

Our text this morning is in Matthew 27:54-61. Take the infallible Record and we will examine some of the death and burial prophecies that were fulfilled. “Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, ‘Truly this was the Son of God!’ And many women were there looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, among whom was Mary Magdalene, along with Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. And when it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given over to him. And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and went away. And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the grave.”

The Bible is the only religious document in the world containing prophecy. You might ask why. The answer is quite simple. It’s because the Bible is the only document that was written by God, who not only knows the future, but has ordained it. According to Ephesians 1:11, He “works all things after the counsel of His will.” God spoke through the prophet Isaiah in chapter 49:9-10 saying, “I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done.”

Satan has written many lies, lies such as the Koran, the Book of Mormon, the Apocryphal books of the Old and New Testaments. I think of the Watchtower Magazine that the Jehovah’s Witnesses insist is written by God; the Christian Scientists “Science and Health with Keys to the Scriptures” and so on. None of these lies contain prophecies that can be verified. Of course you wouldn’t want that, because if you had a prophecy and it did not come true, it would expose your document as a fraud.

Henry Morris has correctly said: “An especially powerful type of historical evidence (for the Bible and Christianity) is that of fulfilled prophecy—historical events written down long before they actually happen. Hundreds of prophecies in the Bible have been remarkably fulfilled exactly as foretold but often hundreds of years later. This type of evidence is unique to the Bible and can be explained only by divine inspiration. God, the Creator of time, is outside of time. He is the One who controls the future and, therefore, is the only One who knows the future. Bible prophecies are not vague and rambling, such as those of Nostradamus and other supposed extra-biblical prophets. Prophecies in the Bible deal with specific places, people, and events, and their fulfillments can be checked by reference to subsequent history.”

God has established a divine standard for prophecy. We know how a prophet is true or false by what happens to the prophecy that they claim is supposed to happen. We read about this all the way back in Deuteronomy 18:20-22, “But the prophet who shall speak a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he shall speak in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. You may say in your heart, ‘How shall we know the word which the **LORD** has not spoken?’ When a prophet speaks in the name of the **LORD**, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the **LORD** has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.”

We hold in our hands the Word of the Living God. There is perhaps no greater proof of the veracity and divine authority of Scripture than fulfilled prophecy. Now, while the scope of Bible prophecy can be diverse, much of its fulfillment is found in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, including His death, burial and resurrection. There is much more that will yet come that will also be fulfilled precisely and literally when He returns again. We look forward to those days. As we look at the fulfillment of prophecies contained in this text, we will see that they focus primarily around the incarnation of Christ with respect to His death, burial and resurrection.

Let's place ourselves in context. Last time we looked at six miraculous messages that have proceeded from the crucifixion, each revealing the might and malice of the cross. There were six supernatural events that manifested themselves in the infinite power of the Almighty. We saw His hatred of sin in these events. They were: darkness that covered the earth, alienation of the Father that the Son experienced on the cross, the miracle of Him yielding up His Spirit, the rending of the temple veil, the great earthquakes with the rocks that split and the tombs that were opened when selected saints were resurrected. Now, the corpse of Jesus hangs upon the tree, limp. He is gone.

In the midst of the midday darkness and the quaking of the earth, we read in verse 54, "the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'" Of course this should have been the response of everyone on that day. But for many reasons God only knows, His regenerating mercies were limited primarily to the hearts of His executioners. No doubt there were others who came to Christ then that were not mentioned, but I find it fascinating that here is an answer to Jesus' prayer recorded in Luke 23:34 when He hung upon the cross. He said "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

You must remember that these pagan soldiers were probably part of the garden arrest, when the soldiers came to arrest Jesus and they were flattened on their backs when they asked who Jesus was. He said "I AM" and gave the covenant name of God and the power of that name flattened them. These servants of Rome also knew of Jesus' claims to be the Son of God, the King of the Jews. They knew He was a miracle worker, everyone knew that. Virtually all of the disease in Palestine had been healed. They knew He had raised the dead and that He was no threat to Rome. He had no army, He carried no sword. They also knew He had exposed the hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders. They were also aware of Pilate's repeated claim that Jesus was innocent. There's a good likelihood they were there when the report came from Pilate's wife warning him not to arrest this man and to leave Him alone. Certainly they were witnesses to Jesus' righteousness as He surrendered Himself to the Father on the cross. I'm sure they were bewildered by the Jewish cries for His crucifixion.

