

He Received - So Can We

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Date: 22 December 2019

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[0 : 0 0] Now this might seem like a strange particular passage to take at this time of year. But what I want us to recognise in it is that at this stage in his life, the Lord, after his life, now the Lord Jesus who has come to give life and fullness and power and forgiveness and strength and all the graces and the glories of God to fallen man that they might be redeemed, has at this stage, as indeed through so much of his life, nothing to call his own.

All that he has now, the honour with which he is buried, the spices, the linen with which he is buried and so on, all of that needs must be, however unconsciously, received.

It must be received from other people. The Lord who had little enough in his life, now in his death has literally nothing.

He doesn't have even the breath of life itself. He doesn't even have, as we looked in previous weeks, without wishing to add any embarrassment to the knowledge or whatever, he didn't even have a strip of clothing in his crucifixion.

When they took him down from the cross, they would no doubt have washed away the blood from his wounds and wrapped him in this linen, whipped the spices and so on, all of which would have been expensive.

[1 : 2 9] And we've got mention of that, we'll come to that in just a moment. But this is that which Joseph and Nicodemus and no doubt a couple of their servants as well would have done together.

Whether or not the cross itself was uprooted and laid down flat before the corpse of Jesus was taken from it, or whether they had to, from the upright cross, you know, get ladders and prise the nails out and gently lower him down, whether with straps or with ropes or whatever, so that the body wouldn't just collapse out, they would have had to gently take him down, wash the body clean of its blood and its wounds, wrap it in the linen and with the spices and so on, and then lay it in this nearby rock-cut new tomb.

But none of this did Jesus own. There was little enough that he owned in his lifetime. As he said, you know, the foxes are holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.

He was ministered to by the women that followed by his disciples, who ministered to them of their own substance. They gave him and the disciples the things they needed.

When Jesus was invited to dine, whether with Pharisees or with others in their homes, or with Mary and Martha, whatever, and they were fed him, and all the disciples, that might be the only decent meal that he and his disciples would get that entire day.

[2 : 5 4] For the three, three and a half years of his ministry, it's not for nothing. You know, Jesus says to the disciples, you know, what have you got in the way of loaves, neighbor? We've got nothing, except we can borrow from this wee boy, five loaves and two fish.

And they've got nothing. They spend their life, their ministry, with nothing. And in his death, Jesus has literally nothing at all. Even such clothes as he had, which would have been stained and bloodied from the wounds and the scourging that he had received already, even that, the soldiers take away and they throw dice for the one decent bit of them, so it doesn't get ripped up and torn.

So he's got nothing. He has to receive. Now, we talked earlier with the children about how difficult it is for us sometimes when we become adults, when we become grown up and we want to think we stand on our own two feet, how difficult and sometimes embarrassing it is when we receive from somebody a gift that we are not in a position yet to reciprocate.

We can't sort of pay back. We can't level up the store. We just receive. And that puts us in their debt. That puts us on the back foot. That humbles us.

That makes us sort of seem in the weaker position. And we're not comfortable. We're not comfortable simply receiving because it implies somehow that we are the weaker party.

[4 : 23] The other person, by being the giver, they're not only showing their kindness and their thoughtfulness, and we should have thought of that and that makes us look bad, and also they're showing their generosity, their care of us as well.

And we look kind of uncaring by comparison, but also we look like the weaker party. We look like we're the ones receiving the gift.

And so somehow we're sort of made to look more bad almost, and it just embarrasses us. And it can be for grown-ups who have difficulty receiving.

It can be positively embarrassing if they don't have a gift to give back. But you see, whatever our case of embarrassment, whatever our case of poverty, whatever our case of having nothing, we see in this incident that there is no level to which Jesus has not descended in order to be able to make himself like us.

Because whatever our condition in life, Jesus went lower. Whatever our status. You know, a homeless person on the street will think, I've got nothing. God can't possibly care about me.

[5 : 37] Look at me. I've got nothing. I've got no home, no roof over my head. Here I am shivering on the pavement. And that is a desperate plight. And we thank the Lord for those who do reach out to them, Salvation Army and Lodging House Missions and others, and seek to give them somewhere a roof over their head or whatever.

But at least they have clothes in which to wrap themselves. Maybe not brilliant clothes. Maybe not much in the way of covering. It's not adequate, but it's something. It's more than Jesus had at the end.

