

GROUP LEADER GUIDE

Holy Saturday: The Visible Burial & The Invisible Victory

Text: John 19:38-42



ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- April 11- 2nd Saturday (Men)
- April 26- Parent Info Meeting for Camp (Kids)

Check out the TJC Weekend Recap podcast for a more in-depth look at our sermons each week!

The podcast is available on all streaming platforms!

Okay, tonight is always a special night because we are working through ideas that most Christians are not very familiar with. This doctrine of Christ's descent to the dead has been lost in the last 100+ years in the evangelical church's history, but that hasn't always been the case. There was a time when this teaching was just as central as Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday. [RAISE YOUR HAND IF THIS IS YOUR FIRST TIME TO EVER LEARN ABOUT HOLY SATURDAY]

What I want to do tonight is not just teach you the basics, but I want to show you two perspectives of what is happening after Jesus dies on the cross at Golgotha and before He appears to Mary in the Garden outside the tomb. Because there is a period of time unfolding both in the physical realm and the spiritual realm.

And that's a distinction I want to introduce: there are things happening at the same time, in parallel to each other, in the physical realm and the spiritual realm.

Let's begin the physical realm: **John 19:38-42**.

After Jesus' death, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus IN SECRET. That could be a whole sermon. The number of people who follow Jesus in secret. Let me make one quick remark on this. I think there could be a category of believers because of certain situations and circumstances that have to be careful or may find they have to operate undercover as a believer. I'm not saying it should always remain that way. I'm saying there are circumstances where people may believe but haven't come out about that yet. And there could be situations where they walk very cautiously. Either way, Joseph of Arimathea comes out of hiding as a believer and asks for Jesus' body from Pilate. Pilate gave him permission.

He takes Jesus' body, along with Nicodemus, another believer who had been operating undercover. And prepare Jesus' body for burial. They put the oils and spices on him and wrap him in linen cloth. Then they placed him in a new tomb where nobody had been laid.

All of this is unfolding after Jesus' death. He's speared. He's brought down. They take his body. They prepare it. They place it in the tomb. This is what is going on the physical realm, in the realm of the living. This is what you and I could have observed had we been present. We could have watched this going on.

But there was simultaneously something going on in the spiritual realm that could not be seen. There was something happening in the realm of the dead. And that's where we have to do a little biblical work on understanding what happened when you died. And the best way to teach this is to understand three states:

- **1. Before Jesus' death and descent.**
- **2. During Jesus' death and descent.**
- **3. After Jesus' death and descent.**

Let's talk about the first one: Before Jesus' death and descent.

In order to understand these things, we need to understand the realms of God's creation. When God made all things "in the beginning," this includes three realms: **heaven, earth, and under the earth**. And these realms can be understood as being a **visible world** and an **invisible world**.

Colossians 1:16 -- For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.

The visible world consists of one realm: "earth." The invisible world consists of two realms: "heaven" and "under the earth." Listen to a few passages highlighting this:

Revelation 5:3 -- And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it

Philippians 2:10 -- so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth

Heaven is that realm where God dwells and manifests His glory. He is served and surrounded by angelic beings. We are told it is a place of beauty, grandeur, and majesty. God is not spatially bound to Heaven. He is everywhere. But He manifests His glory in Heaven.

Earth is the visible realm that we know and inhabit. It's the material world. It includes the universe (or the cosmos), the stars and galaxies. This is the theatre of God's glory, and the dwelling place of man.

Under the earth refers to the realm where all unholy spiritual beings dwell (unholy angels or demons), and the human dead (souls without bodies). Important note: This definition will change by the end of the sermon. Keep that in mind as I define it now. We saw the under the earth mentioned in the other passages. We are going to have a "Before the descent of Christ" reality and a "Post descent of Christ" reality.

But we see it referenced elsewhere, particularly throughout the Old Testament.

Job 11:7-9 -- 7“Can you find out the deep things of God?

Can you find out the limit of the Almighty?

8It is higher than heaven—what can you do?

Deeper than Sheol—what can you know?

**9Its measure is longer than the earth
and broader than the sea.**

Psalms 139:7-10 -- Where shall I go from your Spirit?

Or where shall I flee from your presence?

8If I ascend to heaven, you are there!

If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!

**9If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,**

10even there your hand shall lead me,

and your right hand shall hold me.

When you read the word "Sheol" in the Old Testament, this is the same place that Paul and John refer to when they say "under the earth." Sheol is the place that the dead descend to, hence "under the earth." Sheol is the place where the human dead, and demons dwell. It sometimes goes by the name "the pit" or "the abyss." Sometimes Scripture refers to it as "the lowest part of the earth."

It is important to note here that the language of "up" and "down" are metaphorical in nature. Heaven is not "up there." It is an invisible realm. Sheol is not "down there." It is an invisible realm. The Scripture regularly uses language from the visible world to make the invisible world intelligible to us. Just as Sheol is described as the lowest place, Heaven is described as the highest place. It is called "the highest heaven" or "the third heaven." The first heaven was considered the space from the sky to the moon, the second heaven the moon to the farthest stars, and the third heaven the realm beyond observation, where God dwelled.