Now the world is dark. I would imagine they have probably lit some torches. The earth is quaking. Rocks have split, no doubt that has given off a loud and thunderous roar in places. They also see other observers gathering around. According to Luke 23:28 it says, "And all the multitudes who came together for this spectacle, when they observed what had happened, began to return, beating their breasts." No doubt the multitudes were alarmed. Now maybe they have second thoughts with all of the events, the darkness and earthquake. Maybe they are filled with guilt. God only knows how many of them turned to Christ in saving faith. I believe probably quite a few.

According to Acts 2:36-41 we read that Peter was preaching to them, and there it says that “God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified. Many were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’ And Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.’” According to verse 41 of that text it says that 3,000 souls were saved that day. So there on that hill of atonement a group of hardened Roman soldiers became soldiers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Isn’t that an amazing thought?

In verse 55 we read that, “many women were there looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, among whom was Mary Magdalene, along with Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.” Mary Magdalene was from Magdala, on the western shore of Galilee. She was identified as such because she was a single lady. Interestingly enough in Luke 8:2-3 we have a description of her as one of several women that were there. That text says she was one “who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out.” How often I have seen those who have been saved from the greatest distress become, very often, the most devoted to the Savior.

Also Mary the mother of James and Joseph was there. James was one of the apostles, the son of Alphaeus. Also the mother of the sons of Zebedee, the mother of James and John, the ones who Jesus called the “Sons of the thunder.” I have to pause here to say, praise God for devoted women, loyal to the end. Keep in mind that all of the disciples now were cowering in fear some place in a remote area of Jerusalem, afraid for their lives. But not these precious servants of the Lord. They stood by the Savior to the very bitter end. The characteristics of these women qualify them for support in the church when they become widows. If we were to look at 1 Timothy 5:10 we read that the women that qualify for church support would be those who have a “reputation for good works, have brought up their children, have shown hospitality to strangers, washed the saints feet, assisted those in distress and devoted herself to every good work.” Certainly this describes these dear ladies.

I have to say that I praise God for women like this that we have here at Calvary Bible Church. We have a number of them. There is no more demanding job on earth than being a mother who raises her children at home. That is a demanding, 24/7 job. And yet so many of you still find time and strength to minister to others. And men we need to applaud the sacrificial devotion of godly women.

It’s fascinating that these three women were not only eyewitnesses to the crucifixion, along with Mary the mother of Jesus (John 19:26) but afterward they came to prepare the body and they were the ones that were there when the Lord was resurrected. In fact, He appeared first to two of these women.

John MacArthur offers another important observation that I thought was worth mentioning to you. He said, “The first of the three women Matthew mentions was not married, the second was identified by her children, and the third by her husband. The implication seems to be that divine dignity is bestowed on all categories of womanhood. God has a marvelous and blessed role for women He has gifted with singleness, for women who are faithful mothers, and for women who are faithful wives. And perhaps in order not to suggest a secondary rank for the single woman or for the formerly wicked woman, Mary Magdalene is here named first.”

Here we see the marvelous power of the cross and a testimony of the saving grace of the One who hung upon it. This brings us to the very heart of the text, as we behold the staggering events surrounding the death and burial of the Lord Jesus Christ: events which perfectly fulfill five prophecies. We see this delineated here beginning in verse 57-61. Before we look at it closely, may I say that not only is it staggering to think that God knew in His omniscience precisely what would happen, but it is even more staggering to think that somehow He can orchestrate every minute variable in the universe over thousands of years to accomplish His predetermined plan. That is absolutely inconceivable. And yet, we see it happening over and over again in Scripture.

