# Discipleship According to Mark

*Jesus Buried* (Mark 15:40–47)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at Houston Chinese Church on November 15, 2026

## Introduction

- If you were with us last week, in our study of Mark's Gospel, we finally arrived on Calvary, as Christ was crucified. We saw the **supernatural darkness** that covered the whole land, from noon to 3:00pm, as Jesus hung on a Roman cross. We heard his **cry of dereliction** that revealed the spiritual forsakenness that he experienced as he paid for the sins of a countless many, bearing the holy justice and wrath of God. And we marveled at how, at the very moment he breathed his last, the **curtain of the temple**—which represented the barrier of sin that had separated God from man—that veil was suddenly torn in two from top to bottom.
    - **Indicating that the way to God—which was once shut—is now open because of Jesus.** Because of his Crucifixion, but also because of his Resurrection on the third day. And usually after you preach the Crucifixion, it's typical for that next sermon, the next week, to be on the Resurrection. And that's how I'd normally arrange it. I'd cover today's text along with Mark 16 and make the Resurrection the main focus.

- But this morning, I felt like we could benefit from slowing down and not quickly moving past the burial. **Let's put ourselves in the shoes of Jesus's followers in the immediate wake of his death. Let's sit in the sorrow and sadness, the confusion and disillusionment.** I know it's not comfortable. We want to move past those feelings and get right to the triumph and victory of the Resurrection.
    - But it's that instinct we have to downplay or avoid those feelings that got me thinking, "We need a sermon just focused on the sadness." **It reminded me of an article I read asking if miserable Christians can sing the songs at your church.** That's a great question. **Because there is a tendency in our praise songs to focus on the triumph.** To be Resurrection-oriented. Where we can trust that God will always turn everything bad for good. Where we can sing out loud that, "He's never gonna let me down!" Which is true—when you consider all things in light of the Resurrection.

- **But for sad, miserable Christians—for whom even coming to church was a spiritual battle to overcome—what are they supposed to sing when they're stuck in the mire of their sorrows?** Sure, intellectually, in their heads, they can acknowledge that God will never let his children down. But emotionally, in their hearts, it sure feels that way right now. They feel let down. They feel disappointed and disillusioned with the Lord.
    - **Emotionally, they're in the same boat as those early disciples in our passage.** Watching the beaten, bloodied body of Jesus removed from the cross and buried in a rich man's tomb. **Miserable Christians are Friday-Saturday Christians who are emotionally living in the darkness and ambiguity prior to Easter Sunday.**

- Friends, if that describes you right now, know that you're not alone. There are miserable Christians sitting around you. Most are just good at hiding it. **This is why churches need songs and sermons that connect on an intellectual and emotional-level for all Christians—whatever the state of their soul.** We need praise songs and uplifting sermons that remind us that, "God is good and God is great." As well as, lament songs and sobering sermons that identify with our grief and sadness as we do our best to walk by faith and not by sight.

- **So this morning, as we focus just on the burial of Christ, I want us to consider the burial from three perspectives.** First, from the perspective of (1) A group of faithful women looking on from a distance. Second, from the perspective of (2) A Jewish religious leader making a courageous request. And lastly, from the perspective of witnesses who see (3) A clearly dead Jesus wrapped and sealed in a tomb.

### Faithful Women Looking on From a Distance

- Let's consider the perspective of this group of faithful women who followed Jesus and look on from a distance as he dies. Let's read in v40, "*40There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. 41When 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.*"
  - **Mary Magdalene is one of Jesus's female disciples who has been with him since the beginning of his ministry in Galilee.** We're told in Luke 8:2 that Jesus had previously healed her of seven demons, and along with other women whom he healed, she helped provide for the ministry out of her own financial means (8:3). Mary Magdalene definitely plays a prominent role towards the end of the Gospel. Serving as the first witness of the Resurrection and the first to share the good news that Christ is risen (Jn 20:18).

- The other Mary with her is identified as "*the mother of James the younger and of Joses.*" **This could be another female disciple whose name just so happens to be Mary.** But some think this might be a reference to Jesus's mother. Because, back in Mark 6, Mother Mary is identified as having two other sons named James and Joses (6:3). So perhaps this Jesus's mom. But others push back and point out that, if it was her, she'd be identified as Jesus's mother rather than as the mother of two less prominent sons. So we're not sure.
  - As for the third woman, Salome, we're pretty sure she's the mother of the disciples James and John. In Matthew's account of the same instance, the third woman is identified as "*the mother of the sons of Zebedee.*" (Mt 27:56) The sons of Zebedee are James and John (Mk 10:35). This is their mom.

