

Nicodemus and the Gift of a Royal Burial

3.31.24

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Intro. The unlikeliest of people can often have the biggest impact.

A. Henrietta Lacks is that kind of person.

1. Henrietta was a poor tobacco farmer from Virginia. Her death was remarked by no one except her children, her family, and her friends.

However, [Henrietta Lacks](#) is the source of the HeLa cell line—her blood contained uniquely immortal cells that can live outside her body indefinitely.

After the birth of her fifth child in 1951, Henrietta was admitted to Johns Hopkins University Hospital complaining of “a knot in her womb,” and doctors took a sample of tissue. It was soon noticed that, unlike normal cells, Henrietta’s cells did not die after a few days but rather continued to grow, doubling every 20 to 24 hours.^[10]

Henrietta’s cells can be found in the trillions in laboratories around the world. They have been used by [medical researchers](#) studying not only cancer but also hemophilia, influenza, leukemia, and Parkinson’s disease. They were also used in developing the polio vaccine, the cancer drug tamoxifen, chemotherapy, gene mapping, and a whole host of other uses.

The HeLa cells show no signs of dying. Henrietta Lacks, however, died within months of her admission to the hospital due to a malignant tumor... She was buried in an unmarked grave, never knowing that she would go on to save millions of lives and that her remarkable cells would live forever. Henrietta’s grave finally received a headstone in 2010.

2. Henrietta never knew the impact she had on the world.

B. The Gospel of John follows a man named Nicodemus.

1. He was incredibly smart and knowledgeable.
2. But he did not easily grasp the depth and meaning of Jesus' teachings.
3. So, he starts off as a man secretly listening to Jesus but unwilling to make a firm commitment.
4. But, in the end, God uses Him in a way that surprised everyone.

C. The beauty of Easter Sunday is that the Jesus is alive and He wants you to be alive with Him.

1. This Gospel isn't only for the elite, the wealthy, or the put-together.
2. The Gospel is for all of us, regardless of where we come from.
3. This morning as we look at Jesus' last hours, we see how God used Nicodemus and how Nicodemus blessed the world through His gift.

John 19:31–42 (CSB)

JESUS'S SIDE PIERCED

³¹ Since it was the preparation day, the Jews did not want the bodies to remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a special day). They requested that Pilate have the men's legs broken and that their bodies be taken away. ³² So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first man and of the other one who had been crucified with him. ³³ When they came to Jesus, they did not break his legs since they saw that he was already dead. ³⁴ But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. ³⁵ He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows he is telling the truth. ³⁶ For these things happened so that the Scripture would be fulfilled: **Not one of his bones will be broken.** ³⁷ Also, another Scripture says: **They will look at the one they pierced.**

JESUS'S BURIAL

³⁸ After this, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus—but secretly because of his fear of the Jews—asked Pilate that he might remove Jesus's

body. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and took his body away. ³⁹Nicodemus (who had previously come to him at night) also came, bringing a mixture of about seventy-five pounds of myrrh and aloes. ⁴⁰They took Jesus's body and wrapped it in linen cloths with the fragrant spices, according to the burial custom of the Jews. ⁴¹There was a garden in the place where he was crucified. A new tomb was in the garden; no one had yet been placed in it. ⁴²They placed Jesus there because of the Jewish day of preparation and since the tomb was nearby.

1. Nicodemus is one of the first to recognize Jesus' kingship.

A. Nicodemus has come a long way in three years.

1. The first time we see him in John 3, he comes to Jesus at night and is completely confused about being born-again and why Jesus came.
2. Then, he defends Jesus' right to a fair trial but doesn't exactly declare that Jesus is the Messiah.
3. And then, on this terrible day, Nicodemus steps out of the shadows and offers to help bury Jesus.

B. Consider this:

1. The disciples have deserted Jesus, but Nicodemus is there to help Joseph ask for the body.
 - a. More than likely, that means Nicodemus was there during Jesus' crucifixion.
 - b. That may explain why John is the only one who mentions him.
 - c. John was the only disciple not to desert; thus, he probably saw Nicodemus among the crowd.
2. Nicodemus, who originally came at night, openly carried Jesus' body from the cross to the tomb for preparation.

a. It is possible that Nicodemus and Joseph enlisted slaves to help carry the body. Otherwise, they would have been unclean for 7 days and unable to eat the Passover.

b. Yet, maybe they were willing to become unclean for Jesus since Jesus was willing to be cursed for them.

c. But we simply cannot know for sure.

