
Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

June 12, 2016

Weekend Tomb (Location: The Garden Tomb)

*“There was a garden in the place where Jesus was crucified,
and in the garden was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid.”*

John 19:41 (Common English Bible)

Outside the city walls of Old Jerusalem, near the Damascus Gate, is The Garden Tomb, one of two tombs that are believed to be the burial place of Jesus. The Garden Tomb challenges a 1,600-year-old tradition that the site of Jesus’ burial is marked by an ancient church located within the walls of the Old City – the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Those who argue in favor of The Garden Tomb as the burial place of Jesus point to its close proximity to a hill with a rocky face that bears a resemblance to a skull, a probable place of the crucifixion. This is a highly visible location to people traveling the main road north from the city, a place intentionally chosen for crucifixions to discourage challenges, or disobedience, to the religious or civil law of the day.

The strongest argument against The Garden Tomb as the burial place of Jesus is archeological evidence that suggest that the tomb was used as a burial site in the period of the Old Testament. The witness of John’s Gospel is that Jesus was placed in “a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid.” If The Garden Tomb is not actually the burial place of Jesus, it is most certainly what the tomb would have looked like – located in a lovely garden that dates back to Jesus’ day, a place of considerable calm and beauty. Jesus’ tomb was in a garden and this garden now provides spiritual pilgrims a meaningful center of quiet meditation, worship and devotion.

There are still others who suggest that neither of these two tombs were the actual place of Jesus’ burial; that in all probability, the actual spot of Jesus’ crucifixion and burial are located several feet beneath the accumulated ruins of the city of Jerusalem. It is a fact of history that since the death and resurrection of Jesus, the city of Jerusalem was destroyed and rebuilt multiple times. What all of this suggests to me is that, perhaps, we are struggling with matters that are unimportant. What is important to the Christian witness is that the tomb, regardless of its precise location, was in fact, simply a weekend tomb. It was only used for three days.

The power of the Christian faith is not located in a specific place. The power of the Christian faith is located in a person, the person of Jesus Christ. Pinpointing the actual place of Jesus’ death and burial is less important than what followed those events – Jesus’ resurrection from the tomb, from death, and his continuing life today among those he loves. To stand in Jerusalem, that place where Jesus taught and worshiped, that place where Jesus was betrayed and crucified, that place where Jesus was buried and defeated death, is perhaps one of the most meaningful experiences available to a person of faith. But what is absolutely critical to the existence of a vital faith is the conviction that the tomb of Jesus, wherever it may be, is empty; that Jesus walks this day and each day with those who seek him.

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