

**Sunday 4th April 2010. Easter Sunday. Communion 10.30am..
Building-Outreach-Belonging. X14.**

(PP1) BREAKOUT.

(PP2) Jesus died:

Call to worship: Luke 23: 44 – 46. (Good Friday) It was about 12 o'clock when the sun stopped shining and darkness covered the whole country until 3 o'clock and the curtain hanging in the Temple was torn in 2. Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Father! In your hands I place my spirit!" He said this and died.

The Centurion on duty confirmed Jesus was dead and didn't need his legs breaking but just to be sure he plunged a spear into his side anyway.

(PP3) Measures taken to secure Jesus' body following his death: again there is an economy of words but the details are clear from *Matthew's* account:

- 1) (The Romans did not normally bury a crucified body – they simply threw it on the ground! Pious Jews would have buried them in a public grave but certainly not the family tomb) Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus retrieved the body of Jesus, wrapped it in a tight linen sheet with various pungent spices and wrapped a napkin around the head & amazingly placed it in his own tomb – *Matthew 27: 57 – 60 Read. (Luke 23: 50.51 tells us that even though a member of the Sanhedrin he had opposed the plot against Jesus & was infact a secret disciple).*
- 2) It was a solid tomb recently dug out of solid rock so no one could enter from the rear or sides. It was Joseph' own tomb – that of a rich man and so more than a scrape in the ground. (Grave robbers as in most societies were always a possibility – not wanting to steal here the body so much as either the linen shrouds or anything else of value that had been left).
- 3) Joseph rolled a large stone over the entrance and the 2 Marys – Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph observed this and therefore the next time they came to visit the body suddenly panicked and wondered who would move the stone for them since it was so large and heavy. *Mark 16: 4.*
- 4) On the Friday evening from sunset through to the full Saturday Sabbath the disciples and others could not move around freely since it was the Sabbath but the Pharisees became conscious that maybe they would attempt to steal the body and even say that he had been raised from the dead as Jesus had said he would be. They insisted that Pilate therefore:
- 5) Place a guard of soldiers outside the tomb. *Matthew 27: 65,66 Take a guard, (you have a guard!) Pilate told them; go and make the tomb as secure as you can.* Not only did they place a guard, possibly members of their own Temple guard or Pilate's *custodia* guard but for maximum security ...
- 6) They also placed a seal on the stone of the tomb. The significance of this was to warn off would be grave plunderers....maybe a wedge or an actual seal?

(PP4)

Jesus dead and buried! Everything was done to stop either the disciples breaking into the tomb to steal the body or grave robbers breaking in to steal anything of value.

The Jewish authorities had broken their own Law by searching out Pilate (probably in the last hours of preparation on the Friday night) on the Sabbath and insisting he place a guard. Why did they do this? *John Wenham in Easter Enigma* suggests 3 reasons:

- a) They feared Jesus – They were sure he was dead but the 3 hours darkness (eclipse) and the tearing of the Temple curtain were enough to make them remember his extraordinary ability to control the forces of nature.
- b) And they feared an uprising from the people.
- c) They knew the rumours that Jesus would be raised on the third day and therefore did fear the disciples stealing the body and saying he had been raised. Maybe they even feared that Joseph of Arimathea might arrange for the body to be stolen?

They had not realised one thing – there was not a tomb in the world which could imprison the risen Christ. Not all men's plans could bind the Risen Lord. The man who seeks to put bonds on Jesus Christ is on a hopeless assignment.

William Barclay. Matthew .The Daily Study Bible.

(PP5) BREAKOUT! Everything was done to stop grave robbers or the disciples of Jesus breaking in and stealing the body of Jesus.

But it was Jesus who broke out like a chicken breaking out of the egg shell - from the inside out. Jesus did not break out only of the grave clothes and the stone tomb – he broke out of the prison of death itself!

This is not the amazing feat of a living man entombed in a stone prison cell digging and breaking out like the *Count of Monte Christo* or the P.O.W.s in the *Great Escape* digging a tunnel and breaking out or even prisoners in Alcatraz breaking out in *The Rock*. No this is a man beaten, crucified, and declared dead having had a spear thrust in his side being placed in a stone tomb and then on the third day after this not being there and then many terrified disciples beginning to start saying they had met him alive. This is not a feat of great human strength...it is an act of God.

(PP6) Grave robbers or disciples would not have been able to get passed the guards (even though of course later they agreed to accept money to say that they fell asleep – if they'd been Roman guards they would have been put to death for this). Grave robbers would not have left the valuable linen cloth or taken the naked body through the streets. The disciples were clearly too terrified and disillusioned to break the Sabbath and come and steal the body.

If the guards or the Pharisees or Pilate or Herod could produce the body and display it publicly Jesus would just have been another “local hero” – a great man but certainly not all the person he claimed to be – able to forgive sin, bring in the Kingdom of God and rise from death! The stone is rolled away not to let Jesus out but for people to see in – he is already risen! (*)

To say – “**you can't keep the good man down**” is an **understatement!** There was an earth quake, angelic appearances and the guards were so terrified they collapsed, frozen in fear like corpses. We are told other graves were ripped open too. **The angel speaking to the women** says *He is not here; he has been raised, just as he said. Come here and see the place where he was lying (*)*. *Go quickly now and tell his disciples, he has been raised from death, and now is going to Galilee ahead of you; there you will see him! Remember what I have told you.* They then meet the risen Jesus – take hold of his feet and worship. He knows they are afraid – so would I have been! He won't let them cling on to him – he has work to do and so do they.

BREAKOUT: we ourselves need to do this and can because of the resurrection of Jesus! Leave behind the grave clothes that restrict us and live differently.