

John 19:38-42

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 Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. 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. 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. 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. ⁴² Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Had Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus been standing in the exact same spot just a couple hours earlier, they would have seen the crowds gathering around three crosses. Nearby they would have heard the taunts and jeers thrown at the people hanging there. They could have watched the Roman soldiers clubbing some legs so they could get home sooner and start their weekends. But the crowds had gone home now. The noises had grown silent. Now there was a sort of peace in the garden where Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus prepared Jesus' body for burial. Just a short distance from all the chaos that had happened on Calvary, Joseph and Nicodemus find themselves in a garden of peace. It's quiet. It's uninterrupted. It's a garden of peace – both in life and in death.

Joseph of Arimathea first shows up in the Bible here in this garden. Originally from a few miles north of Jerusalem, Joseph finally had settled in the city itself. It makes sense. After all, he was a member of the Sanhedrin, one of the Jews' religious councils. So he was always in Jerusalem for business. That's where he planned to live. That's where he also planned to die. The very tomb that he was about to put Jesus in belonged to him because we're told in Matthew's Gospel that he was the one that had this tomb cut out of rock. But here's the only description John decides to tell us about Joseph of Arimathea: "Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus." So far so good, but the description continues: "he was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews" (v. 38). Why be a disciple of Jesus in secret? Because he was a member of the Sanhedrin – the very group of religious leaders who put Jesus to death. If anyone knew what evil the Sanhedrin was capable of, it would have been Joseph of Arimathea. That's why he was "a disciple of Jesus, but secretly."

Also in this garden, right next to Joseph, was a man named Nicodemus. This man you have met before. It was a couple years ago, early on in Jesus' ministry. Like a lot of Israelites, Nicodemus was intrigued by what Jesus had been teaching, so he "came to Jesus at night" (3:2) to ask him some questions. Nicodemus "was a man of the Pharisees..., a member of the Jewish ruling council" (3:1). It was his job to know the Old Testament and what it said about the Messiah. Right away it was clear to him that Jesus was different. Based on the miracles Jesus had already done, Nicodemus knew Jesus was "a teacher who [had] come from God" (3:2). But Nicodemus wasn't sure if Jesus was the guy he should be following in open daylight. His Pharisee colleagues certainly didn't seem to think so. And so he came to Jesus under the cover of darkness. In these verses, we see the same sort of thing: Nicodemus sneaking off to be with Jesus as the daylight fades. Joseph and Nicodemus were two disciples hiding in the shadows. They kept it to themselves because they were scared for their lives.

It kind of reminds you of Adam and Eve, doesn't it? Back then, it was a different garden – the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve ate the fruit they weren't supposed to. They broke God's command. They knew death was coming next. They were scared. They feared for their bodies and lives, and so Adam and Eve tried to hide in the Garden, ducking behind the beautiful trees that grew in that perfect place. They didn't want to *follow* God; they wanted to *hide* from him. That's exactly what sin does. It makes you want to hide. It makes you scared. It makes you afraid of death.

So what in all the world made Joseph and Nicodemus all of a sudden come out of hiding, come out to this garden of peace, and do what they did? This was no small task! It took a lot of guts for Joseph to work up the courage, march into Pilate's palace, and ask for Jesus' body. He must have known his colleagues on the Sanhedrin would eventually find out. Plus, he was giving up his expensive new tomb. Then Nicodemus shows up with "a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds" (v. 39) worth. You would normally see that kind of an amount at a king's burial! And just by being around a dead body these two religious leaders made themselves unclean and unfit to celebrate the Passover the next day with friends and families. But Joseph and Nicodemus don't seem to care anymore. They don't seem to care how much the burial will cost them. They don't care what kind of grief they'll get from others. What Jesus' teachings didn't quite do while he was alive, his death finally did. Jesus' death worked in them a sense of purpose and a peace of mind. There in that garden they had peace. They had peace in their lives.

