Low in the Grave He Lay

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[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast, a podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang.! Thank you for joining us. We'll meet inside in the youth center and so we'll be prepared either way.

Well, as John mentioned Sunday mornings, we are walking through the gospel of Mark and we have come now today at the very end of chapter 15. It is, it's always for me a really bittersweet time when you get to the end of a book, particularly a long book like a gospel.
There's a part of excitement that we have finished a journey when we finish a book of the Bible. There's also a bit of sadness in my heart because I also recognize there's no way I could have adequately given us everything that there was to know from this particular book.
But we come at the very end to chapter 15 with just really one text left after this on the resurrection. Today we look at the burial of Jesus.
It's hard. If you've been at graveside services, it's hard to see a burial take place. It's very final.
[1:28] It's very real. Just this past week I was leading a funeral service and made the drive out to the graveside to lead in the graveside service.

Listen, it's difficult to watch for the family that's there. Everything about a burial in that moment feels so final.
We know as believers that if the loved one is in Christ that we will see them again, that they are absent from the body and present with the Lord. We understand that. But from a human relationship standpoint, we certainly miss one who has passed away.
Today we grieve greatly and burials are hard. Today we get to see the burial of Jesus as it happened.
It reminds me of the words of a man named Robert Lowry. He was a pastor in Pennsylvania, New York City, New Jersey, and Brooklyn in the 1800s.
[2:28] He wrote about the burial of Jesus. His name is probably not familiar to you, but his words will be familiar to many of you. He wrote these words, Lo, in the grave he lay, Jesus my Savior, waiting the coming day, Jesus my Lord.

Vainly they watch his bed, Jesus my Savior. Vainly they seal the dead, Jesus my Lord. Death cannot keep its prey, Jesus my Savior.
He tore the bars away, Jesus my Lord. If it's not familiar to you yet, the words of the chorus for many of you will be, Up from the grave he arose.
With a mighty triumph o'er his foes. He arose a victor from the dark domain, And he lives forever with the saints who reign. He arose, he arose. Hallelujah.
Christ arose. For many of us, we grew up around Resurrection Sunday singing that song. And it's an interesting song because it's not typically in our human experience normal for us to think about statements of triumph and joy and victory when we associate it with a burial.
[3:52] Our experience of burial at cemeteries and gravesides are somber, hard, heart-wrenching.

And yet, as Robert Lowry mentions in his hymn, Up from the grave he arose. When we think of Christ, his burial, while it is a dark moment, is actually a very joyful occasion because of what his death accomplished.
And, as he says in his hymn, there is a mighty triumph over his foes because on the third day he will rise.
But we do need to understand as we think about the burial of Jesus, that while we view it from this side of the cross, looking back at the empty tomb, for those who were experiencing it as it happened, it was more devastating than you can possibly fathom.

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We know that even on that first Resurrection Sunday morning when the ladies went to the tomb, they did not go to the tomb expecting to find it empty. Quite the opposite.
[5:12] They were going literally to finish preparing his body to be in the tomb. And everything about that weekend on Friday and Saturday and early that Sunday morning was as dark as anything you can imagine.

As best we can, we go back today to put ourselves in the shoes of the people that were there when he was crucified and when he was buried as we try to get as close as we possibly can to grasping both the desperation of the burial and the exaltation of the resurrection.
Mark 15, verse 42, Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died.
And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph.
And Joseph bought a linen shroud and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock.
[6:47] And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Joseph, saw where he was laid. Notice first with me the surprising witnesses of his death.

The surprising witnesses of his death. When Christ is crucified and he dies, as we learned last week, the curtain of the temple is torn in two from top to bottom, the centurion who is there, who has watched how Jesus has died, who has heard his words, declares, surely this man was the Son of God.
And Mark tells us about these witnesses. Actually, back up in verse 40 is where we find the exact names of those who witnessed this. It says, there were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary, the mother of James the younger, and of Joseph, and Salome.
And when he was in Galilee, they followed him and ministered to him, and there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem. The surprising witnesses of his death, it mentions, are these specific ladies.
Luke 23, 49 adds, there were many acquaintances who were there. Mark specifies, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome.
[8:21] Verse 41 says, there were also many other women. The apostles have fled in fear. These ladies are devoted followers, ministered to Jesus while in Galilee, and they now witnessed his death.

