For they will see what they had not been told and will understand what they had not heard."

^{53:1} Who has believed our Message? To whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? ² He grew up before Him like a young shoot, like a root out of dry ground. He had no form or majesty that we should look at Him. He had nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him. ³ He was despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom people hide their faces, He was despised,

¹³ Genesis 2-3

and we thought of Him as nothing. ⁴ Surely, He has taken on Himself our sufferings and carried our sorrows. Yet we considered Him to be wounded, struck down by God and afflicted. ⁵ However, He was pierced for our rebellious acts. He was bruised for our wrongdoings. The chastisement that brought us peace was on Him, and through His wounds we have been healed. ⁶ We have all gone astray, like sheep. Each one of us has turned to his own way, and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. ⁷ Although He was oppressed and afflicted, He did not open His mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter and, as a ewe is silent before those who shear off her wool, so He did not open His mouth. ⁸ He was taken away through oppression and without justice. As for His generation, who considered that He was cut off from the land of the living? Because of the rebellion of my people He was struck down. ⁹ He assigned His grave with wicked people but was with a rich man in His death, although He had done nothing violent, and there was no deceit in His mouth. ¹⁰ Nevertheless, it was the will of the LORD to crush Him with suffering. When You make His life a sacrifice for guilt, He will see His off-spring. He will have a long life, and the will of the LORD will be successful in His hand. ¹¹ Because of the anguish of His soul, He will see and be satisfied.

“Through His knowledge, My righteous Servant will justify many and bear their iniquities. ¹² Therefore, I shall divide Him a portion among great people, and He will divide the plunder with strong people, because He poured out His life to death and was numbered with wrongdoers. Nevertheless, He has carried the sin of many people and intercedes for the wrongdoers.”

Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9

¹⁴ Therefore, since we have a great High Priest, who has gone through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us cling to what we confess! ¹⁵ For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses. However, we have One who has been tempted in every way like us. Yet He was without sin. ¹⁶ Therefore, let us come boldly to the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace to help us when we need it! ...

^{5:7} During His days in the human nature, Jesus offered prayers and petitions, with loud cries and tears, to the One who could save Him from death; and, because He feared God, He was heard. ⁸ Although Jesus is the Son, He learned obedience from the things that He suffered. ⁹ When He was perfected, He also became the Source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him.

John 19:17-30

¹⁷ Jesus went out, carrying His own cross, to the place that was called “the Place of the Skull,” which is called “Golgotha” in Aramaic. ¹⁸ There they crucified Him with two other men, one on each side, with Jesus in the middle.

¹⁹ Pilate also wrote a notice and put it on the cross. It read: “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.”

²⁰ Therefore, many Jews read this notice, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city. The notice had been written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek.

²¹ Therefore, the High Priests of the Jews told Pilate, “Do not write: ‘The King of the Jews,’ but: ‘He said, ‘I am the King of the Jews’!”

²² Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.”

²³ When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took His outer garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier, and also the undergarment. The undergarment was without a seam, woven from the top in one piece. ²⁴ Therefore, they said to one another, “Let us not tear it but let us throw dice for it, to decide who will get it!”

This happened that the Scripture might be fulfilled that says: “They divided My outer garments among them and cast lots for My clothing.”

So, that is what the soldiers did.

²⁵ Jesus’ mother, His mother’s sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene were standing near the cross of Jesus.

²⁶ Therefore, when Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, “Woman, there is your son.” ²⁷ Then He said to the disciple, “There is your mother.”

From that time on, this disciple took her into his own home.

²⁸ After this, knowing that everything had now been finished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.”

²⁹ A jar full of sour wine had been placed there. So, they put a sponge full of the sour wine on hyssop and lifted it to His mouth.

³⁰ When Jesus had taken the sour wine, He said, “It is finished.”

Then He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.