

Chapter 89

Borne with honour to the grave

John 19 v 31-32

In the evening of that eventful day some of the Jewish elders make their way once more to the palace of Pontius Pilate. Again, they do not enter, so Pilate comes out to them yet again. We may well believe that the Roman Governor has not had a very happy day. He will have thought more than once about that "Son of the gods".

The three hours of darkness had evidently made his superstitious heart shudder with anxiety and fear. The earthquake had frightened him still more.

And now, as the sun sinks slowly in the West, the Jews come to him. They ask Pilate if he will have the bodies of the crucified men removed. That was not the usual practice. No, usually the victims were left to hang for days, but, because at six o'clock the Sabbath will begin, the Passover Sabbath, they request that this time the bodies be removed.

Pilate gives his permission, but since they are not yet dead, he sends a captain with some soldiers to the hill. They are to deal a final blow to those on the cross.

Look, there the rough soldiers hasten to Golgotha.

A little later they stand by one of the murderers. Yes, he is still alive. Well then, they break his legs so that he dies immediately. They do the same to the other murderer.

Oh, for the murderer who had been turned to God, that was no hardship. He is released at once from his painful suffering and his

soul goes to eternal glory. For him it is a mercy.

He had prayed: "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy Kingdom", and Jesus had answered him: "Today thou shalt be with Me in Paradise." That is what happens now. His soul wings its way to that heavenly Kingdom, in which through the Saviour a place was prepared for him.

When the legs of the two murderers have been broken, the Roman soldiers go to Jesus. With a few brutal blows they intend to crush His legs, but, as they look up at him they notice with surprise that Jesus is already dead. They glance at each other and hesitate for a moment. No, they need not break the legs of this Man - it is no longer necessary.

One of the soldiers raises his pointed spear and thrusts it forcefully into Jesus' side. Those heathen soldiers have no respect for a dead body.

In the body of the Lord Jesus there appears as a result of that spear thrust, a gaping wound from which a stream of blood and water flows. That is an unmistakable sign that Jesus is truly dead. Had He still lived, then blood only would have flowed, but since blood and water stream from the wound, the Roman soldiers hesitate no longer. Jesus is dead, without any possible doubt.

So then they too leave the hill of Golgotha and hurry back to Jerusalem to inform Pontius Pilate that the three crucified men are dead.

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Although the soul of the Lord Jesus was in heaven, in His Father's hand, yet His heavenly Father watched over His body.

God had commanded in His laws that the bones of the paschal lamb were not to be broken. Here too, not a bone of the true Paschal Lamb was broken. In this way too the Scripture was fulfilled that not a bone of Him should be broken.

And now look up Zechariah 12 v 10. There we read: "And they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced."

Oh, boys and girls, everything is fulfilled to the letter, which had been foretold of the Lord Jesus. Truly, He is the Messiah, the long promised King of Israel.

Matthew 27 v 57-60

Mark 15 v 42-46

Luke 23 vv 50-54

A man is walking through the streets of Jerusalem. He turns in the direction of the Roman Governor's palace. Soon he is standing in front of that building. Then he hesitates. Probably he passed by the house several times, and yet each time he retraces his steps.

Is he waiting for someone? ... No, that is not it.

Look, all at once he decides to go up the steps of the palace and steps inside. His hesitation has gone. He has made up his mind. In God's Word we read that he "went in boldly unto Pilate". (Mark 15).

Boldly! From this we realise that he had to overcome some hesitation in going. Once he has made up his mind however, he hesitates no longer and steps resolutely inside. Soon he stands

before the proud Pilate.

Pilate looks at him questioningly. He thinks: "What does this Jew want now?" He is getting a bit tired of all these requests.

The man then asks to have the body of Jesus. Now, what does he want to do with the body of the Lord Jesus? ... Who is this man?



Joseph of Arimathea asks for the body of Jesus

Oh, you know already, don't you? ... Tell me then! JOSEPH OF ARIMATHIA is his name. He too is an elder. He belongs to the Sanhedrin.

He had not consented however to the condemnation of Jesus. He had voted against it. Secretly, in his heart, he is a disciple of the despised Jesus. He believed that Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah! But he did not say so, no he dared not. He feared the wrath and the mockery of the other members. Yet he was brave enough to disagree with their verdict.

Now that Jesus is dead however, now that all appears to be lost, he asks for the body of Jesus. Why then? ... What does he want to do with that body? ... Well, he cannot bear the thought that shortly the body of Jesus will be buried in a hole in the ground with the corpses of the two murderers. Deep in his heart there is love and respect for that great Prophet of Nazareth. That love has not diminished. On the contrary, sorrow fills his soul, now that Jesus is dead. He wants however to do something more for the despised and reviled Jesus of Nazareth. He wants to give Him an honourable burial.

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That is why he craves from Pilate the body of Jesus. He waits for the governor's answer tensely.

"Is Jesus already dead?" asks Pilate, surprised. He calls the centurion hastily and asks him if it is true that the Nazarite is already dead. The centurion confirms the fact.

"Well then," says the Governor to Joseph of Arimathea, "you may indeed take the body."

A little later this eminent Jewish elder leaves the Governor's palace relieved. He buys fine linen, and then Joseph of Arimathea hastens to Golgotha, where Jesus had breathed His last.