Verse 47, at the very end of Mark 15, tells us they also witnessed his burial. Chapter 16, verses 1, 2, and 3, describe these ladies, along with Joanna, as being present at the empty tomb.
A bit surprising, really, when you consider that in this world that we read about in Mark 15, it's a culture that does not highly esteem or highly value women, yet the Scripture does.
Witnesses of his death, witnesses of his burial, and the very first witnesses of the empty tomb. The way the culture viewed women is not the way the Scripture views women.
In fact, for many years, all various kinds of cultures have devalued women. It takes some different forms.
[9:46] Some cultures devalue women by seeing them as less important than men. Other cultures, as a rebound to that, have actually devalued women by trying to make them the same as men.

This, too, is a tragedy. pretending that the beautiful differences that God has made between male and female are somehow bad.
Other cultures have devalued women by training and raising them to resent men. We see even much of that in our world today.
Anytime you take what God has made and what God has designed and turn it upside down, you can call it whatever you want and dress it up however you choose to, but anything that's contrary to God's design is never for our good.
The Bible sees distinctions and roles between men and women, but no distinction in value, no distinction in meaning, and no distinction in worth.
[11:00] Men and women are absolutely equals in the eyes of the Lord. One's not higher than the other. One's not closer to God than the other. One's not more holy than the other.

We are of absolute equal value and worth and distinction. However, that does not mean that there are no differences between men and women.

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It is a beautiful thing to watch a godly man who marries a godly woman who are both equal in the eyes of God, equal in value and worth, and yet show us and demonstrate for us different facets of what it means to know the Lord and to love the Lord and the beauties of a wife and of a husband, of a grandmother and a grandfather, of a girl and a boy.
These are beautiful things. And so many times, cultures have either devalued women and made them as less than or raise them up to think that somehow men are the enemy.
It's tragic however people choose to mar the plan of God. And one of the beautiful things even here at the burial of Christ is this value clearly placed on women.
[12:36] Not in the culture that valued them. Sadly, they largely did not. And yet, as evidence of the Lord's love and honor of them, they will be eyewitnesses to his death, eyewitnesses to his burial, and the very first eyewitnesses to the empty tomb.

It's surprising really that this is who the witnesses would be. Because if you were fabricating a story 2,000 years ago at this time, you're not going to be inviting shepherds to the birth.
That's not the chief eyewitness that the culture would latch on to. Shepherds were considered unclean, not even allowed to testify in court.
And yet, at the birth of Christ, it will be the shepherds who will be invited from the angelic invitation showing us that the Lord has come to identify with those that the world has overlooked.
And if you're going to invent a story of resurrection, you're not going to have these ladies who are the first eyewitnesses because in that culture, in that day, their word would not have been seen as carrying the equal weight.
[14:03] But in the eyes of the Lord, while there are differences between men and women, those differences are not in value, meaning, or worth. These are surprising witnesses to his death, not what we would have expected to read about.

That leads to a second thing that's a bit of a shock. That is the shocking tomb for his body that we read about in verses 42 to 47. Again, back to verse 42, when evening had come, it was the day of preparation, that is the day before the Sabbath.
The Sabbath begins at 6 p.m. The body needs to be removed before then and put in the grave before then. Jesus has to be dead Friday, one day, Saturday, two days, Sunday, three days.
Now, people sometimes get tripped up over the predictions of three days and three nights. Just understand, according to the language and the culture of that day, that did not necessitate three full 24-hour periods.
The phrasing here of a day and a night is a Jewish colloquialism that refers to any part of the day. In fact, the Talmud, which is the Jewish commentary on Scripture, specifies these words.
[15:25] A day and a night makes one ana and a part of an ana is as the whole. So, to be in the grave Thursday, or Friday, Saturday, and Sunday is three days.

The way they would have understood the reckoning, one day would be, a part would be as the whole. That would be three days and three nights. But for that to take place, he must be taken down from the cross by 6 p.m. on Friday, placed in the tomb for him to have been buried Friday, Saturday, and then Sunday.
Verse 43 says, Joseph Arimathea was a respected member of the council who also himself was looking for the kingdom of God. He took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.
Who is Joseph of Arimathea? Well, the Gospels in different places describe him a bit to us. Mark 15, 43, that we just read, calls him a respected member of the council.
So, he was a respected man. Matthew's Gospel tells us he was a wealthy man. Luke's Gospel tells us he was a righteous man.
[16:43] John's Gospel tells us he was a disciple of Jesus, but it specifies he was a secret disciple for fear of the Jews.

