

Buried by a Friend

Mark 15: 42-47

Our text records a somber and uncertain time for Jesus' followers. He and the other malefactors are now dead. Calvary has become silent as the mocking crowds have dispersed, leaving the soldiers to their work. From a human perspective, all seemed lost as Jesus gave up the ghost and died upon the cross.

The bodies of the crucified were not usually handled with dignity. If the Romans removed their lifeless bodies, they were merely dumped into the trash heap, without any means of burial. Some were even left upon the cross for the vultures and animals to consume. This was done as a warning to others of the consequences of committing crimes within a Roman province.

The disciples have fled for fear, and it appears John had already begun to care for Mary, being obedient to the command of his Lord. With the body of Jesus needing to be buried, one most would not expect came forth, desiring to bury Jesus. This act of kindness was born not out of mere curiosity or desire for personal satisfaction, but of a love and devotion for Jesus. This man was a committed follower of Christ.

As we examine the [insights](#) revealed within the text, I want to consider the thought: [Buried by a Friend](#).

I. The Arrangements for the Burial (42-45) – Mark records the arrangements made in order to provide a proper burial for Jesus. Consider:

A. The Urgency (42) – [And now when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath](#). Mark described the time as being that of preparation, the day before the Sabbath. The Jewish Sabbath began at sundown, 6:00 pm on Friday evening, and lasted until the next sundown, 6:00 pm on Saturday evening. Fridays were spent as days of preparation for the Sabbath, since the Jews did not permit work to be done on the Sabbath.

- We know Jesus died at 3:00 in the afternoon. This left only three short hours for Jesus to be buried within the restrictions set forth by the Jews. The Jewish leadership demanded strict adherence to the laws regarding the Sabbath, and would not have granted any leniency for the burial of Jesus. If Jesus' body was to be buried, instead of being thrown into the trash heap, or left upon the cross for at least twenty-seven more hours, His burial had to happen quickly.

B. The Integrity (43) – **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.** We find an unlikely candidate came and sought the body of Jesus, so that he might provide a proper burial. I say that with no disrespect to Joseph at all, but most would not have thought Joseph would have involved himself in such a controversial issue. Joseph was from the region of Arimathaea. In the Old Testament, this city was known as Ramah, located about twenty miles northwest of Jerusalem. It was the hometown of the great prophet, Samuel.

- Mark described Joseph as an honorable counsellor, who also waited for the kingdom of God. Joseph was a member of the powerful Sanhedrin, the Jewish council who consented to Jesus' death, and brought Him to stand trial before Pilate. When the votes were cast regarding the guilt of Jesus, Joseph refused to condemn Him. [Luke 23:51 – \(The same had not consented to the counsel and deed of them;\) he was of Arimathaea, a city of the Jews: who also himself waited for the kingdom of God.](#)
- Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, believing the Gospel, and waiting for the kingdom of God. [John 19:38 – And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus. Luke described him as a good and just man.](#)

C. The Bravery (43) – **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.** We must remember that Joseph was one of the Sanhedrin. The high priest would not have been pleased with his refusal to condemn Jesus. Likely he was considered a sympathizer and traitor. Joseph was determined to honor the Lord he loved and served. He came with boldness before Pilate, desiring the body of Jesus so that he might provide a proper burial.

- This took great courage and bravery. Some are critical because John records that Joseph went secretly for fear of the Jews, but we were not there, and our lives were not in danger. This is a man who had gained wide respect, one who had established himself as a leader with great influence and status. We don't know the circumstances of his conversion, but at this moment, Joseph is a committed follower and disciple of Jesus. He was willing to risk his position and reputation in order to serve the Lord. (Some may be critical, but few are willing to risk everything they possess for our Lord. Joseph stands as a great example and challenge for us.)

