



The Gospel of Mark

A Living Word Independent Bible Study



The Gospel of Mark
Part 43
Mark 15:42-47

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(NIV)

INTRODUCTION

Jesus' death happened on Friday evening, before dark, as the beginning of Sabbath was approaching.

We often think of Sabbath as being "Saturday", but in fact it was from sundown Friday evening until sundown Saturday evening.

Contact with dead bodies was forbidden on the Sabbath.

Thus, the death of Jesus so close to the onset of the Sabbath generates some urgency with regard to retrieval and burial of his body.

Mark's final passage prior to the account of Jesus' resurrection informs us that Jesus was properly, and respectfully taken care of by followers, even after his death.

Mark 15:42 (NIV)

It was Preparation Day
(that is, the day before
the Sabbath). So as
evening approached,

“Preparation Day”

As explained parenthetically, this language was used for the day before the Sabbath.

“as evening approached”

The day's end is approaching fast.

Jesus died at 3:00 PM (the ninth hour).

Sabbath began at about 6:00 PM Friday night.

It is now somewhere between 4:00 and 5:00 PM, leaving little time to prepare Jesus for burial, since it could not take place on the Sabbath.

Mark 15:43 (NIV)

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.

“Joseph of Arimathea”

All four Gospels refer to him in this regard, as the one to retrieve Jesus' body.

Arimathea is about 20 miles northwest of Jerusalem.



https://history.wikia.org/wiki/Joseph_of_Arimathea

Mark 15:43 (NIV)

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.

“a respected member of the Council”

This refers to the Jewish Sanhedrin.

“who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God”

For Mark, this language means he is sympathetic to Jesus' goals, even if not committed to the movement itself.

The later Gospel writers enhance his role in the narrative:

In both Matthew and John, he IS a “disciple of Jesus”.

In Luke, he “had not consented to the Council's purpose.”

But for Mark, he is NOT named a “disciple”, but is an otherwise unknown figure who did this for Jesus.

The reason, in Mark's Gospel, is simply that he was sympathetic to Jesus' goals of the kingdom of God.

Mark 15:43 (NIV)

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.

“went boldly to Pilate”

The action was bold, because it could be dangerous to show concern among the Romans for a man condemned to death by Rome.

But equally dangerous to show concern among his fellow Sanhedrin members, and potentially be labeled a friend of Jesus.

One possible motivation: to not allow the “land to be defiled” on the Passover:

Deuteronomy 21:22-23 – “If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse. You must not desecrate the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.”

Jews were also very concerned that the dead receive proper burial.

Joseph might also have believed that Jesus was a great prophet deserving of a respectful burial.

He KNOWS Pilate might refuse him.

But he also knows Pilate knows that Jewish custom was opposed to letting bodies hang overnight, and that Pilate would want to avoid Passover controversy.

Mark 15:44-45

(NIV)

Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead.

Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph.

“Pilate was surprised”

Most crucifixion victims suffered for two to three days or longer before dying.

So Pilate asks the centurion for confirmation of the death before granting Joseph’s request.

There WERE stories of faking crucifixion deaths to allow families to rescue victims, and Pilate is wary of this possibility.

“the centurion”

It is possible that this is the same one who had declared Jesus the Son of God ... but not necessarily.

“he gave the body to Joseph”

Thus, Pilate HAS received the confirmation he needs.

Mark 15:46 (NIV)

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.

“bought some linen cloth”

All of what is described here was standard burial procedure.

The text of Mark’s Gospel doesn’t actually SAY that this was Joseph’s own tomb.

Matthew’s Gospel is the only one that makes this explicit:

Matthew 27:59-60 – “Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock.”

Being from Arimathea, 20 miles away, it might be unlikely for him to have a family tomb in Jerusalem.

Burial of the body of an executed criminal in the family tomb was not permitted until a year had elapsed.

THEN, the bones could be gathered up from a “criminal’s tomb”, placed in an ossuary, and then put in the family tomb.

Matthew’s and Luke’s emphasis on a “new” tomb are meant to communicate clearly that this is NOT a “criminal’s tomb”.

“rolled a stone”

This is to seal the tomb.

There are examples of this type of tomb with round stones by the opening in Jerusalem even today.

Mark 15:47 (NIV)

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

“Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph”

These are two of the same women who were looking on at the crucifixion.

They now know with certainty where Jesus’ tomb is, in order to visit the correct place on Sunday morning, after the Sabbath.

Without these women, it is possible that none of Jesus’ followers would have known where to look for Jesus’ body.

There is no indication in any Gospel that Joseph of Arimathea was in communication with Jesus’ disciples.

Mark 15:42-47

(NIV)

SUMMARY

Due to the actions of a Jewish leader who was sympathetic to Jesus' message of the coming kingdom of God, Jesus is able to avoid being treated like a common criminal in death.

He is removed from the cross before dark, so as not to desecrate the land according to Jewish law.

He receives the appropriate burial treatment that the limited time available permits.

He is not placed in a "criminal's tomb", but in a tomb either owned or at least affiliated with a member of the Sanhedrin – likely, a nice tomb.

The tomb is sealed by a large rock rolled across the entrance.

Finally, two women who have been Jesus' followers are witnesses of the burial, and know where to go to pay respects and complete the burial treatment upon the close of the Sabbath.

All that remains is Mark's description of the events of that Sunday morning!



Bibliography

The following materials have been used as sources for this Bible study:

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