

**Luke 23:44-56**  
**October 11, 2020**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Q: As a Christian, I think we can answer what it means to “live well” for Christ. But have you ever given thought to what it means to “die well?” From a Christian perspective, what do you think that looks like? [Let people engage]

**Transition:** I have been by the side of family members who were dying, but they were in a state of unconsciousness, so I found myself being the one saying final words to them. I reminded Tinsley, praying that the Lord would open his ears, “You belong to Jesus.” I remember singing hymns to my Dad, praying that the Lord would open his ears. I remember being in the hospital room with Mama Helen, her two kids, Tinsley and Aunt Kathryn, and my mother. I got to pray out loud to give Mama Helen permission to go, and that there was no greater joy than to see her children “walking in the light.” Thus, they were going to be okay.

But for some of you, you watched a terminal illness eventually take the life of your loved one. I’m betting your loved one had opportunities to express their “last words.” I bet you watched what they modeled to you as they died with as much grace as possible.

As we read today’s text where Jesus has already been nailed to the cross, he won’t have an “individualized” message to His mother, or to His disciples. He models something different. He’s not focused on those who will be left behind. Instead, He’s focused squarely on His Father. Let’s read and see how the Spirit leads us in today’s Scripture.

**BOOK:**

**Jesus’ Death**

<sup>44</sup> It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, <sup>45</sup> for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. <sup>46</sup> Jesus called out with a loud voice, “**Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.**” (See Ps 31:5) When he had said this, he breathed his last.

<sup>47</sup> The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, “Surely this was a righteous man.” <sup>48</sup> When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. <sup>49</sup> But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

**Jesus’ Burial**

<sup>50</sup> Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man, <sup>51</sup> who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea and he was waiting for the kingdom of God. <sup>52</sup> Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus’ body. <sup>53</sup> Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid. <sup>54</sup> It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin.

<sup>55</sup> The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. <sup>56</sup> Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.

**Process Observations/Questions:**

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

**LOOK:**

Jesus' final words from the cross, a quotation from Psalm 31:5, expressed his faith, his relationship to God, and his insistence that death and the cross did not represent the last word. Death led only to paradise, to protection in God's hands, to the kingdom. If death led Jesus safely into God's hands, does it not do the same for all who trust in Jesus?

**Close in Prayer**

**Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 276-277). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

**Jesus and the Father (Luke 23:44–49)**

We must keep in mind that what our Lord accomplished on the cross was an eternal transaction that involved Him and the Father. He did not die as a martyr who had failed in a lost cause. Nor was He only an example for people to follow. Isaiah 53 makes it clear that Jesus did not die for His own sins, because He had none; He died for our sins. He made His soul an offering for sin (Isa. 53:4–6, 10–12).

The three hours of darkness was a miracle. It was not an eclipse, because that would have been impossible during the Passover season when there is a full moon. It was a God-sent darkness that shrouded the cross as the Son of God was made sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21). It was as though all nature was sympathizing with the Creator as He suffered and died. When Israel was in Egypt, three days of darkness preceded the first Passover (Ex. 10:21ff). When Jesus was on the cross, three hours of darkness preceded the death of God's Lamb for the sins of the world (John 1:29).

Both Matthew 27:45–46 and Mark 15:33–34 record our Lord's cry at the close of the darkness, a Hebrew quotation from Psalm 22:1, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" What this abandonment was and how Jesus felt it are not explained to us, but certainly it involves the fact that He became sin for us.

Our Lord cried with a loud voice, "It is finished!" (John 19:30) a declaration of victory. He had finished the work the Father gave Him to do (John 17:4). The work of redemption was completed, the types and prophecies were fulfilled (Heb. 9:24ff), and the Savior could now rest.

He then addressed His Father in the final statement from the cross, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit" (Ps. 31:5). This was actually a bedtime prayer used by Jewish children, and it tells us how our Lord died: confidently, willingly (John 10:17–18), and victoriously. Those who know Jesus as their Savior may die with the same confidence and assurance (2 Cor. 5:1–8; Phil. 1:20–23).

When our Lord released His spirit, the veil of the temple was torn in two "from the top to the bottom" (Mark 15:38). This miracle announced to the priests and people that the way into God's presence was open for all who would come to Him by faith through Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:1–10:25). No more do sinners need earthly temples, altars, sacrifices, or priests, for all had now been fulfilled in the finished work of the Son of God.

Luke recorded three responses to the events of the last moments of Christ's death. The centurion who was in charge of the execution testified, "Certainly this was a righteous [innocent] man, the Son of God" (Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47). He was greatly impressed by the darkness, the earthquake (Matt. 27:54), and certainly the way Jesus suffered and died. He must have been shocked when Jesus shouted and then instantly died, for victims of crucifixion often lingered for days and did not have the strength to speak.

