Courageous Christians who came out of the closet:

Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea

Mark 15:42–47: Matt 27:57–61; Luke 23:50–56; John 19:38–42

Willi Raphael, Zimbabwe

A painting of two people

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Introduction: Read all four accounts:

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| "When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and went away. And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the grave." (Matthew 27:57–61) | "When evening had already come, because it was the preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea came, a prominent member of the Council, who himself was waiting for the kingdom of God; and he gathered up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate wondered if He was dead by this time, and summoning the centurion, he questioned him as to whether He was already dead. And ascertaining this from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. Joseph bought a linen cloth, took Him down, wrapped Him in the linen cloth and laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses were looking on to see where He was laid." (Mark 15:42–47) | "And a man named Joseph, who was a member of the Council, a good and righteous man (he had not consented to their plan and action), a man from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who was waiting for the kingdom of God; this man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. And he took it down and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid Him in a tomb cut into the rock, where no one had ever lain. It was the preparation day, and the Sabbath was about to begin. Now the women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed, and saw the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment." (Luke 23:50–56) | "After these things Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate granted permission. So he came and took away His body. Nicodemus, who had first come to Him by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. Therefore because of the Jewish day of preparation, since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there." (John 19:38–42) |

A. Details about the burial of Jesus with Joseph and Nicodemus:

1. The story occurred around 4-5pm, just before sunset the day Jesus was crucified.
2. Joseph and Nicodemus preplanned together to bury Jesus before he died.
3. Joseph and Nicodemus did not witness Jesus’ death, like John and the women at the foot of the cross.

B. Details about Joseph of Arimathea:

1. Joseph lived in Ramah, where Samuel was born and had his Naioth prophets college:
   1. “Armathem Seipha (1 Sam. 1:1). City of Elkana and Samuel. It is near Diospolis [I], from which came Joseph of Arimathea in the Gospels.” (Eusebius, Onomasticon, AD 290)  
      A map of jerusalem with red circles and yellow text

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2. Joseph was a “prominent” member of the 71 men of the Sanhedrin, meaning he was one the most respected and influential members.
3. Joseph was a secret disciple of Jesus until the day Jesus died.

C. Details about Nicodemus:

1. Came to Jesus secretly at night at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry: Jn 3.
2. Nicodemus was a closet Christian:
   1. "Some of them wanted to seize Him, but no one laid hands on Him. The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, and they said to them, “Why did you not bring Him?” The officers answered, “Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks.” The Pharisees then answered them, “You have not also been led astray, have you? “No one of the rulers or Pharisees has believed in Him, has he? “But this crowd which does not know the Law is accursed.” Nicodemus (he who came to Him before, being one of them) said to them, “Our Law does not judge a man unless it first hears from him and knows what he is doing, does it?” They answered him, “You are not also from Galilee, are you? Search, and see that no prophet arises out of Galilee.”" (John 7:44–52)
   2. “Look, He is speaking publicly, and they are saying nothing to Him. The rulers do not really know that this is the Christ, do they?" (John 7:26)