They still have life and breath in their bodies. It's more than Jesus had at the end. All that he had, all in this burial, rich and wonderful as it is, none of it was his in terms of belonging to Jesus of Nazareth.

He had to receive it. And even in death, he is the recipient of the generosity. You might even say the charity of others.

But those who perhaps were afraid to be his disciples in the days of his life and ministry now suddenly find that when all seems lost, they are equipped with courage.

[6 : 53] Mark's account of the Gospel mentions how Joseph of Amaphia went boldly unto Pilate. Now, when you think about it, and we've mentioned this in the past, when you think about it, for a Jewish leader to want to go into the presence of the Roman governor, the hated Gentiles, the Roman occupiers, it would have taken some guts.

It would have taken some courage to go, as it were, into the enemy's lair and confront the ultimate power of Rome and to beg for the body of Jesus.

Usually, the bodies of crucified criminals would be simply thrown in an unmarked grave and they would just be covered over there. Now, that was a concession to the Jews in Palestine because in most parts of the Roman Empire, those who were crucified were simply left on the cross.

And they were left there till the birds of the air and the beasts of the field pecked away all the flesh till there was nothing left but skeleton that gradually would fall to bits. But in deference to the Jews, to whom that would be an abomination, they buried the corpses eventually of those who were crucified.

So, Pilate is asked especially by Joseph of Ananias for the body of Jesus, that he might give it a decent burial. Pilate's main concern, of course, is, well, he can't possibly be dead yet.

[8 : 19] He can't possibly be dead so soon after only six hours. Pilate gave him leave. But Pilate, first of all, checked the other gospel accounts first.

He marveled if he were already dead. And he checked with the centurion, which underlines to us the fact that Jesus was not simply unconscious. He wasn't simply in a coma.

Those who were charged with the professional judicial killing of Jesus of Nazareth had made sure of their job. They were hardened killers.

That was their task. That was their profession. And they did it thoroughly. Nobody is going to be taken down from the cross before they are absolutely dead. And so Pilate checked with the centurion, made sure that Jesus was completely dead.

And then said, okay, fine, let's take him. There may, as some commentators have pointed out, there may have been something in Pilate that thought he was a wee bit ashamed of what he'd done with regard to Jesus.

[9 : 19] And this was one way of only saying, right, I'm not having anything more to do with the evil scheme of Putin, this innocent man to death. They want to bury indecently. That's fine. Perhaps, as others have pointed out, he might have seen the dignity and honesty of Joseph of Arimathea and the boldness of him compared to the scheming and the sort of backhandedness and plotting and envy of all the chief priests and the scribes before.

Perhaps. Leave that aside for now. Here comes Joseph who takes the body of Jesus and they give it this burial of honour and dignity.

Along with Nicodemus, who brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes about a hundred pound weight. A hundred pound weight? That's a huge amount. How can you possibly utilise all of that ground, spices and all of that kind of perfume?

Well, one possible explanation might be what we find if we go back to 2 Chronicles in chapter 16, verse 14, that's the last verse of that chapter, where we read of the burial of King Asa of Judah.

It says, They buried him in his own sepulchres, which he had made for himself in the city of David, and laid him in the bed which was filled with sweet odours and diverse kinds of spices prepared by the apothecary's art.

[10 : 42] And they made a very great burning for him. Now, it doesn't mean that he took in a mattress and they laid him on the mattress, on the bed, in the tomb. No. When it says, lay them on the bed, it means almost certainly that they would take all this powdered and ground down spices and perfumes and spread it.

Spread it on the stone shelf of the tomb, perhaps an inch or two thick, so that it makes effectively a bed of spices on which the corpse would then be made.

So that as it decayed and decomposed, the spices and the perfumes giving off their scent, their fragrance would perhaps neutralise the smell of the rotting and decay of the corpse.

So that's what they did for a king, is that they would have this huge amount, volume of ground down powdered spice, which if you're going to lay on a stone shelf, if you're going to make even a couple of inches thick, that's an awful lot of powder you need.

That's an awful lot of spices. So a hundred pound weight doesn't seem quite so excessive, if that's what they planned to do, which almost certainly would be part of it.

[11 : 56] It makes sense in that context. We don't know exactly how they utilised them, but that would be one way that would make sense. It would be, literally, the burial of a king, as it was for King Issa.

This new tomb, hewn out of the rock, which Joseph of Adamathia had no doubt prepared at great expense for his own burial.