3. Nicodemus' gift to Jesus is a kingly burial.

a. This gift of a kingly burial is a central part of this passage.

b. It is also the last mention of Nicodemus.

c. The one who was on the outside, unsure and uncertain, is last seen giving his life's wealth to bury Jesus.

2. The Trash Heap of History?

A. Notice the opening of this passage:

³¹Since it was the preparation day, the Jews did not want the bodies to remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a special day). They requested that Pilate have the men's legs broken and that their bodies be taken away.

1. It violated not only Jewish law but God's law.

Deuteronomy 21:22–23 (CSB)

²² "If anyone is found guilty of an offense deserving the death penalty and is executed, and you hang his body on a tree, ²³ you are not to leave his corpse on the tree overnight but are to bury him that day, for anyone hung on a tree is under God's curse. You must not defile the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance.

2. The Jewish leaders were religious enough not to violate God's command but sinful enough to kill an innocent man.

3. They were religious enough not to want to invoke a curse on the land but not decent enough to want this Jewish rabbi to have an honorable burial.

4. So, the Jews request Pilate to break the legs (which speeds up death) and then take the bodies away.

B. The idea of Jesus' body being in full possession of the Romans is too much to think about.

1. The last touch of human dignity is to offer a respectful burial.

a. This is why combatants and terrorists often desecrate the bodies of the dead.

b. It's one last indignity.

2. The Jewish leaders did not even want Jesus to have a decent burial.

3. They didn't want a curse upon their land by leaving him hang, but they did not want to honor this Jesus of Nazareth either.

4. They hoped the Romans would do their dirty work one more time.

C. But Joseph and Nicodemus are used by God.

1. Both of them are Jewish leaders.

2. But they had seen in Jesus what their colleagues could not.

3. And they request Jesus' lifeless body, so that instead of being confined to the trash heap of history, Jesus would have a proper burial.

3. A Kingly Burial.

A. Notice what is said:

1. ³⁹Nicodemus (who had previously come to him at night) also came, bringing a mixture of about seventy-five pounds of myrrh and aloes. ⁴⁰They took Jesus's body and wrapped it in linen

cloths with the fragrant spices, according to the burial custom of the Jews.

2. ⁴²They placed Jesus there because of the Jewish day of preparation and since the tomb was nearby.

B. Joseph and Nicodemus fulfilled all the law, not just a few parts.

1. Their colleagues said “throw him away” so that we may not break the law.

2. But Joseph and Nicodemus said, “give him to us” so we may fulfill the intention of the Law.

3. What religion was willing to cast aside, love dignified.

C. Joseph and Nicodemus do more than dignify Jesus.

1. They give him a burial fitting a king.

2. Myrrh was commonly used for embalming the dead. It was used in Jewish burial to offset the unpleasant odor. Aloe was a powdered perfume that created a pleasant fragrance. A customary honorable burial would have involved washing the body, anointing it with oil, and/or placing spices (i.e., myrrh and aloe) within the wrappings placed around the body (cf. v. 40). When mixed together, the two spices would have created a pleasant fragrance with which to honor the body of Jesus.¹

3. What stands out is the amount of spices.

1. Nicodemus brings 100 Roman pounds worth, which is about 75 pounds in our measurements.

2. Earlier in John, we see that Mary gave 1lb which was a year’s wages.

3. If Mary anointed Jesus with about one-year’s wages of perfume, did Nicodemus bring over a lifetime of wages

¹ Edward W. Klink III, John, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 818.

(about a hundred-year's wages!) to anoint his crucified body?²

D. It seems that Nicodemus, who at first held back and came to him at night, now holds nothing back.

1. Were these spices meant to be used by Nicodemus to bury himself and his family sometime in the future?
2. Had he been buying some piece by piece, in anticipation of a future day?
3. Had God been preparing Nicodemus for such a moment as this all along?