The people who came to "see the spectacle" began to drift away one by one, some of them beating their breasts as they felt their guilt (Luke 18:13). Were these people believers? Probably not. They were spectators who were attracted to the execution, but certainly they saw and heard enough to convict them of their own sins.

Finally, our Lord's friends were there, including the women who followed Jesus (Luke 8:1–3; 24:22). It is significant that the women were the last at the cross and the first at the tomb on Easter morning.

### **Jesus and Joseph of Arimathea (Luke 23:50–56)**

Joseph and his friend Nicodemus (John 19:38–42) were both members of the Jewish council, but they had not been present to vote against Jesus. Mark 14:64 states that the whole council condemned Him, and that could not have happened if Joseph and Nicodemus had been there.

It is likely that Joseph and Nicodemus had learned from the Old Testament Scriptures how Jesus would die, so they agreed to take care of His burial. The new tomb was likely Joseph's, prepared in a garden near Golgotha but not for himself; it was for Jesus. No rich man would prepare his own burial place so near a place of execution and so far from his own home. The two men could well have been hiding in the tomb while Jesus was on the cross, waiting for that moment when He would yield up His life. They would have the spices and the winding sheets all prepared, for they would probably not be able to go shopping for these items on Passover.

When Jesus died, Joseph immediately went to Pilate for permission to have the body, and Nicodemus stayed at Calvary to keep watch. They tenderly took Jesus from the cross, quickly carried Him to the garden, washed the body, and wrapped it with the spices. It was a temporary burial; they would return after the Sabbath to do the job properly. When they laid Jesus into the new tomb, they fulfilled Isaiah 53:9, and they kept the Romans from throwing His body on the garbage dump outside the city. Condemned criminals lost the right to proper burial, but God saw to it that His Son's body was buried with dignity and love.

It was important that the body be buried properly, for God would raise Jesus from the dead. If there were any doubt about His death or burial, that could affect the message and the ministry of the Gospel (1 Cor. 15:1–8).

When after six days God finished the work of the “old Creation,” He rested (Gen. 2:1–3). After six hours, our Lord finished the work of the “new Creation” (2 Cor. 5:17), and He rested on the Sabbath in Joseph's tomb.

But that was not the end of the story.

He would rise again!

**Martin, J. A. (1985). Isaiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 262-263)**

23:44–49. Luke noted four things that occurred at the time Jesus died. First, two symbolic events took place while Jesus was on the cross. **Darkness came over the whole land** for three hours, from **the sixth hour** (noon) **until the ninth hour** (3:00 P.M.). Jesus had already told those who arrested Him that “this is your hour—when darkness reigns” (22:53). Darkness was reigning because of His crucifixion. The other symbolic event was the tearing **in two of the curtain of the temple**, which separated the holy of holies from the rest of the temple. The curtain divided people from the place where God had localized His presence. The tearing from top to bottom (Matt. 27:51) symbolized the fact that now, because of Jesus' death, people had freer access to God as they no longer had to go through the sacrificial system (cf. Rom. 5:2; Eph. 2:18; 3:12). Jesus was the only Sacrifice needed to enable people to have a proper relationship with God.

Second, Luke noted that Jesus' death occurred because He willed it. Breathing **His last** (Luke 23:46), He voluntarily gave up His life (John 10:15, 17–18).

Third, even a Roman **centurion** noted that Jesus **was a righteous Man**, that is, not guilty (Luke 23:47). He too **praised God**, as did many others in Luke's Gospel.

Fourth, **the people** who witnessed His death mourned (vv. 48–49).

6. THE BURIAL OF JESUS (23:50–56) (Matt. 27:57–61; Mark 15:42–47; John 19:38–42).

23:50–56. All four Gospel writers presented details about Jesus' burial in order to demonstrate that Jesus was truly dead. All the preparations for His burial would have been unnecessary if Jesus had not really died. The death of the Messiah was needed or there could not have been the Resurrection.

Interestingly whereas **the council** had demanded Jesus' death one **member ... Joseph**, disagreed. **Waiting for the kingdom of God**, he believed that Jesus is the Messiah. He was a secret disciple of Jesus (Matt. 27:57; John 19:38). Out of love for Jesus, he buried Him in his own **tomb** (Matt. 27:60).

Jesus died on the **Preparation Day** (which most assume was Friday) before **the Sabbath**.

**Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (pp. 1561-1563). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.**

**23:44–45** Luke was not asserting that a solar eclipse took place (a physical impossibility at Passover, which occurs during a full moon). The word he used (Gk *ekleipo*) merely means the sun was obscured. The physical cause of the darkness may have been thick clouds or a sandstorm, but the Gospel writers were interested in the phenomenon not for its physical but for its theological meaning. Similarly, darkness does not cover the entire “world” but the “whole land,” that is, of Judea or of the region of Jerusalem (Gk *ge* can mean “earth” or “land”).