Think with me for a moment of the infinite number of attitudes and actions in the minds and wills of men and demons that God must superintend to bring to fruition what He has decreed. Think about that. We know this as Christians, according to Philippians 2:13, it says that “it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.” In fact in Jeremiah 10:23 we read that “I know, O **LORD**, that a man’s way is not in himself; nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps.” By implication, it is God that is at work within us. This is an inscrutable mystery, as are all of the doctrines that we find in Scripture. He gives to each of us the freedom to exercise our wills and make choices. And yet He meticulously arranges them into the perfect harmony of His sovereign will.

God says in Isaiah 42:16, “I will lead the blind by a way they do not know; In paths they do not know I will guide them.” In Proverbs 16:9, “The mind of man plans his way, but the **LORD** directs his steps.” And in Proverbs 19:21, “Many are the plans in a man’s heart, but the counsel of the **LORD**, it will stand.” Indeed the miracle of divine providence is beyond our comprehension. All we can do is stand in awe and humility before our sovereign God. Here in Matthew’s account of Jesus’ death and burial we see divine providence at work.

The first fulfilled prophecy God superintended was regarding the grave in which Jesus was buried. Notice in verse 57, “And when it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus.” This is the fulfillment of a prophecy given some 700+ years before it happened, in the book of Isaiah. In Isaiah 53 there are numerous predictions concerning the Lamb that was led to slaughter, including a prediction concerning the burial place of the Lord Jesus Christ. In verse 9 there we read that “His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death.”

You must understand, normally the bodies of criminals in Jesus’ day would be dumped in a common grave, open to the dogs and vultures in order to further desecrate the corpse. Sometimes they would be dumped into a smoldering rubbish hole of the Hinnom Valley, also called Gehenna, just outside Jerusalem. This would have been “the grave assigned to Him with wicked men” as Isaiah 53:9 says. But God had other plans. Instead, He was to be buried by a rich man, and that was Joseph of Arimathea.

Remember, Joseph was part of the Sanhedrin. According to Mark 15:43 he was “a prominent member of the Council.” But he was not like his wicked counterparts. He was, according to Luke 23:50-51, a “good and righteous man (he had not consented to their plan and action)...who was waiting for the kingdom of God.” In Matthew 27:57 it says that he had “become a disciple of Jesus.” Literally, he had become a learner that sat at Jesus’ feet. However, he was afraid of his Jewish colleagues and his countrymen, and so he kept his devotion to Jesus secret. We read about that in John 19:38.

But now he conquers his fear and goes to Pilate and asks for the body of Jesus, his Messiah. We read at the end of verse 58, “Then Pilate ordered it to be given over to him. And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and went away.”

As we look closely at this text and other Gospel accounts, we see a second prophecy fulfilled, concerning the three days that He was in the grave. In Matthew 12:40 Jesus had predicted “just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” Indeed, just as Jesus had promised, He was in the grave three days. He was placed in the grave on “the day of preparation” of the Passover, according to John 19:31, which would have been Friday, or the first day that He was in the grave.

You must understand that a day here does not necessarily mean three twenty-four-hour periods of time. We might, for example, say that we took a three-day trip. But in fact, we might have left on Friday afternoon at 5:00 P.M., were gone all day Saturday, and came back Sunday morning at 9:00 A.M. That would not mean that we were gone three full days. Jesus’ predictions included only a portion of the first day and a portion of the third day, not the full twenty-four hour period. If we insist on three twenty-four-hour periods, then Jesus would have had to have been buried on Wednesday, be in the ground all day Thursday, all day Friday, and all day Saturday, and then risen on Sunday. That would be part of five days. But such a view is in contradiction to the Gospels. In Mark 15:42 it’s clearly stated that the crucifixion was on Friday, “the day before the Sabbath.” And the resurrection, according to Mark 16:2, was sometime before dawn on Sunday, “the first day of the week.” So Jesus was in the grave three days as He promised.

