

The battered body of Jesus hung on the cross. He had surrendered His spirit into the hands of His Father. His followers couldn't believe it. Life seemed defeated. How could the Creator be dead? Did this mean evil had triumphed and God had lost the cosmic battle with Lucifer? (Ephesians 6:12) Were all the forces of darkness rejoicing? Had the promises of God failed? It seemed as if all hope was lost. Did they dare to imagine His promise to rise from death would possibly come to pass? Looking at that mutilated body hanging there lifeless, knowing His spirit was now in the Father's hands, who would dare to cling to that hope? (2Samuel 14:14a)

³¹ Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. Bodies left on a tree during the Sabbath were said to defile the land. (Deuteronomy 21:22-23) They didn't want the cries of suffering fellow Jews to mar the special Sabbath. Breaking their legs would cause the crucified to quickly suffocate. Then they could be thrown on Gehenna, Jerusalem's trash heap, out of sight and out of mind.

Consider again the irony. They want to finish off the Son of God so they can worship God. They want to celebrate the feast, which is a picture of the redemption in Jesus, so they have to get Him off the instrument of torture. They want the Redeemer out of sight so they can remember their redemption. They don't want the land to be defiled by leaving a body on the tree so they want to throw their Creator's body to the vultures waiting in the city dump. They want to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread, a picture of examining our heart and removing sin from our life, while they committed the sin of the ages. There is a similarity with every "religious" person that rejects a personal relationship with Jesus. It's ritual over substance, man's opinion over God's! It's evil! (Mark 7:6)

"Quick, get Him out of your conscience so you can celebrate this ritual. Don't get quiet and listen to His Spirit speak to your heart. He might interrupt your Bible study time. Just zone out while you are at church, His word might speak to your heart and actually ask you to do something about your supposed faith." You see, these Jewish leaders weren't so different from us when our pride allows a religious spirit that would steal our relationship with Christ. (Isaiah 29:13)

³² The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. A sharp blow from a metal mallet was all it took to break the legs between the ankle and the knee. Unable to push themselves up to breathe, the crucified quickly succumbed to asphyxiation.

The excavated bones of a crucified man from Givat ha-Mivtar (discovered near Jerusalem in 1968), whose legs had been broken, provide confirmation of this practice. ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version.

Commented [notes1]: 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.
Eph 6:12 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 14 Like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be recovered, so we must die.
2 Sam 14:14 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: 22 If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, 23 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.
Deut 21:22-23 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: 6 He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me."
Mark 7:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: 13 The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men."
Isaiah 29:13 (NIV)

33 But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. **34** Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. Jesus had already surrendered His spirit into the hands of His Father. (Luke 23:46) Nevertheless, the soldiers could not take the chance that He might be still alive. They would suffer the same sentence of any that escaped their custody. It was easier to simply thrust the spear into His heart to be certain. The Roman spear was a six-foot long shaft of light wood with an iron spearhead. One thrust and out poured the serum that had built up in the pericardium sack and blood left in the chambers of the heart. (1John 5:6-8)

Commented [notes6]: 46 Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last. Luke 23:46 (NIV)

35 The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. John was standing there. He is declaring that he personally witnessed this. Jesus didn't swoon. He didn't take a drug that made Him appear to be dead. No one survives a lacerated heart. The blood and water tell us that all the theories that claim His physical body didn't die on the cross are nonsense. We have an eyewitness. He recorded this so that you may believe!

Commented [notes7]: 6 This is the one who came by water and blood--Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. 7 For there are three that testify: 8 the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. 1 John 5:6-8 (NIV)

36 These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken," John continues to remind us that this is all according to the words of the prophets. It was no coincidence that the Romans didn't need to break Jesus' bones. It was the fulfillment of a prophecy from Psalm 34:20. It is especially significant to the Jews because the Passover Lamb they had just eaten was not to have any of its bones broken. (Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12) Jesus was declared by John the Baptist to be the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. (John 1:29)

Commented [notes8]: 20 he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken. Psalms 34:20 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: 46 "It must be eaten inside one house; take none of the meat outside the house. Do not break any of the bones. Ex 12:46 (NIV)

37 and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced." Over four hundred years earlier, Zechariah wrote of a time to come when the Jews would look on the One they pierced and mourn as one mourns for the loss of their only child. (Zechariah 12:10) John saw this piercing by a Roman spear as a prerequisite for that prophecy to be fulfilled. Again, it was not a coincidence but happened according to the Word of the Lord. The God who dwells outside of time could speak those words to David and Zechariah hundreds of years before they happened so that we would believe. It's my understanding that when Christ returns the Jewish people that survive the time called "Jacob's Trouble" will again look on Him they have pierced and mourn in an even more profound way as they accept Him as their Messiah. (Romans 11:26-27)

Commented [notes10]: 12 They must not leave any of it till morning or break any of its bones. When they celebrate the Passover, they must follow all the regulations. Num 9:12 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: 29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! John 1:29 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: 10 "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. Zech 12:10 (NIV)

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 Jews. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. To avoid the body of Jesus going on the trash heap, the wealthy Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate to ask permission to take the body. This must have been surprising to Pilate that a member of the Sanhedrin wanted to honor the body of a man his colleagues thought was a blasphemer.