So these are the realms of creation. Heaven, earth, and under the earth. Earth is visible. Heaven and under the earth are invisible realms. Heaven is where God and His angels dwell, and under the earth (Sheol) is the place of the human dead, and fallen angels. Again, this definition will change in a minute...because of Jesus.

But let's put some more thought and study on the idea of Sheol as the place for all human dead. This stops some people in their tracks because we often think exclusively in terms of "God's people go up to Heaven" and "the unrighteous down to Hell." We'll get back to that idea, but the Old Testament shows the picture of all the human dead going to Sheol. But here's what I want to show:

1. all human dead went to Sheol, and

2. There were compartments/divisions of Sheol based on the righteous and unrighteous.

Sheol as the place for all human dead:

Ecclesiastes 9:10 -- Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.

Genesis 37:35 -- All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted and said, "No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning." Thus his father wept for him.

1 Samuel 2:6 -- The LORD kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up.

Job 7:9-10 -- As the cloud fades and vanishes, so he who goes down to Sheol does not come up; he returns no more to his house, nor does his place know him anymore.

Isaiah 38:9-11 -- A writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, after he had been sick and had recovered from his sickness:

10I said, In the middle of my days

I must depart;

**I am consigned to the gates of Sheol
for the rest of my years.**

**11I said, I shall not see the LORD,
the LORD in the land of the living;**

**I shall look on man no more
among the inhabitants of the world.**

This teaching is all throughout the Old Testament, but most don't pay attention to it because 1. we haven't been taught to understand what the Scriptures teach, and 2. we impose our post-death and resurrection views back onto the Old Testament.

So all the human dead will be in Sheol, but not everyone's experience in Sheol is the same. There are divisions or compartments. The righteous go to **Abraham's Bosom or Paradise**. The unrighteous go to **Gehenna or Hades**. Jesus tells a story in Luke 16:19-31 about a man named Lazarus who dies (not his friend Lazarus that he raised from the dead). Lazarus goes to the place of the dead, Sheol. But he is in "Abraham's Bosom," meaning he is comforted and at rest. But a rich man who was unrighteous died and he went to Sheol, but in torment in Hades. From the story it appears they are able to see one another, but the key here is the contrast between the two experiences. Both die, both go to Sheol, but their experiences are different. One goes to Abraham's Bosom, the other to Hades. We also see the thief on the cross promised by Jesus that he would be with him that day in Paradise. What is fascinating to me about this is that he doesn't mean in Heaven, but Sheol. Jesus on that day would be in Sheol, in Paradise, but not yet ascended to Heaven.

We also see in the Old Testament that after Samuel the prophet dies, he is in Sheol, and King Saul summons his spirit through a medium. Saul tells the woman, "Bring up Samuel." "Bring up" because he is in Sheol. Which is why we should be so foolish to mess around with psychics or Ouija Boards or any other spiritual things. We live in a world with more than simply flesh and blood. But notice here that Samuel, a man of God and prophet of God, is in Sheol...not Heaven. Because this is where all human dead went.

There are also fallen angels, or demons there. They are in a place called: **Tartarus**. There were angels that fell from grace in rebellion with Satan. Some of those spirits have been chained and sentenced from that time, while others are still free. This word is used once in the New Testament.

2 Peter 2:4 -- "For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment." The word "hell" here is translated from the word Tartarus.

This idea is repeated again by Jude even though he doesn't use the word "Tartarus" he is referring to the same place.

Jude 1:6 -- And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day—

So Sheol, in the Old Testament, contains 3 compartments or divisions: **Paradise/Abraham's Bosom** (the righteous dead), **Gehenna/Hades** (the unrighteous dead), and **Tartarus** (fallen angels/demons).

This is the "Before the Death Descent of Christ" reality. It can be summarized in Psalm 89:48: **Psalm 89:48 -- What man can live and never see death? Who can deliver his soul from the power of Sheol?**

That feels hopeless. But there is a light of hope. **Psalm 49:15 -- But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me.** That ransom from Sheol comes through the finished work of Jesus. So let's talk about what the descent of Christ is all about.

The Old Testament contains promises throughout about a coming Messiah, not only for Israel, but one who will be a light to the Gentiles. This Messiah was coming as victorious king, but also as an atonement (think Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53). But one of the images of the Messiah was in the prophecy of Psalm 16.

Psalm 16:8-11 -- 8I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.

**9Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices;
my flesh also dwells secure.**

**10For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,
or let your holy one see corruption.**

**11You make known to me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy;
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.**

The Scriptures say the Messiah's soul will descend to Sheol, but will not be abandoned there. It will be buried, but will not see corruption. It's not a mistake that when Peter stood to preach his first sermon at Pentecost in Acts 2, he quoted this passage about Jesus' death and resurrection. So, where was Jesus' soul after he cried out "It is finished" and breathed his last at the cross? The testimony of the Scriptures is that his soul descended to every tier of Sheol--to Abraham's Bosom, Hades, and even the abyss itself.

This requires us to look at our second point: **During Jesus' death and descent.**

What is happening during Jesus' death and descent? What is he doing there?