So, you put it all together, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Joseph is a man from Arimathea. Arimathea. This is not Joseph, the father of Jesus. Different man.
This man named Joseph was from Arimathea, wealthy, respected, righteous, disciple, but followed in secret because of fear.
And yet, the text specifically tells us, speaking of Joseph here, that he was taking courage to do this.

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He is a member of the council looking for the kingdom of God and he took courage and went to Pilate. Now, that's interesting because John 19 tells us he had been known as a fearful follower of Jesus, but now that Jesus has died as he prepares to bury his body, he takes courage.
[18:02] Pilate was surprised, verse 44 says, that Jesus has already died. Here's what you need to know about crucifixion. Though it was excruciating, it was oftentimes a slow death.

In fact, it was not uncommon for victims who were crucified to hang on the cross for many hours. as they would ache and scream out in torture and in pain with nails through feet and wrists.
Part of the agony of crucifixion is they would have to put their weight down on their feet to stand up, to take a breath, but by doing so, you're standing up on nails that have been driven through your flesh.
And oftentimes, they would suffer for so many hours. Their heart would still be beating and strong. Their brain still alert until they would pass out from pain. But crucifixion itself was designed to take a long time.
[19:15] Once they were hanging there, you would have birds who would fly over and begin to eat and devour the flesh. At times, to speed up the death of someone who's being crucified, soldiers could take a piece of iron and hit them in the legs.

By breaking bones in their legs, they would no longer be able to stand up to be able to get enough room in their lungs to take a breath and they would suffocate there while hanging on the cross.
It says, summoning the centurion, he asked whether he was already dead. They want to make sure that Jesus is truly dead.
Verse 45, when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph. This isn't just a body.
This is now a corpse. He has died. The professional executioners are there.
[20:29] They have overseen it. They have been a part of it. They have watched him. They have checked him. Men whose job it was to make sure that a victim is truly dead has done their job to make sure he is truly dead.

Now, if we were to go back 2,000 years ago and watch this unfold, what would we have expected to happen to his body? He's died on the cross.
He's been declared dead by the professional executioners. Well, what we would have expected is that his body would have been treated the way that the other bodies of criminals who were executed were treated.
Most of them thrown into a common grave for criminals, thrown into a garbage dump where they would just dump the bodies and then set them on fire.
On some occasions, there would be a family member perhaps who would be there who had a grave and they could grant that family member to take the body of the criminal if they were willing to be associated with the one who has been executed.
[21:45] But who's going to take his body? You might say, well, maybe the apostles would want his body. The apostles are running in fear. They're hiding.

You might say, well, maybe the religious leaders would want his body if they respected him. The religious leaders are the ones who have demanded he be crucified. The leaders of Jerusalem are the ones that were stirring up the crowd to get them to chant, crucify him, crucify him.
And that's where this man named Joseph of Arimathea steps in. Verse 46 says, he bought a linen shroud and taking him down, wrapped him in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that has been cut out of the rock.
It's 3 p.m. And whatever's going to happen has to be completed by 6 p.m. So we have three hours at the most to get everything done, to get the corpse of Jesus taken off the cross, to get the body now removed, to get the body to a tomb prepared in some way for burial and placed in the tomb. This is going to have to happen very quickly. We learn a little more. You can stay in Mark 16, but turn with me briefly, if you would, to John 19.
[23:21] We get a few more details in John 19. verse 38 says, after these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus and Pilate gave him permission.

So he came and took away his body. Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about 75 pounds in weight.

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So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. Now in the place where he was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden, a new tomb in which no one had been laid.
So because of the Jewish day of preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there. So Nicodemus is involved in the burial of Jesus, a Jewish teacher, a member of the Sanhedrin according to John 7.
In John 3, he had come to Jesus at night, and Jesus is going to be taken off the cross, and he is going to be buried in a garden, in a man-made tomb out of a cave that belonged to Joseph of Arimathea, Arimathea, that had never been used before.
[24:54] Now, what you need to know is that the Jews did not embalm their dead like we do. Instead, what the Jews would do is they would take linen strips and cover the linen strips in spices and carefully, thoroughly wrap the body.