John 19 vv 39-42

Look, yet another man is climbing the cursed hill of crucifixion. Who ever is that? ... Take a good look! I am sure that you know him. This man is Nicodemus! Nicodemus also belongs to the Jewish Sanhedrin.

Can you still remember that it was Nicodemus who once came to Jesus by night, to have a quiet talk with Him? That story we told you in Chapter 13. Then he had come at night purposely, so that the Jews should not see him. Then he had feared the jeering and contempt of the other Pharisees.

Now he no longer fears. Now he lets it be known quite openly that he honours and esteems the despised Nazarite. In his heart too there is love for the rejected Prophet. He has bought a hundred pounds weight of spices. He too wants to do the last honours to the Dead.

These two rich, prominent Jewish elders come together to Calvary. Most probably they did not know about each other. No, they had not

arranged it between themselves. Yet both men come with the same intention, both have hearts burning with love for the King of Israel. They now have nothing in common with the mockery, scorn and contempt of the Jews. God brings them together so that they can help each other.

Look, there stand the two men at the foot of the cross. Their hearts are filled with a strange reverence as they behold the dear departed One. Was there perhaps shame and sorrow in their souls, that they had not confessed Him before men earlier? ... God only knows that.

They help each other in their heavy task. Very carefully the long nails are withdrawn from the hands and feet of the Lord Jesus. They carefully take Him down from the cross. Then they wrap the body of the Saviour in the costly linen. They scatter the spices which Nicodemus had purchased and brought with him, in handfuls between the folds of the linen. They do this so that the body of Jesus shall not begin to decompose. They do not realise that the Saviour's body will never decompose, for Jesus is sinless.

It is because of sin that dead bodies are consumed in the grave. Does not the Divine sentence say: "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return."? But Jesus was without sin. His body would see no corruption.

At last all is prepared. What now? ...Where must they take the body? Nicodemus doesn't know. Maybe he looked at Joseph of Arimathea enquiringly.

Joseph of Arimathea however does know of a place. He has had a grave hewn out of the rock, close by. It is still a new grave and has not been used, it lies there still untouched.

Well then, in that grave the body of Jesus shall be laid. For his dead Master he can give up

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anything, even his fine tomb. Together they bear the soul-forsaken body inside, and lay it down reverently. With united strength they lever the heavy grave stone in front of the opening so that wild beasts shall not enter.

Look, there they turn with bowed heads towards home. What will have gone on in their hearts? ... How many questions will have come into their thoughts? Questions to which they can give no answer. They are filled with sorrow. No, they never imagined that it would turn out like this.

A few women, a few disciples of the Lord Jesus, who had always followed Him, who had ministered to Him from their goods, stand by and see all these things. They have seen how the body of their beloved Master had been taken down from the cross; they have seen how His body was wrapped in fine linen; they have seen where it was buried, and now those women also return to Jerusalem with hearts full of mourning and sadness. Life for them has become empty. Jesus is dead!

So you can see, boys and girls, that the Lord Jesus had an honourable burial. Certainly, while He was still alive He was numbered with the transgressors, but now He is dead, He is laid by the rich in His grave.

What Isaiah had long before prophesied, is here literally fulfilled: He was "with the rich in His death".

Matthew 27 vv 62-66

Swiftly the evening falls. The sun has sunk behind the mountains and darkness spreads across the earth. This eventful day is ended.

In the garden of Joseph of Arimathea, in

which his tomb lies, all has become quiet. Not a sound is to be heard.

But yes! Still a moment. ... Footsteps are approaching. Who can that be coming? ... Oh, just look! There are some Roman soldiers. What have they come to do at this late hour? ...

Look, the centurion walks up to the enclosed grave and seals the stone. Nobody may break that seal. Whoever attempts to do so will be severely punished. Why are they doing this? ... What does it mean? ...

Oh, the Sanhedrin has assembled once again. Some think that they gathered on the Friday evening, others say that it was on the Saturday morning.

Oh, they are still not contented. They remember all of a sudden that Jesus had said in His lifetime that after three days He would rise again from the dead. Those words fill them with anxiety. Oh no, that must never happen. Not that! Just suppose that the disciples of that Deceiver (as they called Him) were to steal the body on the sly. Suppose His disciples then go about saying that Jesus has risen. They shuddered at the thought. Then things will be even worse. Do you know what? ... They will take their own precautions. They will take care that such a thing cannot happen. That must be made impossible for the disciples.

They hurry to the Governor and ask for a military watch.

Pilate, anxious to be rid of these repeated requests, immediately agrees. And so it comes about that Roman soldiers are keeping watch by the sepulchre of Jesus.

These tough men of war watch all night long. Sleep? ... No, a Roman soldier never sleeps on guard! The sentries walk regularly to and fro,

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to and fro. Their dull foot falls disturb the stillness of the night.

The Pharisees do not realise, that by this they are showing the dead Jesus the greatest honour. A watch is held by the corpse of a mighty king. Well then, by the body of the King of kings a watch is also held.

And ... would the disciples really intend to steal the body of Jesus? ... By no means! The

disciples had fled, had scattered. They had forsaken their Master. They were filled with terror and fear, with sorrow and sadness. No, the Pharisees had nothing to fear from the disciples. They did nothing.

But the consciences of the evil elders spoke, and that is why they were afraid!