

THE FIRST 15

Friday, May 24, 2024

Today is Friday, May 24 and we are studying the Gospel of John chapter nineteen.

OPENING PRAYER

Blessed Lord God, In the morning I come to this quiet place and draw near to your side. I calm my mind, slow my breathing and center myself completely on your holy presence. Open the scriptures to me and communicate the personal message you have for me today from the Gospel of John. Walk with me on this journey to the cross of Calvary and reveal your amazing grace and relentless love. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

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. 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. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. 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. Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there. John 19:38-42

REFLECTION

Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were both considered secret disciples of Jesus. They were prominent members of the Jewish elite and sat on the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of ancient Israel. Yet these two learned men secretly believed in and followed Jesus. They would have been among those gathered at Caiaphas' home for the hastily called late night meeting when Jesus was tried and condemned. They would have been aware how Jesus spent the night alone in the darkness of Caiaphas' dungeon waiting for the dawn that promised his crucifixion and death. They would have kept their identity strictly secret because of their fear. They would have swallowed their tears and hidden their grief. Yet, they wanted to give Jesus an honorable burial.

Joseph possessed something valuable - a new tomb in a garden setting that had never been used. The bodies of crucified criminals were not offered a burial of dignity, they were left to rot or tossed into mass graves. Pilate recognized Joseph as a member of the Sanhedrin and gave his permission for him to take the body of Jesus. Nicodemus also had something valuable - a large amount of spices. Imagine the effort to carry seventy five pounds of myrrh scented aloe to the garden tomb. Perhaps there were servants who helped transport such a heavy bundle. This was about a hundred times the amount the woman used to anoint Jesus at Bethany that caused people to grumble over the waste. This quantity and quality of spice was the amount used to bury a king, not a commoner. That was the point. Jesus was King.

Joseph and Nicodemus prepared Jesus' body according to proper ancient Jewish burial customs. Together they took down the body from the cross. Together they removed the nails from his hands and his feet. They saw his wounded side pierced by the sword. They extracted the thorny crown from his bloodied head. They held his corpse, touched and carried his dead body to the garden tomb. There was no doubt. They were eyewitnesses. Jesus was lifeless. Together they wrapped his corpse with the spices and strips of linen. They laid his dead body in the tomb.

Ask: What personal message might the Holy Spirit have for me about the suffering, death and burial of Jesus Christ? What does God want me to know about the lifeless body in the Garden Tomb?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, my blessed Savior, you finished your work upon the cross and completed the sacrifice needed for salvation of the human race. You breathed your last breath and gave up your spirit under cruel torture and violent death for the redemption of my soul. Forgive me for taking this great gift for granted and not wanting to stop and reflect on the great power of God's love for me and his amazing grace for all the world. Amen.