The purpose of the linen strips and the spices was to mask the smell and the odor of decay. And here is Joseph from Arimathea who is a follower, but the Bible tells us was a secret follower because he was afraid of the Jews.
And yet, the death of Jesus has changed everything, even about Joseph. Joseph. We heard last week the testimony of the centurion who said, surely this man was the son of God.
Today, we meet Joseph from Arimathea who, while one who was waiting for the kingdom of God, was a follower, a disciple of Jesus, but he was a secret follower because he lived in fear of what people would think of him and what the ramifications would be for him if his trust in Jesus became known.
And just as the centurion saw the way Jesus died and it impacted him, just as one of the thieves on the cross saw the way Jesus died and it converted him, so Joseph of Arimathea, seeing what has taken place, is now taken from being fearful and silent to becoming bold and public.
[26:45] This is actually a fascinating thing that takes place. This wealthy, highly respected man is going to lay down everything he has to identify himself as a follower of Jesus.

Jesus. You'll not read any more in your New Testament about Joseph of Arimathea. For all intents and purposes, his career is done.
He's going to dare to take the corpse of Jesus and hold it, getting the blood of Christ upon himself, identifying himself publicly as a follower, and saying that the tomb that Joseph has, he will give to Jesus.
And this man who up to this point had been a respected, wealthy, righteous man, yet living in fear, lest people find out he's a follower of Christ, now because of the death of Jesus and the way that Christ died, Joseph will say, I no longer care who knows, I want the world to see, I identify with Christ.
It's been said that there is really no such thing as secret discipleship because in time, either the secrecy will kill the discipleship, or the discipleship will kill the secrecy.
[28:28] In the end, it's true that our faith, while it's always personal, is not private, and please church, don't confuse the two.

Your faith, if you're a believer, it is personal, yes. You must have personal faith in Christ. Your spouse can't believe for you, your parents can't believe for you, your children can't repent for you, your faith must be personal, but do not confuse that which is personal with that which is private. There's a distinction here. Your faith is personal, it's between you and the Lord, but it was never meant to be private. We live in a day and an age where people really don't want to go public with their belief that the Bible is the true word of God, that it's the authoritative standard for our lives. People want enough of Jesus to be saved, they're willing to talk about the birth of Jesus at Christmastime because it's traditional and it's cultural, but if you ask people at Christmastime who aren't believers, why was Jesus born?
They do not want to talk about sin and repentance and judgment and hell. They want no part of that part of the story. And so people like to live in the shadows just a bit.
[30:07] Enough Christian ease to be able to feel like they can make it to heaven, not so much truly devoted followers of Christ to where it would cost them anything.

And people will hide behind this premise that well, my faith is private. Your faith is never meant to be private. Personal, yes. Private, no. That's part of what believers' baptism is about when we baptize.

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This is somebody standing in front of the church and saying, I am not ashamed to identify with Christ. I identify with His death and His burial and His resurrection.
I believe in Him. I'm trusting in Him. And as they say in the baptistry waters, I choose to follow Jesus all the days of my life. And you cannot follow Jesus privately.
Personal? Absolutely. Private? No. And it's so interesting because when we were looking at the sentencing of Jesus, Pilate faced the very same challenge that Joseph Arimathea faces.
[31:21] Here is the truth, and here is the problem, that the truth of who Jesus is may cost them their career, may cost them their life, and Pilate when faced with doing right or wrong by Jesus or salvaging his own career, chooses the world.

Which Jesus had already warned about in His ministry when He says, what good is it for a person to gain the whole world if they forfeit their very soul?
Faced with the exact same dilemma, Joseph Arimathea goes public and identifies himself as a follower of Christ.
Christ. This leads us to a third thing that we see at the very end of chapter 15 verses 46 and 47, that is the secure protection of the grave.
The secure protection of the grave. You might turn with me just to one more place so you can see this more clearly. Matthew 27 gives us a few details here.
[32:38] if you want to turn real quick to Matthew 27. Matthew 27, look at verse 59.