If it was cut out of the rock, it means there's no way in or out of that cave, of that tomb, except by the entranceway that was sealed with a stone. Nobody could steal the body.

Nobody could get in and further violate the corpse of Jesus. They are seeking now to give it the burial, the attention, the dignity that perhaps he did not have in the latter part of his life.

Certainly he did not have. So this mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pound weight, they took the body of Jesus and wound it in linen clothes with the spices.

[13 : 00] Now, what that almost certainly means is that the corpse washed and laid out there, the bandages that were that linen strips were round and round it, and with each layer, spice would be scattered and sprinkled within the layers of the bandaging, as it were.

As the strips go round, the spices go through it and between the layers. So the whole body becomes encased in this expensively spiced wrapping.

And then laid out its bed of spices, this thick powdered layer bed. It is the best and most expensive body one could ever have.

Now, even when we say, oh, laid it in linen strips, okay. We think of linen, we think of bed linen, bed sheets, that sort of thing. It's quite common to us, but for the people of Jesus' day, where everything had to be hand spun and hand woven, linen was the finest of clothing that you would have next to your flesh.

It was that which the priests wore, clothed in fine linen. It is that which we read of, the armies in heaven are clothed in. Clearly, that would be a sort of metaphorical linen or heavenly vision of linen or whatever.

[14 : 20] But we read in Revelation 19, we read, for example, when I saw heaven open, verse 11, and behold a white horse, and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns. And he had a name written that no man knew but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood, and his name is called the Word of God.

And the armies which were in heaven, the heavenly hosts, the angelic armies, the armies which were in heaven, followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.

Fine linen, white and clean, was the ultimate honour to put upon someone. As I say, it's what the priests wore, especially the high priest.

It was that which next to the flesh would be the most soft and smooth and gentle and fine of all the materials one could possibly have. It denoted purity.

[15 : 27] It denoted that which was set apart. And that's one reason why it was given, especially to the priests. That and the fact that it was so expensive. Now here we have this, which is wrapped around a corpse.

And it is the corpse, of course, of our Lord Jesus Christ. And so it is the best of the best that he is getting. Because apart from the cost of making that tomb for himself in the first place, although we don't think, oh well, these are rich men, you know, they can afford it.

It doesn't matter how rich you are. If you're expending this much on this kind of a burial, which is literally fit for a king, it is going to leave a huge hole in your finances.

This kind of lavish, you might almost say extravagant, burial. This is what Joseph and Nicodemus are seeking now, you might say belatedly, but not really.

They are seeking to do for Jesus. Because by the time you get to burial, any of us would want it, for any of our loved ones, perhaps even for ourselves, if we cared by them, we would want it to be decent.

[16 : 41] We would want it to be, you know, as good as we could make it. This is the best that anybody could have made it. To be buried within, as of course we looked at the other day, the city of David.

Jerusalem is most often referred to as the city of David, since he made it his capital, and it is most often referred to in scripture as the city of David in the context of burials.

The burials of the king. Here is the king of kings buried in a hewn-out stone rock sepulcher, a new tomb in the city of David. What a burial fit for a king.

But none of it is that which he owned himself. He received because he had nothing. The body of Jesus was helpless.

The body of Jesus was lifeless. This is the veneration that they are showing out of love for a saviour, a messiah, they did not perhaps have the courage to follow in the days of his life, but which now they are seeking to honour in his death.

[17 : 47] A death which, remember, they think is permanent. As far as any of the disciples know, although he had told them time and time again that he would rise from the dead, they just didn't get it.

They think this is it. And this being it, they are making it the best of the best for Jesus. But he has nothing of his own. But everything in this brief passage that we read, everything that has happened, the Lord has already himself prepared and prophesied.

Now we talk about things being prepared. There is no way that you have a hundred pound weight of myrrh and aloes and the extent, the amount of fine linen that would be needed to wrap a corpse with all the spices and perfumes through it.

You don't have that just lying around in a cupboard. You don't have it just in a corner house. Oh, what would you, oh Jesus had died. Let's go and get, let's go and get all our spices. No, you would have to buy it in.

You would have to buy it in from those who dealt in it and even they themselves probably wouldn't have that kind of store of stock. So you'd be having to make sure that you gathered it in from every conceivable source of those who prepared and sold with the apothecary's art these spices and perfumes especially associated with burial and with death.