A third fulfillment of prophecy concerning His death and burial is that of no bone being broken in His body. This prophecy is found in Psalm 34:20. A Psalm referring to the coming of Messiah. It says, “He keeps all his bones, not one of them is broken.” This is in keeping with the preparations of the Passover lamb that foreshadowed the Lamb of God. We read about that in Exodus 12:46 where they were “not to break any bone of” that Passover lamb.

In order to understand this, we have to look at something fascinating to get the context here. According to the Mosaic law, in Deuteronomy 21:23, we read that the corpse of a criminal could hang on a tree all day long as a public reminder of the consequences of sin, but it had to be removed before sunset. That was the law. It had to be buried that same day. So in this case, the body could hang on the tree all day long Friday, but it had to be buried before 6:00 on Friday, because at 6:00 Shabbat, or the Sabbath, would begin. It was important not to defile the Sabbath, so Jesus had to be removed, according to Matthew 27:57, “when it was evening.” That would have been a reference to that interval of time between 3:00 and 6:00 P.M. The Romans would not allow anyone to be removed from a cross unless they were dead. That was also the law. Jesus had only been on the cross since 9:00 A.M. that morning, so thinking that He’s probably not dead, because the victims would sometimes linger on for several days, the Jews asked Pilate to break the legs of the three men to insure that they were dead. They have to remove the bodies before Shabbat, especially before the high and holy day, the Passover.

Normally they would take a large mallet and shatter the bones in the victim's legs. The bones could no longer support the person, and the excruciating pain of the legs being broken combined with their inability to support themselves would cause them to quickly suffocate and die. Then they would take a spear and pierce the heart to make certain the victim was dead. So Pilate, being afraid of the Jews for many reasons we learned of earlier, agreed. But this would make it appear, if he was going to give the body to the soldiers and allow them to break His legs, that the Messianic prophecy of Psalm 34:20 would be in jeopardy. It says there that the bones weren't supposed to be broken. Likewise, if Jesus was the Passover Lamb, according to Exodus 12:46, the bone was not supposed to be broken. All of this could really upset the prophetic apple cart.

We find it very interesting what happens. We read this in John 19:31-37, where we see the amazing fulfillment. We see God's providence once again in action. "The Jews therefore, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. The soldiers therefore came, and broke the legs of the first man, and of the other man who was crucified with Him; but coming to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs; but one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately there came out blood and water. And he who has seen has borne witness, and his witness is true and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe. For these things came to pass, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, 'Not a bone of Him shall be broken.' And again another Scripture says, 'They shall look on Him whom they have pierced.'" There we have another amazing fulfillment of prophecy with respect to not one single bone of the Passover Lamb being broken.

We see a fourth prophecy with respect to the piercing spear into the Savior's side. It would go up into His heart. We see this in John 19:34, "one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately there came out blood and water." In verse 37, "They shall look on Him whom they have pierced." This is following verse 36 "that the Scripture might be fulfilled." Of course verse 37 is the prophecy in Zechariah 12:10 that was fulfilled.

God has promised in Zechariah 12, and other passages, that when Christ returns Israel will finally recognize their Messiah and with the deep remorse of genuine contrition, they will mourn over the One whom their forefathers pierced. That text reads as follows: "And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him, like the bitter weeping over a first-born."

Here is what is fascinating about all of this, truly a manifestation of divine providence in action. Why would the soldier pierce the heart of Jesus with a spear when, according to John 19:33, they realized that Jesus was already dead? That's why they didn't break His legs. I'm certain that the soldier knew nothing of the Old Testament prophecy concerning the piercing of the Savior, so why would he do this? The answer is simply this: in the providence of God, he unwittingly chose to do that which would fulfill a divine promise, as well as a divine purpose, one that was spoken over 500 years ago by the prophet Zechariah.