**23:46** The final words of Jesus are recorded differently in the Gospels. The saying recorded at Mk 15:34 and Mt 27:46 (“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”) is certainly historical, since the early church would not invent such a saying for Jesus (cp. note on Mt 27:46). The saying recorded by Lk (“Father, into Your hands I entrust My spirit”) should also be taken as historical, since it finds echoes in Mt 27:50 and Jn 19:30. John's record of the words, “It is finished!” seems to precede this statement. Thus, Jesus apparently first gave the cry of dereliction. Later, immediately before dying, He cried aloud, “It is finished!” and committed His spirit to God.

**23:47** Luke recorded the centurion's words differently than Matthew and Mark, both of whom had him declare Jesus to be “God's Son.” The centurion may have said both things. More likely, Luke was summarizing the centurion's point, since the term he used (Gk *dikaios*, “righteous, innocent”) occurs frequently in Luke's writings, and the motif of Jesus as an innocent sufferer is common in Lk and Ac. Historically, though the centurion may have used Son of God language, it probably expressed his conviction that Jesus truly was a King and thus innocent of the charges upon which He was crucified, see Mk 15:39.

**Butler, T. C. (2000). *Luke* (Vol. 3, pp. 396–402). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.**

**23:44–45.** Darkness, the symbol of Satan's power, ruled the land for three hours. The time reckoning apparently places the beginning of this darkness at the most unlikely of times: high

noon. This makes clear Jesus' statement to the Jewish leaders that they had an hour, an hour when darkness rules the earth (22:53). The Jewish rulers were instruments of the powers of darkness in bringing Jesus' death. With the death of Jesus, the light of the world was gone. The times of the last days were inaugurated (see Isa. 13:9–10; 50:2–3; Jer. 15:6–9; Lam. 3:1–2; Amos 5:8, 20; 8:9; Joel 2:2, 10, 31; 3:15; Zeph. 1:15). Death reigns in the world. Only an act of God can bring new hope. Only resurrection can bring new life into the darkness.

Darkness did not cover just the cross or Jerusalem. It encompassed **the whole land**, or perhaps better translated, the whole earth. The death of Jesus has universal implications. A world that kills Jesus must live in darkness. The sun paid its homage to Christ. When God's Son dies, the earth's sun cannot shine. It must hide its face in mourning and darkness. A sinful world cannot count on the guarantee of sunlight, for God controls all the rules and laws of nature. A world that rejects God's Son must expect signs that God has rejected the sinful world.

God rejected not only the sinful world; he also rejected the sinful religious practices of that world. His people who claimed to follow his law in his house had become instruments of darkness. At the moment Jesus died, God destroyed their entire religious system. No longer could religious leaders control the system of atonement. No longer could scribes and students of the law hold a reign of terror over the common people, dictating to them what was acceptable to God and what was not. No longer could priests claim to be the only ones with access to God. God himself tore the veil that separated the holy of holies from the rest of the worship place. God opened his presence to the common worshiper. Every believer could now go straight to God with prayers for forgiveness and atonement. As the thief pleaded directly to Jesus, so every person could now go directly to God. No religious system separated them from contact with the heavenly Father.

**23:46.** Jesus' final words from the cross, a quotation from Psalm 31:5, expressed his faith, his relationship to God, and his insistence that death and the cross did not represent the last word. Death led only to paradise, to protection in God's hands, to the kingdom. If death led Jesus safely into God's hands, does it not do the same for all who trust in Jesus? Death becomes nothing more than a barrier, like the temple curtain, to be torn in two to allow immediate and permanent access to the Father. But death is real. This is not some fakery trying to fool the public into believing Jesus really died when he did not. Jesus breathed his last. He died. Life left his body. As with every other corpse, it was time for burial.

**23:47.** Pilate's representative at the crucifixion, the commander of the Roman soldiers, silently viewed the entire proceedings. He saw the Jews mocking. He saw the soldiers gambling and teasing Jesus with wine that would not help his situation. He heard the thieves arguing over the identity and power of this man on the center cross. He heard Jesus' promise to the thief and his commitment of himself into the Father's hands. He knew that Pilate, his commander, had approved the crucifixion, but he did not. An innocent victim had suffered capital punishment. The "righteous" Jesus can be described in terms used for many of Luke's heroes: Elizabeth and Zechariah (1:6), Simeon (2:25), and Joseph of Arimathea (23:50). He also joined the class to which the Jewish leaders claimed to belong, thus denying their need for repentance and excluding themselves from Jesus' ministry (5:32; cf. 15:7; 18:9; 20:20). It is the righteous who have wisdom (1:17) and who will be rewarded at the resurrection (14:14). Admitting that Jesus is righteous is more than a declarative statement. It is a form of praise, of worship, for it brings glory and honor to God. This is what proper response to Jesus always brings (2:20; 5:25–26; 7:16; 13:13; 17:15; 18:43; cf. 24:53).