- So these three ladies have been with Jesus from the start of his public ministry. Enduring the itinerant lifestyle of going from town to town, preaching the gospel, healing the sick. **Along with all his male disciples (particularly the Twelve), they were witnesses of all Jesus has said and done for the past three years.**
  - But unlike the Twelve—who at this point were nowhere to be found (except for John according to John 19:26)—**unlike the men who fled, these women followed Jesus all the way to Calvary.** They witnessed his death. They witnessed his burial according to v47. They "*saw where he was laid.*" Which sets up Mark 16:1 when they arrive at Jesus's tomb Sunday morning only to find it empty. Mentioning the women here preempts any doubt, assuming that the women, in their grief, got confused and arrived at the wrong tomb, an empty tomb. **No, these women were present—when the men were not—serving as eyewitnesses to the death and burial of Christ.**

- But it *is* notable that Mark describes these faithful women, in v40, as "*looking on from a distance.*" You might not think much of it. That it's merely a physical description of where they stood in relation to the cross. Maybe. **But then you have to consider how that same phrase appears a chapter earlier, in Mark 14:54, describing Peter—after Jesus is arrested—following him "*at a distance.*"** And what follows is Peter's denial of even knowing him (14:71). So when you read that, and then in the next chapter, when more disciples are described as being *at a distance* from Jesus, it's signaling something.
  - And then read it in light of an OT text like Psalm 38—a lament psalm of David about his anguish of being abandoned by family and friends. Listen to **Psalm 38:11**, "*My friends and companions stand aloof from my plague, and my nearest kin stand far off.*" With parallels in our text to an OT verse like that—I have a hard time reading a statement about the women "*looking on from a distance,*" as purely neutral. **I think Mark is suggesting that, even for these faithful women, an emotional distance is now developing between them and their dead Messiah.**

- **For these women, at this point in the story, they're looking at Jesus as a failed Messiah.** They weren't expecting him to die a brutal, shameful, criminal's death on a Roman cross. And as devout Jews, they knew what **Deuteronomy 21:23** teaches. They knew it says that anyone who is hanged on a tree is cursed by God. And yet, now their Jesus, their Messiah, the One in whom they had placed all their hopes of deliverance—now he hangs naked and shamed on a cross, cursed by God, dead and gone.
  - They loved him. They believed in him. **But now they have to accept the harsh reality that he's gone. And so they begin to slowly distance themselves.** I think that's what's going on.

- Try to put yourself in their shoes. **At this point, all they know is a crucified Jesus.** They don't know a resurrected Jesus. They're Friday-Saturday followers. They have yet to experience the joy of Easter Sunday. So put yourself in their shoes.
  - **If you were confronted with a crucified Jesus *without* a resurrection—if you had to face the harsh realities of life without Resurrection—how would you process all the sorrow and distress you regularly face?** What would you do with your disappointment, especially when it's directed towards God? I'm not surprised if you too would begin to pull away and create some distance with him.

- And maybe that's where some of you are right now. You feel like God has really let you down. You feel like he failed to keep his promises. **You're disappointed, disillusioned, distant. You're starting to pull away from God.**
  - You can identify with these women who are looking on from a distance. But here's the big difference. **The difference is that you have a perspective not afforded to these women. You stand on *this* side of Easter Sunday.** You can interpret your feelings of disappointment through the lens of the Resurrection. That's an advantage you and I have.

- **On one hand, it's important that we validate the lament you feel.** The sadness and disappointment you're experiencing. Those are real emotions, and they're understandable from one perspective.
    - **But on the other hand, the good news the gospel affords is that you can interpret all that you're experiencing through a new perspective.** Through the lens of a Sunday Resurrection. So before you continue in that direction—pulling away and creating distance with God—please consider the Resurrection and what it means.
        - If what the women initially interpreted as failure on Jesus's part, if that turned out to be the very means of their deliverance—then could it be that what you consider a failure on God's part to deliver—could that disappointment actually be, when all is said and done, an integral part of his plan for your deliverance?

