
Jesus' Funeral

"After these things Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate granted permission. So he came and took away His body. Nicodemus, who had first come to Him by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. Therefore because of the Jewish day of preparation, since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there" (John 19:38–42).

All of us, I believe, find it difficult to picture the Son of God dying on a cross; in addition, it is almost as hard for us to envision the burial of His body. Nevertheless, both His death and His burial go with His advent as God the Son became incarnate. He came to be the sacrifice for our sins and His offering Himself for us necessitated His allowing Himself to be killed on a cross and buried. Amazingly, He left it up to His followers to bury His body.

These events that occurred remind us that the coming of Jesus into this world had characteristics about it that no person or group of people could have ever dreamed up. The Son of God, the highest of the high, the King of kings and Lord of lords, was arrested, tried, beaten, brutally killed, and left on a cross for public disposal! Who could have imagined this!

Jesus gave His spirit up to God late Friday evening. The sun was about to go down. Mark wrote that "evening had already come" (Mark 15:42). Perhaps it was only an hour or so before nightfall. The soldiers would have taken the bodies of the thieves down and would have disposed of their bodies in some inhumane way, such as throwing them into a ditch or casting them into an unmarked grave. Jesus' body would have suffered the same fate had it not been for the care given it by loving servants.

Two men conducted the burial: Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. All four Gospels tell of the reverent removal of the body by Joseph; however, each Gospel will add some special detail to their description. This would be the only time Joseph is mentioned in the Gospels.

Furthermore, only John adds the part about Nicodemus. He supplements what the other three Gospels say.

These two men were both members of the Jewish Council, the council that was responsible for the trial and crucifixion of Jesus (Luke 23:50; John 3:1). Maybe they had not been summoned to the meeting of the council, or, if they had received a summons, they did not go.

Joseph was a rich man who owned property in Jerusalem (Matthew 27:57). He lived in Arimathea, a village that was located somewhere in the hill country of Judah (Luke 23:51). He decided that he would go to Pilate and ask permission to bury the body of Jesus. His wealth and position would give him standing as he made his approach to Pilate for Jesus' body. Mark said that he was "a prominent member of the Council who himself was waiting for the kingdom of God" (Mark 15:43a). Luke said that he was "a good and righteous man (he had not consented to their plan and action)" (Luke 23:50b, 51a). He was a disciple, but he secretly hid his devotion to Jesus, for fear of the Jews (Matthew 27:57; John 19:38).

Mark said, "He [Pilate] granted the body to Joseph" (Mark 15:45), that is, he gave Joseph permission to take the body of Jesus down from the cross and bury it. Pilate had to check on whether He was already dead before he gave this answer. Mark wrote, "Pilate wondered if He was dead by this time, and summoning the centurion, he questioned him as to whether He was already dead. And ascertaining this from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph"

(Mark 15:44, 45). He was surprised that Jesus was already dead, but he granted Joseph's request. Quickly, this councilor went to the cross and took the body down (Luke 23:53).

John mentioned Nicodemus in three separate references. He told the story of Nicodemus going to Jesus by night (John 3:1, 2). Again, he told of him daring to reproach the chief priests and Pharisees when they began to speak with scorn about those who had failed to carry out an arrest of Jesus (John 7:47–51). Thirdly, John mentioned him in connection with Jesus' burial. He joined Joseph, bringing a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes with which to anoint the body of Jesus.

What kind of funeral, then, did Jesus have?

First of all, we notice that His funeral was brief. You would think that the crowds of the earth would have gathered at the tomb for the reading of the finest eulogy that man could write. But no, if there was any eulogy at all, we are not told about it. These two men, perhaps with some help from others, managed to carry the body to a nearby tomb that had been donated by Joseph (Matthew 27:59, 60). They laid the body to rest inside the hewn-out, solid-rock tomb, wrapping it carefully with the linen cloth, and putting the myrrh and aloes in the folds of the linen. They did their work as quickly as possible because of the approach of evening and the furor that surrounded His death. Any oration that was uttered over Jesus' lifeless body was short and hurried.

Further, His funeral was attended by only a few. The immediate attendants seemed to have been the two men, Joseph and Nicodemus, and a group of women who gathered nearby and watched the burial. So far as we know the apostles were not present, not even John. When Jesus lowered His head in the sleep of death, when the legs of the thieves were broken and they succumbed to the sickle of death, the spectators at the cross went home. "Why stay around here now? He is dead," they must have reasoned.

However, a few could not go home. Their devotion to the Christ would not allow them to resume their lives until Jesus had been properly buried. One Joseph had cradled the little body of baby Jesus in his arms in Bethlehem, and

now another Joseph carried the body of Jesus in his arms and buried it in Jerusalem. God has always used human hands to attend to His work. The women who had listened to Him preach and had believed in Him stayed with Him until they could do nothing else for Him. The greatest funeral of all time was attended by only a handful of people.

Thirdly, His funeral was tender and touching. Yes, we wonder why these two men waited so long to make public their faith in Him; and we wonder why those who had known Him and walked with Him could disappear so easily, so quickly, and so totally. However, what we do see are sympathy, tender care, and the respect that were born of reverence and daring belief.

Joseph did as the Jews had done; he asked for Pilate's consent to "take away the body of Jesus" (John 19:38c). They had asked for his consent to have the three bodies "taken away" (John 19:31b). However, Joseph wanted to honor the Son of Man, while the Jews wanted to get His body out of their sight so that they could prepare for the Sabbath. Joseph was going to bury Jesus' body even though it was dangerous to be known as His friend at this time. He who had held his faith in secret "for fear of the Jews" (John 19:38b) now "gathered up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus" (Mark 15:43b).

"Nicodemus who had first come to Him by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight" (John 19:39). While Joseph was engaged in making his appeal to Pilate, Nicodemus was getting together his gift of spices. He became a true partner in devotion and sacrifice, for the myrrh and aloes combined into an expensive gift toward Jesus' burial.

Fourth, Jesus' funeral will live forever. Our Lord did not worry about His burial or whether or not an oration would be made at His tomb. He knew that all of that would take care of itself. In the wonderful providence of God the burial turned out to be a fulfillment of prophecy. It was in accord with the Scripture, which had foretold that the dignity of His burial would be in sharp contrast with the shame of His death. Isaiah wrote, "His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in his death, because He had done no violence, nor was there

any deceit in His mouth" (Isaiah 53:9).

Jesus' death had been and would remain the greatest event in the history of the world. Anything associated with it would be read and pondered until the end of time. Very few would attend it at the time, but the multitudes of the earth would sit before the picture of it in the Scriptures, weeping over the wickedness of men, but celebrating the love of Jesus and the

wonderful, indestructible life that He lived.

Eddie Cloer



Do not give any thought to your funeral; give thought to your life and how you should live it. If you live your life properly, your funeral will take care of itself.