D. Nicodemus and Joseph had much in common:

1. Nicodemus and Joseph were rich, like all first century Jewish leaders. For example, the story of the Rich man and Lazarus, the rich man and his 5 brothers were part of the high priest family of Caiaphas who condemned Jesus.
   1. The rich man was on of 5 brothers of the high priest family of Caiaphas who condemned Jesus!!! 4 living bothers plus a brother-in-law for a total of 5. Abuses of excessive wealth occurred in the first century with the high priests. Eleazar son of Annas was likely “the rich man who habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day" (Luke 16:19). Jesus directly targeted the wealth of the wicked high priests by identifying the rich man with 5 brothers as Eleazar son of Annas, and the rich man’s father as Annas.
   2. JOSEPHUS said: “Now the report goes, that this elder Annas proved a most fortunate man; for he had five sons, who had all performed the office of a high priest to God, and he had himself enjoyed that dignity a long time formerly, which had never happened to any other of our high priests.” (Josephus Antiquities 20.198).
   3. Scripture, Josephus, and Eusebius discussed the succession of high priests (Eus., Hist. Eccl. 1.10). Annas had 5 sons and was appointed high priest by Quirinius in AD 6 and deposed in AD 15 by the Judean Governor Valerius Gratus, who appointed Ismael, the son of Phabi AD 15-16. Then Eleazar son of Annas, AD 16–17 (Ant. 18.33–35). Then Caiaphas, AD 18–36 (son-in-law of Annas). Then Jonathan son of Annas, AD 36–37 (Ant. 19.313; 20.162). Then Theophilus son of Annas, AD 37–41 (Ant. 19.297). Later Matthias son of Annas, AD 43 (Ant. 19.312–316). Finally, Annas son of Annas who beheaded James, brother of Jesus Christ, AD 63, (Ant. 20.196–203). Jesus endured 6 trials, three Jewish wherein he was condemned to death by deposed high priest Annas, and his son-in-law Caiaphas, who was acting high priest AD 18-36, and three Roman where he was proclaimed innocent. The rich man was likely one of the 5 sons of Annas who had died. When the rich man in Hades said he had a living father and 5 living brothers, he counted his 4 brothers plus his brother-in-law, Caiaphas (John 18:13-14). The only possible candidate for the “rich man” is Eleazar son of Annas, who served as high priest for one year AD 16–17, after which almost nothing is known (Ant. 18.33–35). (Source: DECALOGUE CURRICULIM, STEVEN RUDD, 2024, P 51)
2. Nicodemus and Joseph were both powerful men, being a members of the Jewish Sanhedrin
3. Nicodemus and Joseph were both righteous men.
4. Nicodemus and Joseph did not agree with the Sanhedrin’s condemnation of Jesus.
5. Nicodemus and Joseph were disciples and believers in Jesus waiting for the kingdom of God.
   1. Simeon and Anna also waited for the kingdom of God: Luke 2:25–38
6. Nicodemus and Joseph knew the other was a believer long before Jesus died and had discussed it together.
7. Nicodemus and Joseph were secret “closet Christians” for fear of persecution of the Jews.
8. Nicodemus and Joseph came out of the closet at the same time in joint action in burying Jesus

E. Joseph and Nicodemus certified the death of Christ as true:

1. Muslims deny Jesus died on the cross:
   1. Quran says: "The Jews say “we killed the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, Allah's messenger” – but they never killed Jesus not nor crucified him, but Allah made it appear like Jesus had been crucified by making Judas, the betrayer, take on the physical appearance of Jesus, who instead died on the cross. The Jews have direct knowledge Jesus died except conjecture, but Muslims know for certain Jesus did not die on the cross. Allah wisely raptured Jesus into heaven without death." (Qur'an 4:156)
   2. The devil loves this Islamic false doctrine because he was defeated by the same blood that saved us:
      1. "Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him." (Romans 5:9)
      2. "Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil," (Hebrews 2:14)
2. Joseph and Nicodemus provided a Mosaic law certified double witness that Jesus had died and raised.
   1. “On the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses, he who is to die shall be put to death; he shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness." (Deuteronomy 17:6)
   2. Two worthless witnesses:
      1. "So she wrote letters in Ahab’s name and sealed them with his seal, and sent letters to the elders and to the nobles who were living with Naboth in his city. Now she wrote in the letters, saying, “Proclaim a fast and seat Naboth at the head of the people; and seat two worthless men before him, and let them testify against him, saying, ‘You cursed God and the king.’ Then take him out and stone him to death.” So the men of his city, the elders and the nobles who lived in his city, did as Jezebel had sent word to them, just as it was written in the letters which she had sent them. They proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth at the head of the people. Then the two worthless men came in and sat before him; and the worthless men testified against him, even against Naboth, before the people, saying, “Naboth cursed God and the king.” So they took him outside the city and stoned him to death with stones. Then they sent word to Jezebel, saying, “Naboth has been stoned and is dead.” When Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead, Jezebel said to Ahab, “Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth, the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money; for Naboth is not alive, but dead.” When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab arose to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it." (1 Kings 21:8–16)
   3. Many worthless witnesses at Jesus’ trial:
      1. "For many were giving false testimony against Him, but their testimony was not consistent. Some stood up and began to give false testimony against Him, saying, “We heard Him say, ‘I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.’” (Mark 14:56–58)
   4. Contrast in members of the Sanhedrin: Matthew 27:62–66
      1. Joseph and Nicodemus give true testimony.
      2. The rest of the Sanhedrin bribed worthless men guarded the tomb of Jesus to give false witness that the disciples stole the body.
3. Joseph and Nicodemus falsify the Muslim lie that Jesus never died.
   1. They carried Jesus’ body from the cross to the tomb.
   2. Joseph and Nicodemus were the best witnesses on earth as members of the Jewish Sanhedrin.
   3. Two men with the highest legal authority and trustworthiness as witnesses in a court of law.

