



## **Mark 15:42–47**

42 It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, 43 Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. 44 Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. 45 When

he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. 46 So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. 47 Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid.

## **Reflection**

As evening approaches on Good Friday, Jesus' body has hung dead on the cross for an hour, perhaps two. This was not unusual. In fact, the Romans usually refused burial for those crucified. More often their bodies were either left on the cross to decay and be carrion for the birds or simply

thrown into a pile on the ground.

Evening is approaching which means time is of the essence. It's Preparation Day. Sabbath begins at sundown and this is a special Sabbath given that it is Passover week. The Jewish authorities have pressured Pilate to have all bodies removed from Golgotha, so as not to defile the land on the Sabbath. To this end we read in John 20 that the Roman soldiers broke the legs of those crucified on Jesus' right and left which would have caused them to die quickly of suffocation, being no longer able to push themselves up for air. With the three men dead, time is of the essence for Joseph of Arimathea if he wants Jesus' body. That and the fact that it is against Jewish law to move a dead body on the Sabbath which begins at 6pm, less than

three hours away.

But who is Joseph of Arimathea? A very brave man to be sure. Our passage names him a disciple. And the bravery of this disciple points us very strongly by way of contrast to the cowardice of the Eleven; that and the example of Jesus' female followers who haven't left his side. They were with him at the foot of the cross until he died. And they won't let his dead body out of their sight. At the end of our passage they're still standing a lonely vigil over his grave. In the ancient world, women weren't allowed to be disciples, but despite this prohibition and despite the shame and whispering that would have occurred as a result of following Jesus around, they've ministered to his needs and did not leave his side for a moment even in his dark-

est hour. And this Joseph of Arimathea, a disciple of Jesus but not a member of his inner circle like the Eleven, exhibits extraordinary bravery in approaching Pilate himself for Jesus' body, the body of a recently slain revolutionary. Surely this must have marked Joseph as a man for the Romans to watch very closely in the future, if not arrest on the spot.

Joseph was not only brave. Matthew's account tells us that he was also very rich. Here is the rich man who does enter the kingdom of God in contrast to the rich young ruler in Matthew 19. Here is the rich man that God has brought through the eye of the needle. Joseph was also a prominent member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council, which may explain his access to Pilate and Pilate's granting of his

request. In John we read that Joseph was a secret follower of Jesus amongst the Sanhedrin. He followed him secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. Perhaps Joseph was also the inside source that enabled the gospel writers to record Jesus' Jewish midnight trial. Either way, despite the little we know of this man his name is immortalised in all four gospel accounts because of his actions this night,

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The tomb's his. How else could he come about one so quickly in such pressing circumstances? The manner in which he buried Jesus also attests to Joseph's wealth. John tells us that he prepared Jesus' body using about 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes which would have cost a small fortune. But that was only the beginning. A new tomb cut out of rock is the for the privileged few. The equivalent today might be walking in a cemetery past headstone after headstone

and then coming across a family vault or crypt, like a small (or not-so-small) ornate house made of marble and surrounded by a private garden. All this just for one man. The manner of Jesus' death and the manner of his burial could not be more discordant. Killed as a criminal but instead of his body left to rot on a cross or lying in an unmarked grave, Jesus is buried with the rich; which is exactly what Isaiah prophesied would happen some 800 years beforehand,

He was assigned a grave with the wicked,  
and with the rich in his death, Isaiah  
53:9

Joseph of Arimathea. A remarkable man. He defied the religious establishment, put



his life on the line, and gave his own family tomb to his master. Jesus has a way of bringing the best out in us. This secret follower of Jesus has nailed his colours to the mast and will be remembered throughout all of history for it. A remarkable man. And yet our passage ends with remarkable women.

47 Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid.

From a remarkable man, to remarkable women. No mourning was permitted for those who were executed under Roman law, which makes these women brave. They were the last at the cross, and the first at the tomb. Brave.

Marys and Joseph. Common names to be sure. And yet there must be some poetry in Jesus' life in ending in the same way that it began. Marys and Josephs. Unlikely people demonstrating extraordinary faith in the most harrowing of circumstances. That's the story of Christianity down throughout the ages. Jesus uses the least of us, the most unlikely amongst and brings out the best in us. He so often uses the weak to shame the strong and the unlikely to accomplish great things; at the end, just as in the beginning, and everywhere in between.

## **Think**

Take some time now to consider again this surprising little passage of Scripture. You might like to reflect over Christians in high

places. Do you pray for them? Perhaps you're one of them? If so, are you following Jesus secretly like Joseph did? Could now be the time to nail your colours to the mast? Why is it do think that God has placed you as a leader in your field? In your position of power and responsibility how can you influence our culture for Jesus?

Or you might like to reflect again over the remarkable faith and bravery of these women. Consider how countercultural their expression of their faith was. They are an inspiration to us. Is there a similar way that you can express your dedication to Jesus in our culture?

## **Pray**

God places his people exactly where he

wants them. And Jesus Christ brings out the best in us, especially in adversity. Pray for the advancement of his kingdom today, through the work of Christians in high places as well as – and far more normally – the unsung, courageous daily gospel work of the millions of normal Christians through whom Christ is building his church.