Why would this be important? Why would God do this? Quite simply, to silence the mouths of critics as well as to cause the saints to sing. When we look at these fulfilled prophecies, it causes us to rejoice

within our hearts, to understand once again that all God has said is true, and all that He has promised is going to come to pass. I don't have to worry at night thinking that I serve a God that might not be able to pull off the things that He has promised. I can rest in absolute confidence, and so too could those precious saints in that first century who began to understand the fulfillment of these great prophecies in those days of persecution and suffering.

Isn't it wonderful to know that God is using each of us to accomplish His sovereign purposes? Again, Philippians 2:13, "For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." And Proverbs 16:9, "The mind of a man plans his way, but the **LORD** directs his steps." The soldier had no idea that his choice to pierce Jesus' side and go up into His heart with a spear, something that wasn't necessary to do, was a choice he made that was supernaturally superintended by a sovereign God that he may not have even known. As a footnote, the scar of that piercing, along with the nail scars, remain in Jesus' resurrected body. In fact, in John 20:27 we read about Thomas. You will recall he placed his hand in that very wound.

Here we also see a fifth example of divine providence, as God orchestrates the events of His universe to accomplish His prophetic predictions and glorify Himself. We see this in what I would call the Savior's broken heart. Psalm 69 was a prayer of David as he pours out his heart in anguish over the relentless slander and ridicule he was experiencing. We also know that the Holy Spirit of God applied this psalm to the suffering and shame of the Savior through various New Testament writers. It is a heartrending psalm that describes the pain of being hated by those you love, and mocked and ridiculed by your enemies. All through that psalm we see clear references to the pathos of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Psalm 69:20 it says, "Reproach has broken my heart and I am so sick. And I looked for sympathy, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none."

"Reproach has broken my heart." I don't want to be dogmatic here, but it would appear that this is precisely what happened to Jesus on the cross. There have been documented cases of a broken heart, when a heart literally bursts when one experiences severe emotional and physical pain and trauma. When this rare phenomenon occurs, medical experts tell us that the pericardium sack around the heart fills with blood and lymphatic fluid, and therefore, when that spear went up and pierced the heart, John 19:34 says "and immediately there came out blood and water." Perhaps we see another prophecy fulfilled. Certainly it is another reminder of the cost of our redemption, a ransom that was paid in full by the blood of the Lamb that died in our stead.

Here we have seen four, possibly even five, events surrounding the burial of Jesus that fulfill Bible prophecy. We serve a God who not only knows the future but can control it, who can control everything. This is why ours is a "blessed hope" as Titus 2:13 says. We have a blessed hope. All that God has promised about His second coming, and our future enjoyment of Him, all of these things are a blessing to us. It brings joy and excitement to the heart of the redeemed, because ours is a certain hope. As we look around us we see people filled with self-righteousness, hypocrisy, confusion, chaos. We see violence, wars, ignorance, idolatry, and frankly a progressive deterioration of everything that is sacred. We know, according to Scripture, the worst is yet to come.

When we look at the prophetic Word, we find comfort and encouragement. We know that everything is in God's control, right on schedule, none of this is catching Him by surprise. Our salvation, therefore, is sure. I believe that it is soon. In fact, the apostle Paul comforted the Thessalonian believers when he

explained the future and cleared up some confusion about the rapture of the church in 1 Thessalonians 4:18. The text says, “Therefore encourage each other with these words.” Whenever I come to the prophetic Word I find great encouragement in them.

So while the inconceivable suffering and shame of the Savior is almost unbearable to think about, we nevertheless find comfort in knowing that the sweet providence of God was at work then as it is now, precisely orchestrating our redemption. Indeed, fulfilled prophecy gives reassurance of our blessed hope. According to 1 Corinthians 15:58, these glorious promises compel us to “stand firm...be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.” Aren’t those wonderful words? Our toil is not in vain. We’re not just spinning our wheels or wasting time. We have not bought into some massive lie. What God has promised He will fulfill.