**23:48.** The Jewish leaders and Pilate had drawn the crowds into the decision on Jesus' death. Ultimately, they had cried for his crucifixion (vv. 18–24). Now the people could survey all that happened. They left the scene mourning for the one whose crucifixion they had demanded. How far can we go in interpreting this symbol of grief? Did they simply mourn for the one who suffered so grievously, or did they grieve over their own actions and the injustice they had brought about? Or did they truly mourn over and repent of the sins they had committed in killing Jesus? Whatever the full impact of their reaction, they went away never to be heard of again in Luke.

**23:49.** The thieves, the centurion, the people, and finally the friends responded to Jesus' death. They simply stood at a distance, observing all that happened. Later, they would serve as Luke's sources. They would join the Pentecost group in proclaiming the message of resurrection hope. They would spread over the world as messengers of Christ. Their time for proclamation would come. For the moment, they were content with witnessing everything that happened and trying to understand it.

### **C. The Glory Is Buried (23:50–56)**

**SUPPORTING IDEA:** *Jesus, who revealed God's glory, actually died and was buried in the same manner as all dead people.*

**23:50.** Out of nowhere a new character appears in Luke's narrative. Each of the four Gospels focuses briefly on this man. Luke not only joins him with the righteous heroes described above (v. 47), but also calls him "good." This is the only time Luke uses this adjective for a specific person. He describes the good person as a man whose heart stores up good things and activates them at the right moment (6:45). The good man perseveres in God's Word (8:15). He is trustworthy and uses his master's goods in a worthwhile way (19:17). Ultimately, Jesus, the "Good Teacher," must point to God as the only one who is good (18:18–19).

Such high praise is unexpected for any man, but especially for this one. He was no normal private individual. He was a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, the ruling council. He was a part of the court that condemned Jesus and took him to Pilate for the death penalty. Could a man who voted to crucify now desire to pay homage to the dead?

**23:51.** Luke strikes down the previous assumption. The Sanhedrin was not unanimous in its decision about Jesus (cf. 22:66–23:1). At least one man voted against taking Jesus to Pilate for crucifixion. Joseph voted against his council members. Why? Because he had focused his life on God and the kingdom God had promised (cf. 2:25, 38). He was the kingdom at work in the actions of Jesus. He recognized that the one crucified as king of the Jews truly was the anointed one, the king. Joseph's hometown of Arimathea must have been near Jerusalem, but the exact location is unknown.

**23:52.** Joseph went courageously to Pilate. The last time Jews went to Pilate, they sought to kill Jesus. Joseph wanted to bury him. But Romans controlled the crucifixion, so Roman officials controlled the body and its disposal. They could have been reluctant to release the body of a person who was charged with treason. Could he become the martyr figure that inspired others to rebellion? Joseph made the situation easier. He was not a known follower of Jesus. Rather, he belonged to the group that had demanded his death. Events at the cross seemed to dispel any fears of mob-action. Not a single voice of protest was raised there by his followers or the people at large. So Pilate gave the body to Joseph.

**23:53.** Joseph followed the common customs of the day in preparing the body for burial. He placed it in a tomb that had never been used. In Jewish society this was important. It meant Jesus

did not share a tomb with generations of Joseph's ancestors, buried on rock ledges in a cave-like tomb. It meant that Jesus' tomb had not been used previously and then emptied of its contents because a new generation needed it. Joseph had an unusual tomb, one reserved strictly for himself and his family. He gave this precious possession to Jesus, not realizing how short the occupancy would be.

**23:54.** Jesus' burial had to be done hurriedly. This was the day before the Sabbath. Each family had to prepare for worship, for clothing, and for food to ensure that no work was done on the Sabbath. Joseph interrupted Sabbath preparations to prepare Jesus' body for burial. Sabbath would begin at sundown. This may have meant that full preparation and anointing of the body for preservation could not be completed before Sabbath began. Burying Jesus before the new day began at sundown fulfilled the provisions of Deuteronomy 21:22–23.

**23:55–56.** The disciples are noticeable by their absence here. The faithful women continued to follow Jesus (8:1–3). They had provided for him in life. They prepared to provide for him in death. They watched Joseph's activities so they would know exactly where Jesus was and what needed to be done to his body.

They hurried to their residence, prepared anointing spices used to honor the dead and to hide the odors connected with death and decay. Then the Sabbath came. They observed Sabbath. Jesus and those most closely associated with him could not be condemned for violating Old Testament law. They might not follow Pharisee and scribal interpretation, but they obeyed Scripture (see Exod. 20:10; Deut. 5:14). Not disciples but women exemplified Christ's call to take up the cross and follow him. They followed to the cross and to the tomb.

**The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Lk 23:44-56). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.**