



## **John 19:38–42**

38 Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. 39 He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about thirty-five kilograms. 40 Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped

it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. 41 At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. 42 Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was near by, they laid

## **Reflection**

(Today's reflection is given by Justin Mof-fatt.)

After the brutality of the crucifixion of Jesus; after the revelation of trust of Jesus towards his Father (Remember that "Jesus said, 'It is finished.' And with that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit"); and after

the the piercing of his side to guarantee his death, comes this touching scene of the laying of Jesus body in a tomb.

My text today is John 19:38-42. The detail is lovely, and involved two important new friends of Jesus.

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Important people have so much to protect. People who have hit rock bottom often have nothing to lose. I think you could argue that this is why the lepers and the tax collectors, the prostitutes and 'sinners' flocked to Jesus. They didn't care what anyone else thought. They didn't have a reputation to protect. They had a problem, and they knew that Jesus was the solution.

Joseph of Arimathea was an important person with much to protect. And we are told here in verse 38 that:

‘Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders.’

I don't think we are meant to judge him. I think we are meant to see his humanity in this moment. He has fears, like we all do. He cared what others thought, as we all do. And he feared for his life, as every disciple of Jesus did, and many millions more will do in the two millennia following the resurrection of Jesus. Joseph is a very human character.

And Nicodemus is an equally human character. Look at verse 39:

‘He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night.’

See that? John emphasises that Nicodemus came to Jesus ‘at night’. That encounter was recorded way back in John 3, where Nicodemus asked Jesus an important question: ‘what must I do to be saved?’ Jesus said that it wasn’t just about keeping the commands (it’s not just about values or ethics or even obedience), but about being ‘born from above’. Jesus had said to Nicodemus that if he really was ‘Israel’s teacher’, he should know these things. In other words, if he’d properly read his Bible, he would know that a resurrection comes after death, and that this only comes by the Spirit, which is like the wind blowing.

He should have known Israel's history.

But here, I just want you to note that he is a timid sort of fellow. Well, timid re his reputation. I'll say it again. I don't think we are meant to judge him. I think we are meant to see his humanity in this moment. He has fears, like we all do. He cared what others thought, as we all do. And he feared for his life, as every disciple of Jesus did, and many millions more will do in the two millennia following the resurrection of Jesus. Nicodemus is a very human character.

But – and here is the key – their timidity didn't stop them from honouring Jesus, and eventually being known for doing so! I wonder if we need to be like them, by honouring Jesus even in our very human capacity to give way to fear.

## Think:

What did they do?

First, Joseph asked Pilate for the body of Jesus in verse 38, which was a risk, and we are told:

38 With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away.

What about Nicodemus? What did he do?

39 'Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about thirty-five kilograms.

He wanted to honour Jesus, rather than mock him. And teamed up, what did they



do?

40 Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. 41 At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. 42 Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was near by, they laid Jesus there.

They laid him in the dust of the earth, in a new tomb, in Joseph's own tomb (we know from Matthew's Gospel), in a garden, and properly cared for.

I don't want to give away the ending. \*Spoil-

er alert\*. But in the next chapter, Jesus is raised to life again. He was raised by his Father, and is the one now offering peace through forgiveness ahead of a return in order to 'renew all things'.

And that action; that movement: alive, then laid in the dust, then raised again, can sum up Israel's history, and in fact human history, and even my personal salvation. Have you pondered that? Israel was alive, but through sin was laid in the dust of slavery in Egypt and in the dust of exile in Babylon, and yet the promise was that God would raise them up.

That's my story too! I was laid down in the dust through sin. Paul says in Ephesians 2 that 'we are dead in our transgressions and sins'. But he raised me up with Christ

and seated me in the heavenly places.

In fact, I couldn't be a recipient of life without him being laid in the dust. I couldn't know the joy of forgiveness without him being laid in the dust of the earth. I couldn't have the power of the Spirit in me, without him being laid in the dust of the earth and raised again. I would never have experienced new birth without him being laid in the dust of the earth and raised again to give me new life.

## **Pray**

Thank God for that this gift that comes through the finished work of Christ. May this gift speak to my fears about my reputation. Pray against fear.

And pray for our world. It is in such turmoil. But Jesus died so that one day all things may be put to rights. Paul puts it like this in Colossians 1:

Colossians 1:19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

So there is hope for the world. Pray for the hope of the gospel to shine in all the places where 'dust' seems to reign. C.S. Lewis famously put the power of Jesus 'being laid in the dust' like this:

'One may think of a diver, first reducing

himself to nakedness, then glancing in mid-air, then gone with a splash, vanished, rushing down through green and warm water into black and cold water, down through increasing pressure into the death-like region of ooze and slime and old decay; then up again, back to colour and light, his lungs almost bursting, till suddenly he breaks surface again, holding in his hand the dripping, precious thing that he went down to recover.

Jesus went down to come up again and bring the whole ruined world with him.'

Thank God that Jesus was laid in the dust of the earth.