It says, 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.
And Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there sitting opposite the tomb. The next day, that is, after the day of preparation, the chief priest and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, Sir, we remember how that imposter 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.
[33:54] What you see about the burial of Jesus in Matthew 27 is you have a stone, you have soldiers, and you have a seal. a stone guarding the entrance of the tomb, soldiers protecting the area of the tomb, and a seal showing that this has the force and the authority of Rome with it.

Much like police tape in our day, if you go somewhere and you see police tape, you don't go near it because there's an authority of the government behind it saying you cannot trespass here.
In addition to that, you've got soldiers who are there guarding the tomb, so they want to make sure that nothing fraudulent can take place. And with that, the body of Jesus is now laid in the tomb.
The ladies will come back to the tomb early on Sunday morning. When they come back to the tomb on Sunday morning, they're not coming back expecting to joyfully celebrate an empty tomb.
They're coming back because they had taken those linen strips with spices and began to wrap the body, but they had to finish before sundown, before Sabbath would start.
[35:22] They're going to come back on Sunday morning early to finish the task of preparing the body of Jesus as it's going to be laying in the tomb as far as they know.

When the ladies go back to the tomb, they fully expect to see the body of Jesus because that's what you would see when someone has been placed in a tomb. To add to that, you've had a stone rolled in front of the tomb, the seal of protection put on the tomb with guards watching over the tomb.
And yet, as we know, all of this is just setting the stage for Jesus to be the first fruits of those who will be resurrected.
If you want some good news today, let me give it to you. 1 Corinthians 15, starting in verse 20, says, but in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.
For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive, but each in his own order.
[36:38] Christ, the first fruits, then at his coming, those who belong to Christ, then comes the end. And when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father, after destroying every rule and every authority and power.

If you are in Christ, you triumph. But that's what we know on this side of the empty tomb.

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For Joseph, for Nicodemus, for the ladies, they don't know what's going to happen.
They've heard what Jesus has said. They know that he has said he will rise again. But the death of Jesus was so real and so gruesome and his body now so lifeless.
verse 47, the very end of Mark 15 says, Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Joseph, saw where he was laid.
[38:02] He's been killed and he has been buried. But as I begin this morning with the words of Robert Lowry, low in the grave he lay, Jesus my Savior, waiting the coming day, Jesus my Lord.

And rightly can we have salvation and victory because up from the grave he rose. with a mighty triumph for his foes.
Our hope is in the Savior who died in our place, paid the price for our sin, was dead, buried, but praise be to God on the third day he rose again.
We have much to be thankful for. Lord for your word today we are so grateful for the promise of resurrection and the promise of heaven.
We give you thanks. Lord we pray today for any who may not know you as Savior that even today in the hearing of the gospel story and the singing of songs that have contained the message of salvation that this would be the day they would trust in you.
[39:36] we pray for you to do what only you can do. In Christ's name. Amen. Real quick before you are dismissed this morning if you have any questions or need help as far as knowing how to follow Christ or how to study your Bible or help knowing how to share the gospel with someone whatever your need may be we encourage you to take that connection card guest or member let us know your question or your need you can drop that in one of the giving boxes on your way out.

Make note inside of your bulletin you've got this handout with our Christmas schedule it's got two sides it'll help you navigate Sundays and Wednesdays as well as special services that will be taking place all throughout this month.
We have a number of things that happen at the Christmas season we want you to be aware of them so take this home put this on your refrigerator put in your calendar make sure you're aware of some of the special services and schedules that are taking place tonight evening service as we will be studying what does the Bible teach about the rapture of the church encourage me back and be a part of that and again next Sunday night Christmas around the tree next Sunday morning is a big day for us as we have our multi-generation choir leading us in Christmas music it's going to be a wonderful morning we want you to be a part of the life of the church use that insert to help you to know where to be and when to be there and to be fully engaged in our church all right hope you had a great Thanksgiving hope you have a very merry Christmas season love you church family God bless you're dismissed him just they're going to be a room for you to be a single house for you to be a happy yeah what's going to be a house for you and for you to be a heart for you and for you to be a room that's what's going to be for you you and for you you and and you and you and you and you and you and you and you and you and you and you and you and you and you and you and
Thank you.

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