

## “Digging Deeper”

*Biggest Losers in the Bible – part #4*

*Matthew 27:57-60*

**[1-title slide]** *Welcome, prayer.*

**[2-Question mark]** See if you can answer this riddle: “The man who built me doesn’t want me. The man who bought me doesn’t need me. The man who actually needs me doesn’t know it. What am I?” The answer is: a coffin.

**[3-Crucifixion scene]** The scripture for my sermon today might feel a little out of place at first. After all, we are at the end of our stewardship campaign, so most people probably think we’re here to talk about our resources, our time and our money and how we spend them. What’s with the Easter story, and why are we talking about tombs and graves?

**[4-tombstone]** Here’s the connection. Graves and tombs aren’t free. They are something you have to purchase, eventually, or someone has to buy it for you, more likely. The good news is, I haven’t had to buy a grave or a coffin yet. But when I do, I think I’ll ask the undertaker if it’s possible to carve my epitaph, “Please, no flowers. I’m allergic.”

Let’s face it. Funerals, gravestones, and tombs are expensive things. No matter what you believe, it is important to plan for them.

**[5-Questions]** Let’s do a quick survey. Name something you’ve saved up in order to buy. I’m thinking large, expensive purchases. For example, a car or a house. *(Make a list.)* Next, name something you gave away. *(Make a second list.)*

Imagine for a moment, after you’ve spent years saving, and you finally made the purchase, before you even open the package, turn the key, and enjoy or use said purchase, and at the last minute, someone asks you, “Can I have that?” How hard would it be to part with said item? Pretty hard, I imagine.

**[6-Lunch food]** It is no surprise that consumerism is a major issue in our world. We make transactions all the time. If we go out to dinner, someone pays the check. Even when a new restaurant opens and promises “free food”, we know that they do it to generate demand, to bring customers back to support the business. A common yet disheartening phrase is, “There’s no such thing as a free

lunch.” We all love handouts, but the truth cannot be denied: even if you didn’t pay for it, someone did. And they probably want something from you in return.

When it comes to generosity, too many of us are comfortable consuming what someone else paid for. And often times, it’s not just money, but time, effort, energy and emotion that someone gave.

Maybe it’s time we heard a story about someone who gave without strings attached, someone who knew the real meaning of generosity is to give without any thought of what they got in return.

**[7-Jesus lowered from the cross]** Here’s the setting for our scripture today. It’s Good Friday, just before sundown. Jesus, the Son of God, is dead. His body is lifeless, bloodied, and bruised. And someone has to do what no one else wants to do: Take care of the body. All four gospels tell us, the man who did this was Joseph of Arimathea.

**[8-Joseph]** According to the gospel of Mark, Joseph was a “prominent member of the ruling Jewish council.” (Mark 15:43) Matthew calls Joseph “a disciple of Jesus.” (Matthew 27:57) “A good and upright man,” Luke says, who did not want to see Jesus die. (Luke 23:50-51) This honest, prominent, Jewish man was the one who took care of Jesus’ body at his own expense.

**[9-preparing Jesus’ body]** Think about what that entailed: Cleaning the body. Preparing the embalming spices, 75 pounds of expensive ingredients, according to the gospel of John 19:39. Wrapping the body in linen cloth. And most importantly, finding a place for burial. Israeli topography consists of a lot of hills, rocks, and hard ground. Any soft places were mainly used for agriculture, not graves. They literally had to chisel the hard rock out to make tombs. This was an expensive process, not done casually. In fact, many graves were made for multiple people to share the expense.

**[10-going to the tomb]** The gospels say that Jesus was laid in a brand-new tomb, never used before. In fact, Matthew says it was Joseph’s own tomb. I have no idea who he was saving it for. Himself? His family? One thing I know, Joseph never thought about saving it for a later date. Jesus needed it now, although technically Jesus didn’t ask for it.

**[11-Joseph goes to Pilate]** Put yourself in Joseph’s shoes for a moment. It’s been a shocking day. No one expected Jesus to die, except Jesus himself. Additionally, crucifixions could last several days. The gospel of Mark says Pilate himself was surprised to learn that Jesus died so quickly. (Mark 14:33) This implies haste. Luke reminds us it is the day of Preparation, Sabbath is about to begin at sundown. There’s no time to waste. Jewish burials aren’t allowed on Saturday, and it’s not like they can leave Jesus in the morgue. There is no time for another option. So Joseph says, “It’s OK. Use my tomb.”