### A Jewish Religious Leader Making a Courageous Request

- That's a perspective available to you, by grace, through faith. But let's go back to our text and look at Jesus's burial from the perspective of a Jewish religious leader making a courageous request. His name was **Joseph of Arimathea**. Look starting in v42, "*42And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, 43Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.*"
    - Joseph of Arimathea was a respected member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council in charge of the temple. **Members of that council, led by the chief priests, were the ones who trumped up charges against Jesus and had him arrested.** They put him through a hasty trial in the early hours of that Friday morning. And dragged him before Pontius Pilate, the Roman prefect, to demand that Jesus be crucified.
        - Now the text suggests that Joseph of Arimathea was of a different mind. **He was looking for the kingdom of God and hopeful Jesus was the Messiah.** The long-awaited kingly figure sent by God to usher in the kingdom. In Matthew's Gospel, he labels Joseph of Arimathea a "disciple of Jesus." (Mk 27:57) And in Luke's Gospel, he explicitly states that Joseph did not consent to the actions taken against Jesus by fellow council members (Lk 23:50-51). Because he actually believed him to be God's Anointed King.

- But now Joseph's hoped-for King is hanging naked and dead on a Roman cross. **Now just ask—how did a true believer respond to Jesus's death?** Did he sit on the edge of his seat waiting for Jesus to come back to life and climb off that cross? No, Joseph wasn't expecting that. None of the disciples were expecting that.
    - **Joseph of Arimathea simply did what he could to give Jesus a proper burial.** Which demonstrated his reverence for Jesus. But it also showed his resignation to the harsh reality that his Messiah had failed. He was now dead.
        - Now v43 says that Joseph "*took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.*" **The usual course of action in a Roman crucifixion was to leave the body on the cross to rot and be consumed by scavenging birds.** That sends a chilling message to the general public. That's the intent.

- ❖ But Joseph couldn't stand the idea of Jesus's body being left on the cross. **He knew the Law of Moses called for God's people to bury their dead on the same day, before sunset.** It goes back to that Deuteronomy 21:23 verse that says, "*his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.*
    - **Leaving the body unburied would bring shame to the dead's name and defilement to their land.** So Joseph went to Pilate to ask for the body. He was in a hurry to bury Jesus because the Sabbath was going to begin at sundown. And Jews weren't allowed to conduct a burial over the Sabbath. They only had enough time to wrap his body in a linen shroud. Applying all the requisite spices and anointments would have to wait until after Sabbath, on early Sunday morning.

- ❖ **Now usually the family of the deceased would make this kind of request for the body.** But in this case, not even Jesus family or his closest disciples approached Pilate. Yet this Sanhedrin member—who may have never even met Jesus before personally—he goes to Pilate and openly associates himself with Jesus. Showing sympathy for Jesus and his cause. And since Jesus had just been crucified for high treason against Caesar—for claiming to be the King of the Jews (15:2)—**it was courageous of Joseph to disregard his reputation and out himself as a follower of Christ.**

- ❖ And in v46, we're told that he was granted the body, which he promptly buried in his family tomb, "*a tomb that had been cut out of the rock.*" **That description of a rock-cut tomb tells us that Joseph of Arimathea was well off.** Only the rich had tombs like that. Little did he know that he was fulfilling OT prophecy. Fulfilling **Isaiah 53:9** which refers to God's Suffering Servant and says, "*And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.*"
    - Now you'd think a rich man like Joseph would be weary of defiling his family tomb by burying a crucified man in it. You'd think a religious man like him would avoid touching a dead body so as not to become ceremonially unclean before Sabbath. **In other words, there were good reasons for Joseph to back away and just move on.**

- ❖ That's why his actions are so commendable. **But it's important to note that his actions were *not* an expression of faith that Jesus would soon rise from the dead.** That's not what Joseph expected. All he could expect was to give Jesus a proper burial. He saw his Messiah die on a cross. And all his hope died with him.
    - **Again, like with the women earlier, this is the response from a true believer, facing the harsh reality of dashed hopes and failed expectations.** He concluded that the least he could do was to offer Jesus a good send off. To show some respect.

- ❖ Maybe some of you can identify with that. **God has let you down.** He didn't answer your long-term prayers. You never got that spouse. You never got that child. You never got that healing—for yourself or for a loved one. So now you're disappointed. You're confused.

- **But maybe you won't go so far as to shake your fist at heaven.** You won't curse God or outright reject him. You'll remain respectful and show reverence. You won't even keep your distance. **You'll still show up.** You're here in church after all. That takes courage. That takes fortitude. **But let's face it, your hopes are dashed and your future unsure.**
  - **But again, the difference between you and Joseph of Arimathea is a matter of perspective.** You have the advantage of seeing things from a perspective unavailable to him. **He's looking at an occupied tomb. But you're looking at an empty one.**
    - And an empty tomb makes all the difference in the world. Because the tomb is empty, for those who trust in Christ, our future is full. Our hopes are full. "*Weeping may tarry for the night but joy comes with the morning.*" (Ps 30:5)

