

## THE SAVIOUR'S BURIAL

Mk. 15:42 And now when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, <sup>43</sup> Joseph of Arimathaea, an honourable counsellor, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus. <sup>44</sup> And Pilate marvelled if he were already dead: and calling unto him the centurion, he asked him whether he had been any while dead. <sup>45</sup> And when he knew it of the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph. <sup>46</sup> And he bought fine linen, and took him down, and wrapped him in the linen, and laid him in a sepulchre which was hewn out of a rock, and rolled a stone unto the door of the sepulchre. <sup>47</sup> And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses beheld where he was laid.

John MacArthur said to his congregation, “I want to remind you that preaching is not a spectator sport. It is not a matter of sitting and watching. It’s not a form of spiritual entertainment. Preaching is really a form of engagement, it’s a conversation. And I’ve always believed that you get from it what you bring to it. And one of the things that expository preaching does is engage you beyond the preacher with the Scripture. And that’s the intention, that you bring your Bible, and even if you sit back in the corners far away from me where I can’t really command your attention, the Word of God can command your attention because it’s right there before your eyes in your hands. And that’s very, very important because you’re engaging when you come here not with me, I’m merely a tool, I’m really a light, a reflected light to point you toward the true light which is the Word of God.”

Often when we come to the final chapters in the Gospels, most of our time is spent with the death of Christ, and His resurrection ... and that is how it should be. Having said that, though, there is another very significant part of the story, and it concerns the Saviour’s burial. It is so essential it is included in all four Gospels. ... Indeed, Isaiah had already prophesied it, **Is. 53:9** *And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death.*

Some people allege He did not die. Instead, the Gospel writers were mistaken because He *fainted* with the heat and exhaustion. They suggest He went into some kind of a coma, and that, - to the untrained eye, - He *looked* dead ... but when He was taken down from the cross, - hours later, - He revived.

And then some others concede that He *did* die, but He did not rise from the dead. Instead, his disciples made it all up! It was a ‘big con’! They came and took His body away, and then they concocted the resurrection legend.

However, God’s Word clearly says Jesus died, was buried, and rose again from the dead. ... In Mk. 15:42-47, we are told about the preparation for the

sabbath ... and about the people involved, - Joseph of Arimathea, the Jewish leaders, Pontius Pilate, the centurion, the soldiers, Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of Jesus. We are told about how Joseph of Arimathea entered the palace and requested the body of Jesus to be released to him, and we are told about how the body was prepared in the sepulchre. Despite the horrendous nature of how Jesus died, - and all the aspects which led to His death, - there is nothing chaotic, or disorderly, or disorganised. ... God had it all under His control.

John tells us that after Jesus bowed His head and died (Jn. 19:30), a sequence of events took place ... Normally, it took a few days for the crucified person to die, - it was a slow, painful, protracted death. However, Jesus took them by surprise because He died within a few hours ... He was nailed to the cross at 9 am ('the third hour'), and He died six hours later at 3 pm ('the ninth hour').

As we considered before, neither the soldiers or the Jewish leaders killed Him, - they crucified Him, but they did not actually kill Him, - no man came claim he killed Jesus! Instead, as the Saviour had previously explained, **Jn. 10:18** No man taketh it [*i.e. My life*] from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. ... He had given His life freely, according to the will of God, **Jn. 4:34** Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work ... **6:38** For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. ... No one took His life from Him for Jesus died when He Himself had finished what His Father had sent Him to do, **Lk. 23:46** And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.

Meanwhile, the Jews were not aware He had died, - they were so busy hating Him, they had not noticed! ... They had gone and made a special request to Pontius Pilate to speed up the process. ... Just for a moment, think about that ... There would have been nothing more enjoyable for them than to watch Jesus suffer, and to make Him suffer for as long as they could, and for as many people as possible to witness it so He would be all-the-more humiliated! ... That would have pleased them no end! ... And if this would have happened on just about any other time of the year, that is how it would have been, - they would have kept Jesus hanging on the cross in disgrace for days!

God had it all worked out though ... not to the plans of men, but to His own design. ... The Jews specifically did not want Jesus hanging on the cross on the Passover, so, **Jn. 19:31** The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the

bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. ... From six o'clock that Friday morning until sunset on the Friday evening they were *preparing* for Passover. When it became evening, their Sabbath began and it lasted until sunset on the Saturday evening. ... They were getting prepared! ... But for the Sabbath and the Passover not to be violated, certain ceremonial practices had to be observed. On this occasion, one of those preparations was to get rid of the three crucified criminals. ... Their bodies had to be disposed of ... and, of course, they had to die first!