He did not go to suffer, but to subdue. He did not go for punishment, but to liberate.

1. He bound the strong man and preached to the wicked.

Jesus taught that a strong man must be overpowered by a stronger man before his home and goods can be plundered. Jesus demonstrated he is the stronger man during his ministry when he cast out demons. Jesus descends to the lair of the serpent to crush his skull and declare his victory. He is the victor. He possesses the keys to Death and Hades.

Revelation 1:12-18 -- 12Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, 13and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. 14The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, 15his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. 16In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

17When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, 18and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. 19Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. 20As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

What does it mean that He holds the keys? In ancient imagery, keys represent authority to open and shut. Christ doesn't just escape death. He controls it. Death is now His servant, not His master. This connects to Isaiah 22:22 where the key of David signifies royal authority.

Another passage that describes Jesus' proclamation of victory in Sheol is 1 Peter 3:18-22.

1 Peter 3:18-22 -- 18For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, 19in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, 20 because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. 21Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

Jesus doesn't go to preach an evangelistic message. He goes to preach a victory. He holds the keys now to Death and Hades. He has the authority. It belongs to him. He is the victor.

2. He led a host of captives to Heaven.

Jesus descended to the dead for us, and ascended into Heaven with us.

Ephesians 4:8-10 - Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." 9(In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? 10He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)

Paul here is referencing Psalm 68. This psalm is about God rescuing His people from Sheol. Israel's king is described as fighting on behalf of his people. He goes out to battle and his enemies flee. God will bring his people back from the depths of the seas, and ascend with them back to His holy mountain. This is the language and message of Psalm 68. Paul uses this to describe the work of Christ. Notice that after he descended into the lower regions, he came back with a host, a captives that he ascended on high with. This is not insignificant. This is describing the work of Christ in his descent to rescue the people of God into the presence of God.

Jesus liberates the righteous dead from Sheol and ushers them into the presence of God in present Heaven. When the end comes, and Jesus returns, the dead will be raised and the righteous dead in Heaven will be reunited with their glorified bodies. But until that day they are now in Heaven with God.

That leads to the last point: **After Jesus' death and descent.**

So what does this mean for us today? It means that when we die in Christ, as Christians, we do not go to the place of the dead. We do not go to Sheol. We go to be with Christ. We go to be in Heaven. This is huge. For all of human history, until Christ descended to the dead, the righteous awaited the day of the Messiah's liberation. Jesus didn't just come to die on the cross to atone for sin. He came to set the captives free and liberate the righteous in Sheol. He now opens wide Heaven's gate for all who look and turn to Him.

Close:

So I want to circle back to the very beginning. There are two things happening simultaneously when you see the death of Christ. There is what you see in the physical realm as Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus take the body of Jesus and bury it. And then there is what Jesus's spirit is doing in Sheol in proclaiming victory and setting captives free.

But watch, here is the amazing thing to consider: the same two things are happening simultaneously in our deaths as well. When we stand by a loved one as they breathe their last, we watch them die. We take care to prepare their bodies for burial. We bury them. In our realm, we see this happening. But there is another realm where something else very real is happening. If we or our loved one is in Christ, they are present in the Heavenly realm with Christ. Their souls go to be with Him. And we can rejoice in that amazing picture and reality. This too is won and bought for us by Jesus.

He is the Good Shepherd that leads His sheep home to be with Him. Praise be to our Savior.

PRAY

- How was your week? What is one thing you're grateful for and one thing that challenged you?
- How did you grow in obedience to Christ over the last week?
- Where did you go to share the gospel or have a spiritual conversation with someone?
- What is a sin you have been struggling with that you need to repent of?



Discussion

1: Seen vs. Unseen Reality – Read: Colossians 1:16

Question: How does recognizing both the visible and invisible realities reshape how we understand life, death, and spiritual warfare?

Leader Note: Help ground this in biblical categories, not speculation. Keep it anchored to Scripture.

2: Christ's Authority Over Death – Read: Revelation 1:17–18

Question: What does it mean that Jesus doesn't just defeat death, but has authority over it?

Leader Note: Emphasize authority and assurance. This is about confidence for believers, not just curiosity.

3: Hope Beyond the Grave – Read: 2 Corinthians 5:8

Question: How does the reality of being with Christ immediately after death shape the way we grieve, hope, and live today?

Leader Note: This is pastoral—expect emotion. Connect doctrine to comfort

LOOK AHEAD



- **BUILD UP | SEND OUT**

- How are you making yourself known at church this week?
- How are you growing to know Christ better this week?
- How are you making Christ known this week?

- **PRAYER**

- **Pray over any request from your group members.**
- **Pray for our team:** John Hogan, Director of Technology & Production
- **Pray for our replanters:** Christ's Fellowship
- **Pray for our short-term teams:**
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- **Pray for our long-term units on the mission field:**
 - The Wilsons
 - The Grays
 - The Browns
- **Pray for the unreached.** Want to keep up with Unreached People Groups? Download the Unreached of the Day App <https://joshuaproject.net/pray/unreachedoftheday/app>