- **Friends, my point is that if you feel empty, if you feel disappointment or despair, you don't have to be ashamed.** You don't have to deny those real feelings. You don't have to suppress them. You just have to bring them to God in the form of lament.
  - **And just know that Jesus felt those same feelings before.** Remember when he was in the Garden of Gethsemane. Feeling confusion over his will versus God's will. Feeling fear and terror at the prospect of drinking the cup of wrath against sin. Or remember him hanging on the cross—feeling empty and abandoned as the Father forsook his Son. My point is that he knows how you feel. But that's not enough.
    - **If Jesus never left that tomb, then all you have is a Messiah who feels your pain.** Sure, that's comforting to some degree. But that's not enough. A Sympathetic Messiah is good. A Risen Lord is far better.

### A Clearly Dead Jesus Wrapped and Sealed in a Tomb

- That's who Jesus is, but before we go there, let's consider his burial from one more perspective. We've looked at the burial from the perspective of the women at the cross and the perspective of Joseph of Arimathea at the tomb. Let's conclude with the perspective of all those who witnessed Jesus clearly die and get wrapped and sealed in a tomb.
  - We're told in the text that when Joseph came to Pilate asking for Jesus's body, Pilate was surprised to hear he was dead. Look at v44, "*44Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died. And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. 45And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph.*"

- Pilate was surprised because it usually took about two to three days for a crucified person to die, either by exposure or asphyxiation. **But Jesus was dead within six hours of hanging on the cross.** In John's Gospel account, he tells us that the soldiers were instructed to break the legs of the three men on the cross, the speed up their death. With broken legs, you can no longer support your body weight with your feet, so your chest remains constricted in this out stretched position, and you end up asphyxiating (suffocating) much faster.
  - But when they came to break Jesus's legs, they saw he was already dead. We're told that one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear to make sure he had died (Jn 19:34). Perhaps that's the centurion Pilate asked to ascertain if Jesus was really dead.

- **So the point that I'm belaboring—because Scripture belabors it—is that Jesus really did die.** He didn't just swoon and appear dead as skeptics have historically claimed. No, he truly died and a Roman centurion confirmed it. **These Romans were trained experts in this type of execution.** They crucified hundreds of thousands of people during their centuries in power. And there's not one ancient record out there of anyone surviving a Roman crucifixion.
    - So there's no question that Jesus actually died on the cross. But that's not a real problem for us. Christians don't worry about that. **A Messiah who dies is not the issue. But a Messiah who stays dead is a huge problem.**

- But that was the problem for his followers in our text. From their vantage point in the story—the One in whom they trusted as the Messiah—is now lying, decomposing, in a tomb. **From their perspective, he failed them.** He let them down. His big promises had come up short.
    - Try to put yourself in their shoes. **Think of how hopeless, how disillusioned, how demoralized they must have felt.** Many of you don't have to think too hard. You're already wearing those shoes. You know exactly what it's like to be let down by someone you loved. To be disappointed by someone you looked up to. By God himself. You know what hopelessness feels like. You have your own stories of dreams deflated and harsh realities confronted.

- **It's no surprise if many of you are living in the dark despair that defines that sorrowful Saturday between Good Friday and Easter Sunday.** You're living life without a view towards the Resurrection. You're trying to cope with the pain and suffering of life without an expectation of resurrection.
    - **And like the characters in our story, you might be able to scrape some meaning, some purpose out of life.** Your actions can still be faithful and courageous. They can be noble and honorable. But in the end, your actions are futile. They're depressing. Without any hope beyond the grave, then all of it ends there. Sealed up in a tomb.

- **Friends, if Christ has not been raised—if our hope in him is for this life only—then we (Christians) are of all people most to be pitied** (1 Cor 15:17, 19). Since we, of all people, have placed our hopes in an empty tomb—in a Risen Lord. But if the tomb is still occupied, if Christ has not been raised, then we are still in our sins. And we've been fooling ourselves to think we'll ever escape their consequences.
    - **But in fact Christ *has* been raised from the dead. Death has been swallowed up in victory.** And the sting of death is sin. And that stinger was left behind in the flesh of Christ. **So like a stinger-less bee, death is still buzzing around, but it's doomed.** It's fate is sealed. Death will one day die—when Christ returns and all are raised. And on that day, all the sorrow and sadness, all the disappointment and despair, all of it will be gone. All our tears will be wiped away.
        - Church, I didn't want to jump too quickly to that good news. **I wanted us to sit in sadness and lament for a moment.** But, of course, I had no intention of leaving us there. There's no way we weren't going to end with a strong reminder that Christ is risen. The tomb is empty. And everything is different.