Commented [notes13]: 26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. 27 And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins." Romans 11:26-27 (NIV)

³⁹ He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. You will recall Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus in John chapter three when Nicodemus said they knew Jesus was from God because no one could do those kind of miracles if they were not from God. (John 3:2) Jesus told him that he needed to be born again and told him that the Son of Man would be lifted up like the serpent in the wilderness. (John 3:14-15) It had happened. Nicodemus watched Jesus' words come to pass and it may have been at that moment that he remembered and was indeed born again.

Nicodemus had spent a great deal on those spices. Apparently the two of them had gotten together and decided that they were going to jump ship. They saw the contrast between Jesus and Caiaphas. They knew the murder of Jesus was motivated by envy and financial gain. (Mark 15:10) Even though they held positions in their government that would be comparable to a Senator, they decided they would walk away from that prestige and follow the crucified man from Galilee. This was their "coming out of the closet" so to speak. They had been secret followers to this point, but now they felt compelled to declare where their allegiance belonged. (Mark 8:38)

Think about how hard a decision this must have been. To follow Jesus when He was alive was one thing, but to declare allegiance to a crucified Messiah would seem so senseless. Yet, they could no longer stay silent. What was it that changed them from secret followers to out right disciples? Was it the dignity in which Jesus confronted Annas and Caiaphas? Was it Jesus' warning that they would see Him at the right hand of the Father and coming in the clouds of heaven? (Matthew 26:64) Was it the way He endured the cross, or the three hours of darkness and the earthquake? (Matthew 27:51) Ultimately, it was the grace of God working in their hearts. (John 6:44)

It is a temptation to be a silent follower today as well. You can hang on to your social dignity a little longer if you don't announce your allegiance to Jesus of Nazareth. As soon as you say you are a follower of Jesus, a born-againer, a Bible believing Christian, you can see the attitudes of people toward you change. Imagine making that declaration in Pakistan or North Korea! For Joseph and Nicodemus it wasn't a declaration in word, but in action. They were going to do something that not only said they were followers of Jesus, but that they rejected their nation's spiritual leaders. They would even lose the privilege of participating in the rest of the feast, because touching Jesus' dead body meant they were unclean. (Numbers 19:11)

Did they understand they were touching God's sacrificial Lamb, which was the reality of what the feast portrayed? Did they see that as they searched their hearts during the Feast of Unleavened bread that there was the sin of silence that needed to be swept from their lives? They were the only 2 out of 70 Jewish leaders to make that stand. The gate is narrow that leads to life. (Matthew 7:13)

Commented [notes14]: 2 He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."
John 3:2 (NIV)

Commented [notes15]: 14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,
15 that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.
John 3:14-15 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: 10 knowing it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him.
Mark 15:10 (NIV)

Commented [notes17]: 38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."
Mark 8:38 (NIV)

Commented [notes18]: 64 "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."
Matt 26:64 (NIV)

Commented [notes19]: 51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split.
Matt 27:51 (NIV)

Commented [notes20]: 44 "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.
John 6:44 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: 11 "Whoever touches the dead body of anyone will be unclean for seven days.
Num 19:11 (NIV)

Commented [notes22]: 13 "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.
Matt 7:13 (NIV)

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. I wondered if this may have disproved the Shroud of Turin as it mentions strips of linen (*othonion*), but on further research I found it does not. The body was first placed in a folded sheet (*sindon*) like the Shroud and then wrapped with spices in the strips of linen. That was the burial custom of the Jews in the first century. There has even been a physical confirmation that this was the practice of the time in a recently discovered tomb dating back to the first century. A burial shroud like that of the Turin Shroud was discovered intact 2000 years after it was placed in that tomb.