D. The Delivery (44-45) – **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.** As Joseph came before Pilate, requesting the body of Jesus, Pilate was

amazed that Jesus was already dead. The Roman crucifixion was devised to inflict as much pain and suffering possible. Often those who were crucified endured the horrors of the cross for days before they died a slow and agonizing death. Calling for the centurion to confirm Jesus' death, Pilate consented and gave the body to Joseph. (This serves as a reminder of the horrific death Jesus died, bearing our sin, enduring the wrath of God, and tasting death – all for you and me!)

II. The Attention in the Burial (46-47) – While we don't have a lot of detail regarding the burial of Jesus, we have enough to know Joseph provided an honorable burial, with great effort and love. Notice:

A. The Detail (46a) – *And he bought fine linen, and took him down, and wrapped him in the linen.* We must remember that time was not on Joseph's side at this moment. He had already spent time dealing with Pilate, and he knew he had to be finished before 6:00 pm. Joseph bought fine linen and took it with him to Calvary. There he removed the body of Jesus from the cross and wrapped His body in the linen. This was all done in order to provide the Lord with as honorable a burial as possible within the time he had. It was a common practice to wrap the bodies of the dead in linen cloths prior to burial.

- Mark doesn't record it, but Joseph was not alone at Calvary. Nicodemus also came and helped with the burial. *John 19:39-40 – 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.* Most agree Nicodemus was also a member of the Sanhedrin. These men stood to suffer great loss by their devotion to Jesus. No doubt their commitment to the Lord would result in their dismissal from the Sanhedrin. They would have been despised by many who knew them. Having handled a dead body, they would have been ceremonially unclean, and unable to participate in the Passover meal and festivities on the coming day. Again, we must admire their devotion to the Lord and willingness to serve Him, whatever the personal cost or consequence.

B. The Devotion (46b) – *and laid him in a sepulchre which was hewn out of a rock, and rolled a stone unto the door of the sepulchre.* Jesus was not buried in a common, ordinary grave. He was buried in a tomb that had been hewn out of a rock. Most agree this was a tomb that Joseph had likely already secured for his own burial. (He may not have fully realized it at the moment, but Jesus wouldn't need it long; He would only borrow the tomb for three days and would rise again triumphant over death!)

- Joseph had to have been a man of means, one who possessed material wealth. Only the wealthy could afford tombs hewn in rock. These were viewed as symbols of status and wealth, serving to memorialize the legacy and contributions of those buried within. No tomb or burial site is more revered and recognized than the tomb in which Jesus was buried. The sacrifice of Joseph became a memorial unto the triumph of our risen Lord. The tomb would not serve to honor the memory of Joseph; although the Lord will reward his faithfulness, it continues to memorialize the hope and assurance we have through our resurrected Lord.

C. The Discernment (47) – *And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus beheld where he was laid.* We concluded our last study recognizing these women were witness to the events of the cross. While most had abandoned Jesus, these were determined to follow Him, even unto the end. Mark reveals they must have remained near the cross, even after Jesus' death. Likely they followed Joseph and Nicodemus unto the tomb, observing the place where Jesus was buried.

- Again, the commitment and devotion of these women stand as a challenge for all who follow Christ. We must abide faithful in service to Him, regardless of the cost or circumstance. There is no place to abandon our faith or reason to fail in our commitment to the Lord. He was faithful unto death for us; the least we can do is serve Him with the lives we have received.

Conclusion: As I studied this passage, the words of Jesus came to mind. *Luke 9:23 – And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.* Clearly, Joseph lived out this command as he denied himself, sacrificing greatly to follow the Lord. While salvation is a free gift of our Lord's marvelous grace, serving Him will come at a cost. Are we willing to deny ourselves, and take up our cross daily to follow Him? I want to be committed to the Lord, regardless of the cost or circumstance. There is clearly room for improvement in my life. How is your relationship with the Lord? Have you repented of sin and submitted to Him in salvation through faith in His finished work on the cross? If so, is your life surrendered to His will? If there are needs, come to Jesus for the help and provision you need.