

## INTRODUCTION

The burial of a loved one is a tender moment. Our thoughts are mainly on that person, but it also reminds us of our own mortality. That is true in connection with Jesus' burial.

## THE PEOPLE

Joseph was a member of the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin. It was responsible for Jesus' execution.

He was not party to their decision, indeed he was a secret follower of Jesus. He "waited for the Kingdom of God", obviously believing that Jesus was God's Messiah.

He had a high position in society both as a councillor and a man of wealth. That often hinders people from identifying with Christ (2 Corinthians 1:26) and from getting personally involved. It did not hinder him. It gave him access to the Roman Governor and prevented protests by Jesus' enemies.

He did not leave the task to subordinates but used his own hands to remove Jesus' body and bury him.

This showed humility as well as courage and devotion - a mark of Jesus' followers.

Joseph was also prepared to suffer loss. He buried Jesus in the tomb reserved for himself. We sometimes think the only real service is what produces good; this was no more than an act of love.

He also respected the position of Pilate, requesting the body of Jesus even though Pilate had acted unjustly. That is an example for God's people as they live in society.

Pontius Pilate was the Judge. Since the news of Jesus' early death surprised him he checked to make sure - 'justice' had to be done. It reminds us that God the Judge of All will use perfect justice when he applies the penalty of sin.

In permitting Jesus' burial Joseph showed him more respect than his enemies did.

Nicodemus was another Council member and a scholarly man. Jesus had referred to him as "the teacher of Israel".

He was a disciple as a result of Jesus' teaching. We meet him in John 3 but are unsure of the result of that conversation. We see the result after Jesus died.

In those two men wealth and scholarship combined to honour the Saviour. Business and academia do not always understand each other, but they are in harmony when they follow Christ.

Whether or not they had the resurrection in mind their conduct should influence us to treat the bodies of the saints with care and respect rather than thinking of them as nothing but dust.

The fourth party at the cross was the group of women who had followed him from Galilee and watched him die. They took note of where he was buried so that they could anoint the body when time permitted.

## THE PLACE

The place of burial was a garden. What a contrast to the disorder, death and ugliness of the cross! Disorder had entered the Garden of Eden; now the Saviour was re-entering the Paradise of God. It was provided by Joseph his disciple. His sin (and that of others) had led Jesus to the cross; now Joseph served his Redeemer by providing for his last need.

On the cross Jesus was "numbered with the transgressions". After putting sin away by his death he lay in a new tomb, separate from sinners.

He was its only occupant and it was in a conspicuous place. When he rose on the third day it was obvious whose grave was empty.

## THE EXPERIENCE

Burial is the greatest humiliation a human can face. It was the last stage in Jesus' humiliation. He shared it with us.

It is the ultimate in loss of control. Jesus was totally dependent on others. As a human he had no control over his future.

The Father answered his faith. He provided an honourable burial through his saints. Two honourable men took responsibility for him, anointed him and wrapped him in a clean linen cloth, then laid him in a new garden tomb. Other victims of crucifixion were thrown on the burning rubbish tip that Jesus used as an illustration of hell.

What Joseph and Nicodemus did for Jesus in his need is a reflection of God's love for us.

Although burial was part of his humiliation it was also the beginning of his glorification. He was done with sin and his circumstances reflected that.

"My flesh shall rest in hope" are the words of Psalm 16. Because he had put away sin his burial was not punishment in any sense; it was rest. He had committed his spirit to the Father, and the Father would reunite body and spirit never to be separated by death again.

## THE LESSONS

Jesus said to his disciples that because he overcame they would overcome also.

The humiliation is past, and his people will share his rest.

He looked forward in faith to a glorious resurrection and his people can do likewise.

Burial remains a humbling thing but that is appropriate for it reminds us of what our sin did to the Son of God. We must never divorce that from awareness of his grace; joy and humility constitute the blend of faith.