I wonder which of the two made the decision first? I'd guess it was Nicodemus because of the John chapter three encounter. Did Nicodemus convince Joseph that it was the right thing to do? Did his example of being willing to leave behind all the power and position and notoriety help Joseph take a stand? Sometimes we just need to see someone else has the guts to do what is right and it encourages us that we can do it too. (Proverbs 27:17)

The last issue of the Voice of the Martyrs was a special on people that the magazine had reported on in the past and where they were now. You would expect many of them to have died or gone into hiding. On the contrary, their ministries are, on the whole, more open and productive than ever before. Most of the things we fear never come to pass. Even if they do, we'll be like Peter and John rejoicing that we are worthy to suffer shame for Jesus' name. (Acts 5:41)

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. This tells us that the tomb of Jesus was right near Calvary. That tomb was destroyed partly by pilgrims picking off pieces as relics and finally by a Roman emperor. He cleared it to build a temple to one of the Roman gods, burying and preserving what was left of the site. Excavations show that Church of the Holy Sepulcher was an olive garden over an old quarry. When Queen Helena came looking for the site of the tomb, Christians took her to the temple of the Roman god and told her the site was buried underneath. The temple was torn down, the fill removed and a church was built on the site encompassing Calvary and the place the tomb had been. First century tombs can be found within the church. One of them is thought to be the other tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.

It is an important point that Jesus was placed in a new, unused tomb. Jews never mixed things such as materials in their clothing. (Leviticus 19:19) It was a reminder to remain unmixed with the pagan practices of the world. A tomb was only for one family. By putting Jesus in that tomb, Joseph was giving it to the family of Jesus. (Matthew 27:59-60) He would have to build another for his own family. Tombs were very expensive to build as they were so labor intensive to hand hew them in limestone. It was worth much more than today's family burial plot. This was an extravagant gift and is a sign of how completely Joseph had dedicated himself to Jesus. Joke: (Of course Jesus may have asked Joseph, "Hey Joe, Can I borrow your tomb. It'll only be for a few days!")

Commented [notes23]: 17 As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. Prov 27:17 (NIV)

Commented [notes24]: 41 The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Acts 5:41 (NIV)

Commented [notes25]: 19 "Keep my decrees. "Do not mate different kinds of animals. "Do not plant your field with two kinds of seed. "Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material. Lev 19:19 (NIV)

Commented [notes26]: 59 Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, 60 and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. Matt 27:59-60 (NIV)

This also fulfilled Scripture. In the suffering servant song of Isaiah chapter 53, it is foretold that the Messiah will make His grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death. (Isaiah 53:9) He did indeed die between two wicked men and yet contrary to what would normally have happened, he was buried in a rich man's tomb. How many details of prophecy have we seen fulfilled on that sad afternoon? It should be enough to convince any skeptic.

Commented [notes27]: 9 He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.
Isaiah 53:9 (NIV)

⁴² Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there. It was important to get the body into the tomb before the Sabbath began. At the sight of the first two stars, the Passover Sabbath would have begun and no work would be allowed. Nothing of any weight could be carried. They had to use a tomb nearby to get the body in, clean and wrap it with the spices, and leave before those first two stars appeared and the shofar announced the beginning of Sabbath.

In the midst of all this sorrow and sense of great loss, these two prominent men came out of the closet and became open followers of Jesus. They backed that declaration with a commitment of finances knowing it would separate them from the religious establishment to which their fellow Jews clung. They had found a relationship with their Savior and that changed their understanding of worship.

I remember when I came out of the closet with my Christianity. I was 12 years old. Pastor Ira Day preached on being a living sacrifice a couple blocks from here on the corner of Apple and Jordan. (Romans 12:1-2) The Holy Spirit convicted me that I was not entirely His. I asked Pastor Day what I should do. He told me to take my Bible with me to school and watch for opportunities to share my faith. It took a few years, but eventually the Bible went on the top of the books I carried to school. I had a long, long way to go to be like Christ. I still do. But that was my first action that declared to the world around me I belong to Jesus.

Commented [notes28]: 1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.
2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.
Romans 12:1-2 (NIV)

There has always been a desperate need for Christians to come out of the closet and be honest about their faith regardless of the cost. How else will others hear? (Romans 10:14) Most unbelievers won't walk through the doors of this church or any church. They have to see it in loving action in your life. They have to hear it in honest conversations about what really matters to you. Two thousand years ago these two men took a stand, and we are still talking about it to this day. Ask yourself what you need to do to stop being a secret Christian. Take the first step. The next ones are easier. Watch for those opportunities in conversations to declare what Jesus has done for you.

Commented [notes29]: 14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?
Romans 10:14 (NIV)

The day Jesus died, Nicodemus and Joseph both decided they would compromise no longer. They couldn't betray Jesus by being silent! Let me remind you that you understand better than they did what happened that day. Like the North Koreans we heard about last Sunday, will you put your entire life on the altar? (Romans 6:13) Will you take a stand? Will you come out of the closet with your faith in the One who died for you?

Commented [notes30]: 13 Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.
Romans 6:13 (NIV)