To hasten their death, the Jewish leaders appealed to Deuteronomy, **Dt. 21:22** And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree: **23** His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance. ... And so John explains, **Jn. 19:31** The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. ... That is something else that is interesting ... the Jewish leaders approached Pilate on *that* occasion, but previously, when, -, not long after Jesus had been arrested, in the early hours of the morning, - they would not meet Pilate, - or go anywhere near him, - because it would have defiled them for the Passover, by coming into contact with a Gentile, **Jn. 18:28** Then led they [*the Jewish leaders*] Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover. ... But now, - ... they had 'changed the rules', and here is their hypocrisy, their double-standards, - on this occasion, - just a few hours before Passover and the Sabbath began, - they met with Pilate! ... They adapted their religion to suit themselves!

Of course, Pilate gave them what they wanted and he issued the order to break the legs of the three crucified men ... Break their legs so as to put more strain on the heart, which would affect the various physical organs, which would finally lead to asphyxiation and death all the quicker. ... And the soldiers broke the legs of the two criminals, and then they came to Jesus to break His legs too, **Jn. 19:33** But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs. ... God was in charge for He was fulfilling the Old Testament prophecy, **Ps. 34:20** He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken. ... **Jn. 19:36** For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. **37** And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced [*cf. Zech. 12:10*].

And to make sure Jesus *was* dead, <sup>34</sup> one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. ... He plunged his spear into the side of the corpse of the Saviour ... Apparently, the blood and water coming out has to do with the heart, - it is something to do with 'cardiac trauma', which leads to a 'myocardial rupture' ... The insides burst apart because of the ordeal, as the psalmist described, **Ps. 69:20** *Reproach hath broken my heart* ... crushed it, broken it into little pieces. ... And John witnessed it all, <sup>35</sup> *And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true.*

So, Jesus had died, and Mark tells us the evening was come (Mk. 15:42) ... sometime late in the afternoon, before six o'clock ... before the start of the Sabbath. The two thieves are dead, and Jesus is dead also ... and you could see where the blood and fluid had been seeping from His side. All three bodies were hanging listlessly on the crosses.

And now Joseph of Arimathea is introduced ... At the beginning of Jesus' earthly life there was a Joseph, and now here, at the end of His earthly life, is another Joseph. ... Joseph was a very common name, - it is an Old Testament Hebrew name which means 'Jehovah will add/prosper/increase' ... God's plan was prospering through the testimony of both these Josephs.

... Arimathea was also a very common name for villages along the hillsides, - 'ramoth'/'ramah' means 'hill'. For example, Ramathmizpeh (Joshua 13:26, 'the hill of the watchtower'), Ramath of the south (Joshua 19:8), Ramathlehi (Judges 15:17, 'hill of a jawbone', where Samson killed one thousand Philistines), Ramathaimzophim (I Sam. 1:1, 'double hill of the watchers', where Samuel's father Elkanah came from), Ramothgilead (I Kings 22:4, where King Jehoshaphat fought alongside King Ahab).

We don't know exactly where Joseph's Arimathea was, but obviously the way his name is presented here, - Joseph of Arimathea, - he was well-known to the early Christians in Jerusalem. He was also well-thought of for he is described as **Mk. 15:43** *an honourable counsellor*, - he was highly-respected, of good standing. He belonged to the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council ... which shows that even *there*, God had His man! ... Matthew records Joseph of Arimathea as Jesus' disciple (Mt. 27:57) ... John explains he was **Jn. 19:38** *a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews* ... and Luke refers to him as a good man, and just, and who *waited for the kingdom of God* (Lk. 23:51). ... He belonged to the same group as old Simeon and Anna had belonged. Just over

thirty years earlier, they had been in the temple when the baby Jesus was brought by Mary and Joseph to be circumcised, **Lk. 2:25** And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel ... **38** And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem. ... Throughout those thirty-plus years the hope in the Messiah had neither waned or died, but it had been passed on to a new generation. ... God always has His people throughout every generation awaiting His Son's return!

So, Joseph of Arimathea was a (secret) disciple of Christ, a believer ... He knew His Old Testament and he believed Jesus was the promised Messiah, the King Who would come to reign. ... Belonging to the Sanhedrin, he kept quiet about his allegiance to the Saviour, but there came the time when he openly confessed he was a follower for he went to Pontius Pilate. He stood up and stood out for Jesus. He knew it would cost him but he was willing to pay the price. He must not have been there in the middle of the night when the other members of the Sanhedrin had met to condemn Jesus because Luke tells us, **Lk. 23:51** **The same had not consented to the counsel and deed of them.** He did not agree with their decision ... but God had him there in the right place for this right time.

... And he kept on believing even though Jesus had died on the cross. He believed Jesus was the Messiah, and that not even death could hold Him! God had placed within his heart the love for the Lord Jesus, and a commitment that would neither break nor be broken. Doubts and fears were kept at bay, because Joseph of Arimathea kept on trusting Christ. ... As a disciple, He studied God's Word, and he knew how it promised the coming kingdom of God (Lk. 23:51). No doubt, he would have known all the Old Testament passages relating to the Messiah ... including Isaiah fifty-three ... how the coming King would be ... a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, despised, bearing our grief, wounded for our transgressions, afflicted yet He opened not His mouth ... He would have recognised it all came together in Jesus!