[19 : 19] Myrrh, and aloes, remember that myrrh is one of the gifts that the wise men brought to Jesus at the time of his birth. That which would symbolize or look forward, pointing forward, to the death that he would die.

And it is often speculated that, you know, the myrrh was for the death he would die, the incense, the frankincense, because of his priestly office that he would have interceding between God and man, a gold for his friendship.

Here we have him, clothed as it were, now at last, with the fine linen, the strips of linen, the garments of a priest, with the burial of a king, and with all the spices that could be prepared and bought, which Joseph and Nicodemus would have had to prepare.

They would have had to buy in, they would have to expend that in order to gather in these spices in such quantity. So they are giving the best of the best to Jesus, but if they are prepared, then God himself has been preparing this from all the beginning of time.

We saw in the passage that we read, you know, there's four or five prophecies here already that are being fulfilled. You know, we saw in Psalm 22, for example, verse 16, dogs have come past me, the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me, they pierced my hands and my feet, I may tell all my bones, they look and stare upon me, they part my garments among them and cast lots upon my vesture.

[20 : 56] Now there in these three verses, we've got the piercing of his hands and feet, written at a time when crucifixion was unknown, hundreds of years before it was even known about.

They part my garments among them, they cast lots upon my vesture. That's the fulfilling of a prophecy there with which the soldiers do. I may tell all my bones, I can count all my bones, none of them is broken.

Again, pointing to the fact that although the legs of the thieves were broken, Jesus' bones were not broken and we'll come back to that in a moment. So that's the first prophecy that is fulfilled there.

We also read at verse 28, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith I thirst. And that's quoting from Psalm 69 at verse 21, they gave me also gall for my meat and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.

And then we have the third one that is unfolding where we see the fact that a bone of him shall not be broken.

[22 : 02] And this is a reference of course to the Passover lamb. The Passover lamb which was the ultimate symbol of deliverance for the children of Israel. Jesus had partaken of the Passover on the night in which he was betrayed just before he was crucified and of that Passover lamb we read in Exodus 12 at verse 46 in one house shall it be eaten that shall not carry forth all of the flesh or throw it out of the house neither shall he break a bone thereof.

Yes, you are to carve away the meat, eat the meat, share the meat but not break any of the bones. I may tell all my bones we read in Psalm 32 verse 17 they look and stare upon me.

So not a bone of him is to be broken but pierced nevertheless with the spear of the soldier they shall look on me whom they have pierced.

And again that's looking at whom they have pierced. Zechariah chapter 12 at verse 10 we read I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and of supplications and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced.

Whether with the nails to his hands and feet whether the spear in his side which you know the flowing out of blood and water at that point was a further indication that he'd been dead for some time because the blood sort of coagulates it sort of intensifies as it were and the sort of clearer fluid separates off from it so that when the pericardium that's the sac around the heart would have been pierced with the javelin so that's what flows out this watery clear liquid and beginning to coagulate blood and water he has been dead for some time but that thrust of the spear was itself intended almost as an act of contempt you know they're going to break the legs of the first one break the legs of the third one but Jesus is already dead they could just say okay leave him leave him he's already dead but no that's just stab him while we're at it king of the Jews so they stabbed them with the spear and out flows blood and water and we read he that saw it bear record and his record is true and he knoweth that he saith true that he might believe so we've got four prophecies there already that are fulfilled even in this brief passage and we could add so many more throughout the life and death of Jesus but just in this short passage there's four and we see how even that which men intend for evil

[24 : 37] God overrules for good as proof of his death proof that he is as dead as dead can be so that when he rises from the dead it can be seen to be only the pure power of God he had nothing but at the same time he fulfills all things and we read then of his burial in Joseph's borrowed tomb of course Joseph who was rich Isaiah 53 verse 9 he made his grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death because he had done no violence neither was any deceit in his mouth Jesus was certainly not rich in terms of this world's good but his burial is nonetheless with the rich his burial is the burial of a king in a rich man's tomb his grave his burial is with the wicked with sinners yes and with the rich in his death he had done no violence no violence found in his mouth so he has although all these things he is the recipient of them he has made himself so low that all he can do is receive now