So Joseph “gathered up courage” according to Mark 15:43, “and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him.” Now Joseph’s true devotion to Jesus is going to be known to all of his colleagues, and certainly he has sealed his fate with them. The ridicule and rejection will now begin. I think of Paul’s words to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:12-13, “Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. But evil men and imposters will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”

Now since Joseph was a member of the Sanhedrin, Pilate probably thought that he was acting on their behalf, and so he was all too happy to get that body off the tree. He didn’t want to hear any more fussing from the Jews about a body hanging on the tree on the Sabbath. He certainly didn’t want to offend them, so having no idea what Joseph was really up to, he gives him the body. In fact, Mark 15:44-45, “Pilate wondered if He was dead by this time, and summoning the centurion, he questioned him as to whether He was already dead. And ascertaining this from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph.” So there again, we see the long arm of divine providence working in the minds and wills of men.

In verse 59-60 we read that “Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and went away.” Such tender care indicates to me that Joseph was not thinking about a resurrection. If he had believed in a resurrection or was thinking about that, he would not have gone to such great lengths in the interment of our Lord. But he obviously loved Jesus.

I also think it’s very exciting to note that John’s Gospel reveals to us that another member of the Sanhedrin joined Joseph in the care of Jesus’ body. We read that in John 19:39-40: “Nicodemus, who had first come to Him by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen wrappings 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 yet been laid. Therefore because of the Jewish day of preparation, since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.” What a sacred time of fellowship that must have been, for those two Jewish leaders as they cared for the body of their Messiah. And there, dear friends, our sins were buried with Him.

The great Puritan John Trapp of the seventeenth century wrote, “He was buried in Calvary, to note that he died for the condemned; and in a garden, to expiate that first sin committed in the garden; and in

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another man's sepulcher, to note that he died for other men's sins." So Joseph inter the Savior in a new tomb made for his family, "and he rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and went away. And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the grave." What a picture of love and sadness, to think that the tears rolling down their faces would soon change to tears of joy when they found their Savior resurrected on that Lord's day morn.

Spurgeon has poignantly written a poem about that scene. He says:

Rest glorious Son of God; Thy work is done,  
And all Thy burdens borne.  
Rest on that stone till the third sun has brought,  
Thine everlasting morn.

How calmly in that tomb Thou liest now,  
Thy rest how still and deep!  
O'er Thee in love the Father rests:  
He gives to His beloved sleep.

On Bethel pillow now Thy head is laid,  
In Joseph's rock-hewn cell.  
Thy watchers are the angels of Thy God.  
They guard Thy slumbers well.

One of the most difficult jobs of a pastor is preaching the funerals of those that we love. I watch the family grovel in the very bottom of the sorrowful abyss when they watch the casket lid being closed and lowered into the grave, and when those first shovels full of dirt begin to pile up. But friends, knowing that our Savior dwelt in such a resting place, and knowing that He did not stay in that resting place, somehow robs that age old haunting of all of its terror. There is no finality of the grave for the Christian. Because of Jesus' death, that king of all terrors holds no more fear. We have been released from its grip and we can look forward to dying, knowing that when we do we enter into the presence of the Lord. As Paul said in Philippians 1:21, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." And 1 Corinthians 15:55, "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"

So now the Lord is at rest, but not His enemies, as we will see in subsequent days. The fears and the malice of the wicked never rest. But what joy is ours to know that it is only this old tabernacle that ends up in that grave. Our soul is with the Lord. We have been buried with our Master and like Him, we will be resurrected. May Christians ponder these magnificent truths and rejoice in them with inexpressible joy.

For those of you who do not know Christ, I pray that you will shiver with fear until you repent and bow your knee to the Savior, lest someday you see Him not as your Savior but as your Judge. May you repent of your sins and cry out for His mercy while there is still time.

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