**[12-Jesus in the tomb]** It’s one thing to give away something precious to you. It’s another to give it to someone who isn’t expecting it and can never repay you. They bury Jesus. And then, significantly, Matthew 27:60 adds these telling words: Joseph “went away.” Joseph made his gift, gave up what was rightly his, and walked away. He didn’t ask for a receipt. He didn’t extract a promise from the disciples, such as “Dibs on the next tomb!” Joseph gave without strings attached, and his gift was irreplaceable.<sup>1</sup>

**[13-Scripture]** Matthew 6:21 says, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Jesus knows one of the best indications of our faith and commitment to him is what we do with our possessions, specifically our money. Where we invest points to what we value and we hope for.

**[14-Scripture]** Jesus does not force us to give. He does not demand “You’d better tithe, or else...!” Instead, Jesus says, “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” (Luke 6:38) While Jesus could command us how to give – he is, after all, the Risen Son of God, the Holy One, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords – Jesus invites us to understand what real giving looks like, and what it does for our souls.

**[15-Joseph takes Jesus to the tomb]** Have you ever given like Joseph? Did you freely part with a great prize, a treasured object, or an heirloom? Have you ever made a donation that totally surprised someone? I’ve seen donations to this church that have been great blessings: A widow who wrote a check for a \$1000. Someone who said, “I’ll take care of this lunch.” Last week, you all gave over

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdfcapital.org/generous-people-bible/>

\$1300 to a school in Haiti you will never visit, for the sake of children who will never be able to say thank you to us, and you gave without hesitation.

**[16-treasure chest]** Where have you buried your treasure? Are you waiting for someone to ask you for it? In a sense, God is asking you, right now, to let him use your treasure. Go ahead, give up something precious to you. Use it to love on God's church, the Bride of Christ. You can help this congregation to be known as an extravagantly generous church. You can take steps toward giving a tithe. You no longer have to withhold your earthly resources for yourself. Listen again to the full passage in **[17] Matthew 6:19-21:**

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Maybe you're not worried specifically about grave robbers, but what I worry about is faith robbers. Peace robbers. Not literal people, but those thoughts and anxieties that strike at us when we worry more about our wealth than we do about our community, our world, our church. It's been said, you can own your possessions, but more often than not, your possessions will own you.

**[18-heart and hand]** I invite you consider what your wealth can do for the kingdom of heaven. It takes faith to respond to the grace of Jesus. Giving is part of the Christian life. When you realize the depth of the love of Jesus, the one who went to the cross to forgive us our sins, who never so much as asked us to say, "Thank you," who knows we can never pay it back, when you know his love, you can never give enough.

**[19-Jesus cross]** Our purpose is to invite all people to a loving relationship with Jesus for the glory of God. We exist, not only to tell people about the gospel, but how to live the gospel. The world needs the church, whether they realize it or not. The world says, "Buy bombs, buy votes, buy single-use, throw away junk because it will make you happy." In contrast, the Bible says, "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost." (Isaiah 55:1) From

whence comes this generosity? From God's people who have learned to give without hesitation, even costly things, in order that others might know the goodness and grace of Jesus.

(Sing) "Jesus paid it all. All to him I owe.

Sin had left a crimson stain; He washed it white as snow."

*-Elvina Mabel Hall, John Thomas Grape*

Let's pray.

*(Opportunity to turn in Faith Promise Cards)*

Memory Verse: **Psalm 112:5**

"Good will come to those who are generous and lend freely, who conduct their affairs with justice."

### **Reflection Questions**

1. Think of a project or expensive item you saved and worked for. What was it? How did it feel to finally complete or own it?
2. Now imagine the thing you made or bought for yourself was given to someone else who needed it more. How would you feel?
3. Why is Joseph's giving his tomb to hold Jesus' body a generous gift and sacrifice?
4. The scripture says Joseph "went away." He never expected to use the tomb again, much less see Jesus alive. What does that say about Joseph's attitude?
5. What things in your life have you worked hard for that need to be given away to someone else? What is the purpose of generous giving?
6. Are you "digging deeper" in your faith, your compassion, and your generosity?