So, he steps out in faith and goes and asks for the body of Jesus, to bury Him with dignity. It took a lot of courage. His associates in the Sanhedrin would have quickly heard about Whose side he was on, but it didn't matter for he had chosen Christ! If he had not asked for the body of Jesus to bury it, it would have been thrown into the area known as Gehenna ... the dump, where other unclaimed bodies were ignominiously discarded.

The women were in the background (v.47), at this point. The disciples were nowhere to be seen ... but Joseph of Arimathea **Mk. 15:43** went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus. ... He wasn't for leaving until he got it! ... But Pilate did not know Jesus *was* dead! This powerful man had to check it out for himself, - **44** And Pilate marvelled if he were already dead: and calling unto him the centurion, he asked him whether he had been any while dead. **45** And when he knew it of the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph ...! The word for 'centurion' is preceded by a definite article which means this could very likely be the same centurion in v. 39, And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God. ... God had it all worked out! He had it all in place ... And the centurion informed Pilate Jesus had died, and all about how and when He died so that the body would be released to Joseph. ...

He received the body of the Saviour, and he brought it to his own private tomb, which had never been used. He laid the body of Jesus upon an area raised up off the ground, inside the tomb, **46** And he bought fine linen, and took him down, and wrapped him in the linen, and laid him in a sepulchre which was hewn out of a rock, and rolled a stone unto the door of the sepulchre. ... And through God's choice of using Joseph of Arimathea, the Lord Jesus was with the rich in His death, as Isaiah had prophesied (Is. 53:9).

John also tells us Joseph had a helper, **Jn. 19:39** And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. **40** Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. ... These two men belonged to the Sanhedrin, two of the most respected and knowledgeable Jewish leaders in the land ... That first night Nicodemus met Jesus, he said, **Jn. 3:2** Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God ... Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea ... and maybe there was even more. And this same Nicodemus had brought his supply of oils to embalm the body of Jesus. ... God had been preparing these men for the burial of the body of Jesus. Previously, they were too scared to tell their fellow-members of the Sanhedrin, but now the Lord had given them confidence ... and that marked them out as true believers ... not ashamed of their Saviour.

And something else ... When Joseph and Nicodemus took away the body of Jesus, they defiled themselves because that is what touching a dead body does ... And not only did they defile themselves, but they defiled themselves on the Passover day, the Sabbath! That means they weren't able to eat the Passover

meal. ... But what did that matter for they had discovered in Christ the Lamb of God Who had taken away their sin!

So, at the cross, a thief was saved, and a centurion and some of his soldiers, and Joseph, and Nicodemus ... From the very lowliest to the most respected ... Jews and Gentiles ... learned and unlearned. All kinds met the Saviour at the cross ... and two of them laid Him in the tomb, **Jn. 19:41** Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. **42** There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand.

Imagine, there were only two people at the funeral of Jesus. No hymns or psalms were sung. No prayer uttered. No sermon preached. No tribute to the Saviour. He was laid in the tomb, and His body left. ... And watching was **Mk. 15:47** Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses beheld where he was laid. ... They had been at the cross (v.40), and now they were at the tomb. They had followed Jesus all the way from Galilee (Mk. 15:41) because they loved Him, and they were with Him to the end.

And then when Joseph and Nicodemus left, it was the women's turn ... and they went over to the tomb and walked in, - there was no stone blocking its entrance at that time, **Lk. 23:55** And the women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulchre, and how his body was laid. ... You can see them standing there, looking, and the tears streaming down their faces ... **56** And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the sabbath day according to the commandment.

There is just one final group who went to the sepulchre ... a group who had absolutely no sympathies for Jesus ... **Mt. 27:62** Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation [*the Saturday/Sabbath*], the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, ... they again defiled the Law and met with a Gentile, *on Passover Sabbath!* ... **63** Saying, Sir [*κύριος*], we remember that that deceiver ... they didn't even say His name, they hated it so much ... and Pilate knew who they were talking about(!) ... said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. **64** Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. **65** Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can. **66** So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch. ... Each and every one of them was complicit in seeking to destroy the Gospel. ... But God was using even them to stop *anyone* from stealing the Saviour's body.

The Gospel is a wonderful and powerful story. It has no equal. It tells of how God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son. He handed His Son over to wicked and cruel men to abuse and nail to a cross. Upon His perfect sinless Son, God placed all our sins to be dealt with completely and forever ... never to be held against us, in any shape or form. Jesus died for us on the cross, and His precious body was laid in the tomb ...

Jesus paid it all, All to Him I owe!