

Giving Your Grave

By Bobby Schuller

I just want to begin by saying that God sees you when it feels like nobody else does. Well, God always sees us, doesn't He? There are times in life where it feels like nobody sees me. Nobody sees what I'm giving, nobody sees the work I'm doing, nobody sees that I'm suffering or I'm alone. Maybe you feel that way today. I want you to know that God sees you and I believe God loves you and blesses you.

When I think about people who feel invisible, the first type of person I think of is a young mother. Young mothers who are sometimes covered in spit-up and taking care of kids and driving kids around and very often it's a kind of a thankless job. The kids don't really often know or care when they're little. It's so easy when you're like that to feel like nobody sees this; nobody sees the work I give. I want you to know God sees you and He blesses you.

Maybe sometimes when you're the spouse of someone who's sick and you care for them constantly, maybe it's been years, and of course the sick person receives some empathy and sympathy, but very often you feel like nobody sees the work you do. Very often the person is too sick to

say thank you. I want you to know God sees you and God's blessing you for the work you're doing, and your best is yet to come.

Very often we have moments in life where we can choose to lash out, or we can choose to argue so that everybody around can see how smart we are or that this issue matters to us, but instead we decide to be merciful and kind and loving and patient with our neighbor. And nobody applauds that. Nobody says way to go for being patient and kind and merciful. But I want you to know God sees that.

God sees that when we come to these points in our life, and we decide to do the right thing, even though nobody will see, we decide to be more like Jesus in all that we do. God sees that and He blesses it. I want you to know God sees you right now. He loves you and He blesses your name as we bless His. He's a good God.

I want to begin my message today by talking about the tomb of Jesus and the gift of Joseph of Arimathea. It was a big gift. Jerusalem's a special place. There are all sorts of songs written about it, ancient songs and new songs. We sing about it around Easter and we sing about it at Christmastime, and if you've ever been to Jerusalem, you'll know it's a unique and special place.

As a world traveler, I love it; it's maybe my favorite city in the whole world. It's magical because Jerusalem today is a combination of a modern city, but also an ancient city. On the outside are modern buildings and streets and lights. I had a local Israeli say that Israeli

lights are special because they come with their own sound effects, so when the light turns green everybody honks instantly. That's true.

And it comes with an amazing culture, a mix of the three largest world religions: Christianity, Judaism, Islam, all in one place. It comes with long memories and it comes with vengeance and it comes with forgiveness and it comes with hospitality and it comes with war and it comes with fear and peace, and all the stories that we tell, and of course it's where the scriptures came from.

In Jerusalem, there are many holy sites. You probably think of the western wall. But my favorite holy site, actually, is, and I love history, it's this place called the Holy Sepulchre, which is sort of grown over time as a plant would grow. The Holy Sepulchre is the cathedral or I don't even know if it's considered a cathedral, it's a network of churches all interconnected, built in progression over the last two thousand years around what they believed to be the tomb and crucifixion site of Jesus Christ.

One reason I love it is because it's beautiful and it's weird. In this picture, you can see that it's more of a white marble, but most of the time it's more of a black, because of all the candles that are lit every day, the soot gets on the walls and so it's a constant process to clean it.

As you walk around the Holy Sepulchre, you'll find various chapels and even caves and weird staircases. It totally looks like Hogwarts or some castle out of a fantasy novel, or something you would read in a

romance novel. It doesn't make sense, everything seems mixey/matchey. It seems majestic. There are people in strange clothing's.

It's run by six different denominations who all argue with each other. Not long ago there was a big fist fight, I believe, between the Armenians and the Eastern Orthodox. The priests were going at it over some issue.

There's a ladder in the Holy Sepulchre that's kind of amazing. It's been sitting in the same spot for three hundred years. Some maintenance guy back in I think 1710 leaned a ladder against a wall on the outside roof part, maybe to get a lamp or something, and he left it right at the border between where two different denominations control so that one half of the ladder was on this side, and the other half was on that side, and an argument ensued about who's side it was on. So the ladder has just remained there, and has not moved for three hundred years. Maybe you start to get a feel for why I like this place. Very mysterious. It's a magic castle, in a way. It's a holy place.

One of the most interesting things is that there's a door to the entrance, and when Saladin recaptured Jerusalem, he gave one family a key to open the Holy Sepulchre and this family, this Muslim family every day brings an eight-hundred-year-old key to the front door of the Holy Sepulchre and opens it for worshippers.

It's an interesting story, the Holy Sepulchre. A lot of historians, most historians, even the Evangelical ones regret to inform you that it's

probably the actual site of the tomb. Most Evangelicals want it to be the garden tomb because that looks more like what we think the tomb would look like, but most historians believe it's probably the real site.

