

Eternity Daily Bible Study - No. 332

Series: St. John's Passion - Gospel of John chapters 12-21

Verses: John 19:38-42

Topic: The Body of Jesus

Date: Tuesday 14th September

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John 19:38-42 MKJV And after these things, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus (but secretly for fear of the Jews) begged of Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus. And Pilate gave permission. Then he came and took the body of Jesus. (39) And Nicodemus also came, who at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. (40) Then they took the body of Jesus and wound it with linens with the spices, as is the custom of the Jews to bury. (41) And in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one yet had been placed. (42) There, then, because of the Preparation of the Jews, because the tomb was near, they laid Jesus.

Today's Eternity-DBS will be a little longer than usual because I wish to put to tackle British Israelite-ism, and some of the Bible Code humbug that has recently become popular and erodes the faith of many - and which have Joseph of Arimathea as a central character. You may skip the "historical stuff" and go to the devotional at the end if you prefer.

[Historical Stuff begins..]

These legends tend to have Joseph of Arimathea as a central character and cast him as an uncle of Mary (and thus of Jesus) who took Jesus to England as a child (on business trips) and returned in 63 AD (with Mary Magdelene) and the Holy Grail to found an oratory and monastery at Glastonbury and thus started Christianity in England.

Lets look at some facts - Joseph of Arimathea is already a senior member of the Sanhedrin in 29AD when he receives the body of Jesus. That means he is at least 40 (for admittance to the Sanhedrin) and probably 50 or more. In 63 AD he would be about 80. I don't think an 80 year old man would get up to all the missionary adventures he is credited with in Glastonbury.

Secondly there is no credible church historian that I know of who agrees with these legends.

Thirdly the legends are distinctly nationalistic and frequently racist in character as if God had national preferences. This is clearly contrary to the teaching of the New Testament. (Galatians 3:28, Colossians 3:11, Romans 10:12)

Fourthly they involve paganistic views of the Holy Grail and other "magic objects" such as Joseph's staff that sprouts and turns into a tree atop Allweary Hill.

Fifthly the fruit of British Israelite-ism is, and has always been, bigotry and spiritual disaster. At best it is a distraction, at worst it is a destructive heresy. Spiritual growth comes from humility, love and a focus on the cross of Christ – not on racial pride.

Sixthly such conspiracy theories and notions tend to replace the Scriptures with mystical humbug and lead people astray from the Truth that is in Christ. Moreover they regard some populist historian as having more insight than the people who put the Canon together in the early Church – who were much closer to the facts.

That said – both Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea are interesting characters in their own right. Here is a little about them, the first is from John Gill's Exposition Of The Entire Bible, the second is from the ISBE (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia)

Nicodemus; frequent mention is made of "Nicodemon ben Gorion", the brother of Josephus ben Gorion (p), the writer of the Wars and Antiquities of the Jews; and there are some things which make it probable, that he was the same with this Nicodemus; for the Nicodemon the Jews speak so much of, lived in this age; as appears, not only from his being the brother of Josephus, but also from his being contemporary with R. Jochanan ben Zaccai, who lived in this time, and until the destruction of the temple;... he (Nicodemus) is represented as very rich, and is said to be one of the three rich men in Jerusalem (r), and who was able to have maintained a city ten years.

Joseph of Arimathea (apo' Arimathei'as; for etymology, etc., of Joseph, see general article on JOSEPH): Joseph of Arimathea - a place the locality of which is doubtful, but lying probably to the Northwest of Jerusalem - was a "rich man" (Mat_27:57), "a councilor of honorable estate," or member of the Sanhedrin (Mar_15:43; Luk_23:50), "a good and righteous man ... who was looking for the kingdom of God" (Luk_23:50; Mar_15:43), and "himself was Jesus' disciple" (Mat_27:57; Joh_19:38). Although he kept his discipleship secret "for fear of the Jews" (Joh_19:38), he was yet faithful to his allegiance in that he absented himself from the meeting which found Jesus guilty of death (compare Luk_23:51; Mar_14:64). But the condemnation of his Lord awakened the courage and revealed the true faith of Joseph. On the evening after the crucifixion he went "boldly" to Pilate and begged the body of Jesus. There is a fine touch in that he himself took down the body from the cross. With the assistance of Nicodemus he wound it in fine linen with spices (compare Mat_27:57, Joseph was a "rich man") and brought it to the new sepulcher in the garden near the place of His crucifixion. There they "laid him in a tomb that was hewn in stone, where never man had yet lain" and 'rolled a stone against the door of the tomb' (compare Mat_27:57-60; Mar_15:42-46; Luk_23:50-53; Joh_19:38-42). In this was held to be the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isa_53:9.

[Historical Stuff ends..]

From all of the above we can see that both Nicodemus and Joseph were very wealthy. The one hundred pounds of spices would have been very expensive on its own. At say \$5 an ounce (cheap for perfume and spices) it would be around \$8000. It was a lavish and considerate burial in a fine grave, in which no-one had yet laid, it was the burial of a prince, or of the King of The Jews.

The growth in courage of both Joseph and Nicodemus is recorded here. Joseph was a secret disciple as was Nicodemus, who came to Jesus by night before (John 3:1-18). Now they are seen boldly asking Pilate for the body of Jesus. Their days of secrecy are over, and extra-biblical sources have them being persecuted by the Jews, even bankrupted and driven out of Jerusalem and buried in common graves. It was costly to

oppose the Sanhedrin – their own group, and to honor the One the High Priests had crucified.

John's account also puts to rest the Swoon Theory – that Jesus “just appeared to be dead”. In this account Jesus is wrapped in linen cloths with the spices placed between the layers of linen. An air-tight, extremely pungent and absolutely suffocating arrangement. A similar arrangement (a wet cloth on the face) ensured the death by suffocation of the King of Syria (2 Kings 8:15). If Jesus had “swooned” He would not have survived the burial procedure!

On another level we can see that “the body of Christ deserves the best”. The Church is now the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-31) and should be honored in all her manifestations – as local churches, house churches, cathedrals, mission stations, home groups and wherever believers meet as called out ones.

“And in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one yet had been placed.” Jesus was crucified in or near a garden! We often see pictures of Jesus being crucified atop a barren hill. But it seems it was not the actual case. The body was simply taken off the cross and placed in a tomb in the memorial garden.

The tomb was near the cross. It was convenient to move the body of Jesus there before sunset and the start of the Day of Preparation (Jewish days start at sunset), as Jesus died in the late afternoon some time after 3pm. The place of resurrection is often close to the place of death. When we are hit hard by life and die inwardly, it is often exactly where we are “buried” that we rise.

Finally the ancient prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled:

Isaiah 53:9 MKJV And He put His grave with the wicked, and with a rich one in His death; although He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth.

Jesus was the pure and innocent King of the Jews. Such a one could not stay dead, could not stay wrapped in linen and buried in myrrh and aloes. Here was spiritual power, seemingly motionless, but working a great redemption. It is interesting to note that the three points we most celebrate in Jesus life were times He was unable to lift a finger. The birth when He was wrapped tightly in swaddling clothes, the cross where the nails held Him down and the resurrection where Jesus was dead, buried and wrapped in grave clothes. Be still and know that I am God. (Ps 46:10)

Blessings,

John Edmiston

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