Philippians again reminds us of how low he made himself let this money be in you which was also in Christ Jesus who being in the form of God thought it not robbery not something to be grasped at to be equal with God but made himself of no reputation and took upon him the form of a servant who was made in the likeness of men and being found in fashion as a man he humbled himself the sense that is he emptied himself he humbled himself even more emptied himself out and became obedient unto death even the death of the cross by which time he had nothing not even the clothes that were on his back he was crucified and even his burial he had to receive from others so you see when we are called upon by the Lord to receive the free gift of grace from his beloved son Jesus Christ when we are called upon to accept with empty hands and in a spirit of helplessness that which the Lord alone is able to give he is not asking us to be ground down in his presence often yes we have to be brought to the place of hopelessness before we are willing to accept

God but that is just our pride if we were able to accept Christ sooner before we've exhausted every other possibility then it would be right for us to do it but so often it's only when the Lord has closed off every other single possibility every door is slammed and locked shut there is nowhere to go but to Christ in our extremity that's when we do it because we are such sinful rebellious creatures but when we are brought so low and when we are brought to the stage where there is nothing but what we can do but receive with empty outstretched hands this free gift of God the Lord is not asking us to do anything that he himself has not done first he is not asking us to go down lower than he had to go he is not asking us to be stripped of all our possessions and hopes and wealth and clothing and any resources that we have we know that something still in this world

Jesus had absolutely nothing he is not asking us to go down lower than he himself went he emptied himself having been God that fills the heavens and the earth God is reduced in terms of God the Son reduces himself to this abject state of complete helplessness and death where all that he can do is receive from others and that example is what he wants us to follow look I have been there I have been lower than you have been I have been worse than you have been I have been further down than you have been I have been worse off I have been more despised I have been more brought low I have been more humiliated and shamed than you could ever be and I had to receive from others and I was glad to do it I was thankful for the love they showed I was thankful for the gifts they bestowed upon me not just the rich like Joseph of Ananias but even the woman of ill repute who broke her alabaster jar ointment upon his head and upon his feet and wept over his feet and he said she's done this anointing in preparation for my burial and he just accepted it he accepted it with love that extravagance he accepted with love he gave us apart from salvation itself he gave us this example of how he would have us to be that we who are not brought down as low as he was who are not empty as much as he was who are not humiliated to the extent that he was are nevertheless called upon at this time and all times of the year to receive to be prepared to receive from Christ that which we cannot possibly ever hope to repay that which we cannot give anything back to that which we cannot level up the score or level up the values just accept it you're so low you're so weak you're so helpless all you can do is receive and you know there comes that point where it's a blessing to be able to do so once many years ago in my life

I had pneumonia and I had to go into hospital with it apologies if I've told you the story already but prior to that of course I was you know running a hundred miles an hour trying to do this trying to do that trying to do the next thing being probably way too busy way too active being run down and not in the best of health anyway and would be coughing away having to go and lie down in the afternoon just to get through the rest of the day and be getting worse and worse in the health but you still keep going you still soldier I can't afford to be ill I've got this meeting I've got that to preach I've got this appointment to keep I can't this nobody else can do it I must do this I must do that virtually thinking ourselves indispensable we all do it to a greater or less extent eventually I got to the stage where I was literally coughing up blood into the toilet and at that point of course the better half of the Lord had given me insisted you go to the doctor which I did the doctor insisted you go into the hospital which I did so finally lying down in the bed tubes coming out arms and everything in medical one you just put your pajamas up slide it in the sheets into bed and they hook you up to all these machines you think okay here I am in hospital in medical one how that much worse can it get

[31 : 59] I have to accept the fact now I'm ill just let go and let them deal with it let the nurses let the doctors deal with it you're here you're hospitalized you're in bed there's no point trying to think anything other than it you're ill just let go and I did at that point I did and there was this huge release of just accepting the fact I can't actually do anything about this I can't actually get up and help them with what they're doing you know I have to just accept there's nothing for me to do but receive there's nothing for me to do but receive the medications receive the food or whatever they bring receive the treatments they bring just lie there and take it accept it your hands are empty your strength is gone you are helpless just receive what the Lord wants to give and when the Lord comes to us he doesn't come with a vague power majestic judgment saying you better bow down before me how does God come to us he comes to us as a little child he comes to us as one that wants to make sure that we don't feel that we are humiliated inexactly doesn't make us feel that we are the weak party that we are come to pay our homage to pay our worship and respect and receive this gift of a saviour yes of a deliverer yes of forgiveness yes but he comes initially in the weakness and humility of a child he knows what it is to be helpless and to have to just receive so he's not asking you or me to do anything he hasn't done for us he is our example he is our pattern and he is our saviour and that is why he has come let us pray