The story's an interesting one. It goes like this. Not long after the death and resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, Christians began to gather in the tomb of Christ and worship there. In 70 A.D., there was an uprising of zealots in the city of Jerusalem, and the Romans came and destroyed the whole city. In the year 130, the Emperor Hadrian, who was sort of anti-Jewish and of course Judaism in Hadrian's day, Christianity was a Jewish sect, found the place and now I have not been able to find an original source for this, but a professor from Hebrew University told me this, so I don't know if that counts as a source, but he said that Hadrian found this tomb where Christians would gather to worship, and maybe because he was anti-Christian, or maybe because he was, I don't know, maybe because he thought it was a holy site, he used that tomb to become his new temple to Jupiter and Venus.

So in an attempt to destroy the tomb of Christ or maybe you could say to turn the tomb of Christ into this what Jews might think of as an abomination, he actually preserved it. Because when Constantine's mother, who was a baptized Christian, Constantine is claiming to be the first Christian, but Tim knows that he wasn't actually a Christian, he was only baptized on his deathbed. You knew that, didn't you, Tim? Of course, he did. Constantine's mother, who was a committed Christian,

traveled to Jerusalem and because her son was the emperor of Rome, she knew, based on the documents that Jesus Christ' tomb was Hadrian's temple to Zeus. And so, by trying to destroy the tomb of Christ, he actually preserved it for us today. Isn't that a cool story? We don't really know because maybe something's wrong there.

But when I hear this story, by the way, let me just divert for a minute, I love historic ironies like that because it's a reminder of God's nature that what Hadrian intended for evil towards the church and towards these worshippers, and what they experienced as something awful, might have actually been God's way of preserving the special site for those of us today. Something that normally, totally would have just been lost in the annals of time, especially in a place like Jerusalem, which is constantly being conquered and trading hands and various religions controlling it, somehow through all of that, it's at the very least, a historic wonder that we're pretty sure that that's the actual tomb of Christ. That's kind of neat.

I remember when Hannah and I went to the Holy Sepulchre, we were there during the Intifada. I've been several times to Israel, but it was Hannah's first time, and I always get emotional, and normally it's flooded with thousands of people, and everybody's trying to get in. There's lines and it's crowded and everybody's shouting and there's all these cultures that don't understand each other and languages. When we went during the Intifada, there's no tourism hardly at all in Israel, so

we just walked right in. There was no line, we walked right into the tomb itself, and like put my hands on the tomb and I was like wow, this is heavy. And then we left and like an hour later, Hannah didn't know the whole time; I didn't explain to her. I was like it's the Holy Sepulchre! And like as a knucklehead, I just thought she knew what that meant. Yes, it was very short, yes. People were shorter back then. Well anyway, she said it's so short. I know. Well anyway. It's an interesting story.

What I really want to say today is that God sees the hidden things in life. So often, the world loves to reward what's visible. The world loves to lavish the glorious and lavish the beautiful, and lavish the works of goodness that you do for everybody to see. But the Lord loves to lavish those who do what's right when it's unseen. Those who give when it's difficult and nobody applauds them. Those who sometimes even give in secret or care for those neighbors and those they love when nobody notices. God loves to come and help those who weep alone, who suffer on their own. Maybe you're in a hospital bed right now and you feel betrayed by your family, or you feel like you don't have a family, you don't have friends. God sees you and He's with you. I want you to know He loves you, and if I could see you, I'd tell you I love you, too, and you're not alone. God loves to care for those who are unseen.

And one of my favorite stories about this is this gift of the tomb by Joseph of Arimathea. Let me read the passage again. After the death of Jesus Christ, remember a crucified victim was not elevated. We often

think of like this cross here, like the crucified victim is way high and everybody can see it, but Roman law said that when you crucified someone, they had to be at eye level, so the cross meant that Jesus, when He was crucified, would have been at eye level, so He would have been about this high off the ground so He's right in your face.

And so after Jesus died, there was this man who.. this is his sort of first appearance in the story, and it says "as evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body and Pilate ordered that it be given to him." Another account says that Pilate marveled. "Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of a rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and he went away." And he went away.

It's interesting this story in its context because Joseph of Arimathea is a member of the Sanhedrin, meaning that he was not only a devout Jewish person, but as a wealthy man, he was a person of influence and he was a part of the body that committed Jesus to crucifixion. Now Joseph himself obviously wouldn't have supported Jesus' crucifixion, he probably would have hated it, but when Jesus was crucified, remember He was crucified like this and He would have been naked. Crucified victims, whether they're slaves or rebels were supposed to be left to be devoured by birds and by dogs. And it says that Joseph of

Arimathea, this Jewish man saw Christ on the cross, and remember, at this time, all the disciples except for John had just abandoned Christ, denied Christ, Peter denied Him three times, and there is Joseph looking at his rabbi, the son of God, the greatest man who had ever lived, and he said no, I am not going to let my rabbi be picked apart by birds and by dogs. And when he went before Pilate, as a wealthy man, he took a huge risk asking for this body.