You may not be standing in that same garden of peace right now, but you do have that exact same kind of peace in life right now. What does Jesus' death do for you right now in your life? It changes your sinful heart. It takes a heart that was too scared to follow God – too scared of death – and gives it peace in life. I ran from God. You hid from him. We're afraid of what might happen to our comforts and bodies and lives if we openly follow our crucified Lord. And yet

God still works in our hearts. He still points you to his crucified Son, who didn't shy away from death. He points you to his Son who gave up his life so you wouldn't have to worry about losing yours. He points you to the garden of peace where two men set aside their fears and worries in order to bury his Son. And then God tells you not to hide from him anymore. He has already poured out his anger on his Son. That kind of love buries all your fears. That kind of love points you to this garden of peace and gives you peace in your life.

Jesus didn't deserve to do all the work he put in during Holy Week, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday especially. He was so busy during Holy Week. Preaching. Teaching all day. Washing his disciples' feet. Then a sleepless night filled with nonstop suffering. First he was betrayed, then arrested, then tried, then convicted, then beaten. He didn't deserve to be mocked while nails pinned him to a cross. It wasn't *his* sins that sent him there. Joseph of Arimathea's sins did, every time he was too scared to follow Jesus. Nicodemus' sins kept Jesus up there, every time he doubted whether Jesus was God's "one and only Son" (John 3:16) who was sent to save the whole world. My laziness and selfishness killed Jesus. Your gossip and anger sent God's Son to a tomb. Jesus didn't deserve to have to do all that work.

But in death he did earn the peace and the honor he got. His body earned a break from all that suffering. He earned the honor of being buried "with the rich in his death" (Isaiah 53:9). He earned the honor of being buried with spices fit for a king. Jesus earned that honor because he had been working on his plan to save you ever since the Garden of Eden, ever since Satan was told, "He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (Genesis 3:15). As you look over Joseph's and Nicodemus' shoulders, you see your dead Savior. He looks sad. He looks pathetic. He looks beaten. He hardly even looks like himself. You see Joseph and Nicodemus hurrying to wipe away the blood. You see the men wrap a layer of linen strips around Jesus and then carefully add some of the precious spices. You see them repeating the process until they're sure they've done it "in accordance with Jewish burial customs" (v. 40). You see them place Jesus in the tomb. As sad and morbid and depressing as it may look, there still is a beauty and peace in this garden. This garden has a beauty and peace because you know that your Savior's suffering is done. It's over. "It is finished" (19:30). There's a peace wrapped up with this body. You know that this is a garden of peace because your soul now has peace in death.

Have you ever thought about cemeteries like that? As gardens? That's what we try to make them look like, right? One November day a couple years ago at my grandfather's funeral, I was struck at how beautiful the cemetery was. Huge, towering oaks with trimmed limbs. Even in late November you could tell the grass was well taken care of. Flowers were still out from Veteran's Day. Gently winding paths took you past perfect rows of headstones. Ornate monuments marked out families. It looked beautiful. It looked peaceful. And then I remembered why I was there: my grandpa was dead. If it wasn't for death, there would be no need for cemeteries. But because everybody sins, death is a reality. We just don't like to dwell on it. So we try our best to cover up how unnatural and ugly death is. We try to beautify death so that it seems less stressful, less scary.

But for the Christian, Jesus' burial turns a cemetery into a garden of peace. For the believer who trusts in Christ's death and burial and resurrection, cemeteries are just gardens of peace where believers' bodies get to rest for a time. They get to rest until Christ raises them up and makes them perfect, just like he did with his own body three days after his burial. For you, your burial and cemetery will just be a chance for your body to rest from all the junk it has to go through here on earth. The temptations. The fighting. The heartache. The achy joints. The failing organs. Your sins may have killed Jesus, but he died for *you*. And as you watch Joseph and Nicodemus wrap Jesus in strips of linen, your hope and peace are wrapped up in what Jesus did for you.

Don't be scared of following Jesus out in the open. Don't be afraid of your sins or death. Don't be sad when you see Joseph and Nicodemus gently laying Jesus in a tomb. Jesus went there for you. He went there to give you peace in this life. He went there to give you peace in death. Jesus died and was buried so that you can have *eternal* rest for both body and, more importantly, for your *soul*! Jesus went there to make every Christian's cemetery a garden of peace.