4. Three days in the Garden tomb.

A. I had never noticed the connection.

⁴¹There was a garden in the place where he was crucified. A new tomb was in the garden; no one had yet been placed in it. ⁴²They placed Jesus there because of the Jewish day of preparation and since the tomb was nearby.

1. John was specific that Jesus was buried in a tomb that was placed in a garden.
2. We know that this tomb was owned by Joseph.
3. And it had to be a new tomb, for once a tomb is used it is not clean and would not have been acceptable for Jesus.

B. The enormous amount of spices and the garden tomb tell a message:

1. Together, they proclaim the message that Jesus was, indeed, a King.³

² Ibid

³ The careful and intentional reference to a garden as the place of the burial of Jesus "was intended to make an extremely important symbolic point: the tomb of Jesus, like that of David and other Davidic rulers, is located in a garden." And along with the lavish amount of

2. Jesus was arrested in a garden, buried in a garden, and resurrected in a garden.

3. Not only is Jesus seen as a King, but John is showing us that Jesus is the restorer of blessings and the reverser of curses.

C. This was all foreshadowed in Genesis 3, when the original inhabitants of a garden sinned and received the Curse and the Promise

Genesis 3:15 (CSB)

¹⁵I will put hostility between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring.

He will strike your head,
and you will strike his heel.

1. The Curse that was given in the Garden was now reversed as Jesus is buried and resurrected in a garden.

2. And because Jesus became the curse, we can be restored to relationship with God.

Galatians 3:13 (CSB)

¹³Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, because it is written, **Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.**

5. God used Nicodemus and Joseph to fulfill part of the Divine Plan.

A. Think about it:

1. None of the disciples could afford to give Jesus a lifetime's supply of spices.

2. Who else in the crowd that day had an unused tomb close by that Jesus could borrow for three days?

spices (v. 39), the "implicit statement is that Jesus is the legitimate heir of David and the Messiah of Israel³

3. Two men who started on the fringes ended up blessing Jesus like no one else could.

B. Perhaps you are on the fringes of a relationship with Jesus today yourself.

1. You are a good person who goes to church.
2. But relationally, you are unsure, distant, and hesitant.
3. You are visiting Jesus "at night," on the edge, hedging your eternal bets just in case this Jesus thing is true after all.

C. To the Nicodemus' in the room, the only way to worship Jesus is with full abandon.

1. We are called to worship Him as the undeniable king.
2. We are called to give Him everything, holding nothing back so that He may use us as He sees fit.
3. It's ok to start off hesitant, but we cannot continue that way.
 - a. And for many of us in the room, it's time to go ALL IN.
 - b. Don't wait any longer.
4. Take the next step closer to Jesus:
 - a. Read your Bible like it matters.
 - b. Give the Lord every Sunday.
 - c. When it's time to worship, sing like a prisoner set free by a gracious king.
 - d. When it's time to hear the sermon, lean in and take notes.
 - e. When it's time to pray, speak to God as if you have a personal audience with the king.
 - f. And when we are out and about in our ordinary days, tell and show all you encounter what Jesus has done.

Close: Let me close today with a Question.

A. Are you ready to take the next step?

1. If you are ready to step out of darkness into the light, then today is the day.
2. If you are ready to be born-again, today is the day.
3. If you are ready to be a follower of Jesus, today is the day.

B. Here is what I ask you to do.

1. This is a really big day, and I know that you have plans for after-service service.
2. But the most important decision you can make today is to give your life to Jesus.

C. If you have never given your life to Jesus, and today you are making that decision, would you:

1. Take a connect card from your seat or from the welcome desk, and fill out your name and contact info and mark you gave your life to Jesus?
2. Then myself or one of the team will connect with you this week.
3. If you had fallen away from following Jesus, but you are rededicating your life, fill out a card and drop that in the box so we can pray with you this week.
4. Same goes if you want us to pray for you.
5. And if you have decided to follow Jesus and want to be water baptized, there is a sign up at the information desk and sign up or put it in on a card.

All of this is so that we can celebrate with you and follow up.

PRAYER