The only reason you'd be crucified in the Roman Empire was for treason. If you support someone who's crucified for treason, your political enemies can use that against you to take your stuff or to take your political power. Joseph of Arimathea didn't care. He asked for the body.

And a tomb is a very expensive thing made for you and your family. It was regarded as important to the end of days when the Lord would resurrect the dead and you would be there with your family, raised from the dead. Perhaps he didn't care about that, either. And just by touching Jesus' body, Joseph of Arimathea would have become unclean for seven days. He didn't care.

And I picture this man probably old, wealthy, grieving, seeing his rabbi and Messiah dead on the cross, and he would have probably, with some help, taken the cross and laid it down, and Joseph would have pulled those nails out of Jesus' wrists, pulled them out of the feet, and he would have very carefully taken the body, and with the help of

Nicodemus cleaned the body of all of its blood and dirt and vinegar, maybe weeping, and he wrapped the body in linen, and he placed it in a tomb and he just went away, the Bible says.

And that says it all, doesn't it? That he just went away. I don't know if Joseph of Arimathea believed that Jesus would be raised from the dead. The other disciples clearly didn't. I don't think Joseph was doing this for his own glory. He just did it for the Lord, and he did it for himself because he had to in his own way do what was right and just went away. And maybe little did he know he planted the most important seed in human history – Jesus Christ, who became, and of course in His resurrection the light and life of us all.

But the thing I pull most from this story is the importance of doing in your heart what you know is to be right and good, even if you might lose all your money, even though you might lose all your power, even though nobody else is doing it, even though all the disciples have walked away, you believe in your heart that it's the right thing to do, then do it, and God will see it and God will bless it. Amen.

God sees you! God sees you when you weep alone. God sees you when you give and it hurts, or you don't feel like you can't afford it. God sees when you're a caretaker and He sees when you're a father and a mother, or a grandparent to kids whose parents have walked away. He sees when you're a mentor. He sees when you don't get to go have fun with your friends because you're doing what is right to help those who

need you. He sees you when you decide not to lash out at people and be angry, but instead decide to be kind and decide to laugh with people and enjoy people. He sees that and He blesses it.

I believe that life in the same way that sort of Joseph of Arimathea, in a way, planted Christ, maybe that's excessive, I don't know, but at least provided a place for Christ to be buried, in many ways, I believe that life, all of us, are preparing a harvest. All of us every day are planting seeds whether we know it or not.

Galatians says a man reaps what he sows. You probably heard your grandma say that to you back in the day. 'Bobby, he reaps what he sows.' It's usually a bad thing, right? But it's also a good thing. You are going to reap what you sow. If you sow the right types of things today, tomorrow you're preparing for yourself a wonderful harvest, even though nobody sees it. Nobody sees seeds that are planted. If today you're making all sorts of bad decisions and neglecting all sorts of things, tomorrow you're preparing for yourself a very dangerous and unwelcome harvest. You reap what you sow.

What kind of harvest are you preparing? See I think that's one of the most important questions we can ask as a disciple. Not who sees what I'm doing, who's going to reward me, how is this going to pay off, how is this going to benefit me, but rather to ask myself what kind of a harvest am I preparing for myself is the beginning of wisdom, I think. It's the fear of the Lord.

What you neglect today will neglect you tomorrow. I've heard enough stories to know that this is true. That what we neglect today will neglect us tomorrow. It's true of your health, of your body, its true of your family and your friends, its true of the work that needs to be done. Don't neglect what you want to support you tomorrow.

I remember when I was at Rancho Capistrano, at my first job I was like ah 16/17/18, and every summer vacation I got paid \$6.45 an hour. Man, that was good. And I had to be there at six in the morning, and I had this guy, Tim, who was my mentor. Tim would teach me how to fix things and he was so meticulous, so good with tools, and he taught me how to paint and how to mend things and work with tools, and I didn't know any of that stuff when I started, and by the end I was pretty good. He actually trained me to be a locksmith so I made a master key for the whole ranch, which was a fun process. It was like over 200 locks I had to reset and it was just a great experience.

And one of the interesting things about Rancho Capistrano, it was a 350-acre ranch, and even though it's kind of along the five freeway, it sort of feels like you're in the middle of nowhere. It's hard to explain. You should visit it sometime if you've not been there; it's a beautiful place. And Tim had a house. I don't know what the deal was, but there were two houses way back in the ranch, way up in the hill in the middle of nowhere, you had to go up a windy dirt road to get there, it'd be easy to

get lost and there was bush and there was a river that went by, and coyotes and birds and stuff.

And I remember, we would go up there all the time in the summer and both of these houses, they were not special houses, they were small, but both were immaculate. It's almost like Tim's spare time was just to make.. I mean he was so meticulous – every little thing, like if this thing was patched or that this roof was.. everything had to be perfect, and that was the great thing about it, kind of a perfectionist in that way. And it was beautiful and all this stuff.

Well after the ranch was sold, I believe, I can't remember all the employees were let go, and Tim, I think, moved back home, I forget where he was from originally, and it was only a year later, I remember going up to those same houses, because I still go to the ranch on retreat, and I drove up that windy road to his old house and that old like platform where we used to have dinner and listen to music and enjoy each other company and have people over in these different areas, and it was completely overrun. It had only been one year and all of the windows were broken. There were plants growing on the inside. The roof had collapsed in from something. There was a beehive inside one of them. The other one looked like some maybe drug addicts had been living in there. I mean it was gross. It looked like it had not been abandoned for just a year or year and a half, it looked like it had been abandoned forever.

So much of life is like this, isn't it? It's like brushing your teeth. You can go a couple days without brushing your teeth, but after a year you're going to be in trouble. And very often this is how life is, that the harvest that we're preparing for ourselves is not usually based on that one time you did that one thing, but it's what happens over time, those little decisions to neglect something day after day, week after week, hour after hour.

And that's why things like being a part of a church, that's why a date night with your wife or husband, that's why setting aside regular time to be with your kids or your friends or a mentor, that's why these things matter! It's not the big, big moment that changes your life. It's the pattern of regularly attending to becoming the person you're called to be! An athlete does not become a champion by having one amazing workout. Athlete commits himself daily to small rhythms that make him or her the person they're supposed to be to win the race they've been called to run.

What you neglect today will neglect you tomorrow. What you bless today will bless you tomorrow. What you bless today will bless you tomorrow. Remember my grandpa told me some advice about raising kids, he said "kids spell love differently than we do. Kids spell love t-i-m-e." Time. I think he was right, but I think everybody spells love t-i-m-e, actually. And I'm starting to realize the value and the importance of how we use our time and what it says when we choose not to spend our time

doing something that is worthwhile, that we neglect that thing to do something that's more worthwhile. Anyway.

Love is spelled t-i-m-e. And I want to encourage you today that what you bless today is going to bless you tomorrow. All of us, every day we're planting seeds. The words we say, the places we go, we're planting seeds. The music you listen to is planting seeds. The way you spend money is planting seeds. Someone said once that every dollar you spend is a vote for the kind of world you want to live in. The way you spend your time. How you wake up in the morning. How you act in your job, not just how you do your job, but how you act towards your neighbor. All of those things are planting seeds, and they're planting seeds in the kingdom of God. Even when you do something amazing for somebody and they don't know who did it, and nobody sees it, God sees it and I believe that seed will be blessed.

Friends, it's easy in this time of COVID-19 and everything else, and all the weird news cycles and everything that's going on, to just feel overwhelmed, especially when you feel like you don't have the energy to do what you need to do to press on through. Maybe you're going through a court case right now, or to press on through parenting and marriage and ministry and work and caring for people and all this stuff that you're called to do, but I want to encourage you that when tomorrow comes, and you reap the harvest of the good seeds you've planted today, you'll be grateful that you did it.

It reminds me of a stand up. Maybe I'll get in trouble for this, but Jerry Seinfeld had this stand-up thing where he talked about last night guy and today guy, and how last night guy doesn't care about today guy. Last night guy will drink and be outside and stay up and the today guy has to wake up early. I'm not as funny as Jerry Seinfeld, it doesn't come across as well. But remember that that the tomorrow version of you will be grateful that the today version remembers one thing and one thing alone – God sees when nobody else does, and He blesses the good that is done in secret, or He blesses the good that is done regardless of who sees. I'm grateful for you. You're doing a lot better than you think and I'm proud of you.

Father, we love you and we thank you so much for all that you're doing for us. There's so much we don't see that you're doing. And I ask, God, that you would increase our faith and not decrease it. I ask that you give us a faith to believe in more than enough, not just enough. I pray that you give us a faith to believe that your angels and your Holy Spirit are doing good work in the background that we can't see, and to just trust the process. I pray that you'd give us more than patience, that you'd give us even excitement for the good that is to come. And most of all, Lord, I pray over everyone under the sound of my voice that they would be blessed. That they would be above and not beneath, and the head and not the tail. That all the chains in their life will be broken forever. That they would live every day in the power of your resurrection

and your love. That every word they say would be words of life, of encouragement, of peace. And that our hearts will be overflowing with mercy and kindness and victory, and we ask all this Lord, in Jesus' name, amen.