F. Joseph and Nicodemus certified the resurrection of Christ as true:

1. The Jewish lie that the disciples stole the body from the tomb to explain resurrection is falsified.
   1. Scripture says: "Now while they were on their way, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all that had happened. And when they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, and said, “You are to say, ‘His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.’ “And if this should come to the governor’s ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble.” And they took the money and did as they had been instructed; and this story was widely spread among the Jews, and is to this day." (Matthew 28:11–15)
   2. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, our faith is worthless:
      1. "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching and your faith is vain" (1 Cor 15:14)
   3. Notice again, worthless men who gave false witnesses because of bribery were used by the Jews.
2. The rich man’s new solid stone cut tomb provided identification for the location, and needed security to prove he rose. A standard burial in the ground would not have been as secure.
   1. "Now on the next day, the day after the preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate, and said, “Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I am to rise again.’ “Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, otherwise His disciples may come and steal Him away and say to the people, ‘He has risen from the dead,’ and the last deception will be worse than the first.” Pilate said to them, “You have a guard; go, make it as secure as you know how.” And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone." (Matthew 27:62–66)
3. Joseph did not realize it at the time, but his expensive rock cut tomb destroyed the lie that the disciples stole the body and certified the resurrection.

G. Joseph and Nicodemus were agents of God who directly fulfilled scriptures: Isaiah 53:9

1. "His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death." (Isaiah 53:9)
2. He was buried according to the Jewish customs: John 19:40
   1. Joseph buried Him in his own rich man’s tomb: Luke 23:53
   2. They wrapped Him in a clean linen: Matthew 27:59
   3. Jesus was destined for an ossuary box, which was the size of the largest human femur bone.
3. Archaeology of first century burial. Steve Rudd has excavated several first century tombs and visited many others.
   1. Typical first century tombs looked like this with either round or square rolling stones to seal the entrance. Ossuaries were stored in each of the “fingers” known as :Loculi” or “kochim”:  
      [A diagram of a tomb

      Description automatically generated](https://www.bible.ca/archeology/bible-archeology-tomb-burial-Jewish-first-century-kokh-Koch-Kochim-loculus-Loculi-Khirbet-el-Maqatir-Ephraim.jpg)
   2. Tombs of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem featured square rolling stones to seal the openings:  
      
   3. First century tomb at Shiloh with square rolling stone:  
      A stone wall with a hole in it

      Description automatically generated
   4. This is the first century tomb of Helena, Queen of Adiabene and Edessa located in Jerusalem. It features body decay slabs (1 year process), body fluid drains and many loculi in which to store the ossuary bone boxes. They also had rolling stone doors to and seals to protect the contents from tampering. The tomb of Helena is typical of the kind of tomb with rolling stone that Jesus of Nazareth was buried in. He would have been placed on a stone slab as pictured below wrapped in white linen cloth. They also had many oil lamp niches in the walls for light.  
      [A person lying in a cave

      Description automatically generated](https://www.bible.ca/archeology/bible-archeology-tomb-burial-Helena-queen-Adiabene-Edessa-Jewish-first-century-kokh-Koch-Kochim-loculus-Loculi-ossuary-storage-Josephus-Antiquities20-17-Jerusalem-56AD.jpg) [A person sitting in a cave

      Description automatically generated](https://www.bible.ca/archeology/bible-archeology-tomb-burial-Helena-queen-Adiabene-Edessa-Jewish-first-century-stone-rolled-Jesus-entrance-doorway-sealed-Jerusalem-56AD.jpg)
   5. Ossuaries were cut from soft limestone, quarried in the Jerusalem area. Here is the ossuary of Caiaphas the high priest of Mt 26:57. They were just long enough to fit the a human femur.  
      [A close-up of a stone

      Description automatically generated](https://www.bible.ca/pottery/Bible-pottery-Stoneware-ossuary-Joseph-son-of-Caiaphas-high-priest-burial-cave-Jerusalem-Elaborate-Aramaic-inscription-soft-limestone-Matthew26-57-Jesus-18-36ad.jpg)

H. Joseph and Nicodemus, like the mustard seed, grow in faith:

1. Secret phase:
   1. Nicodemus visited Jesus secretly at night
   2. Nicodemus defended Jesus in the Sanhedrin and was scolded
   3. Both Joseph and Nicodemus hid their faith until Jesus died.
2. Joseph and Nicodemus were both under condemnation:
   1. "Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. “But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 10:32–33)
   2. "Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God." (John 12:42–43)
   3. “For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”" (Mark 8:38)
   4. “For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels." (Luke 9:26)
   5. "If we endure, we will also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us;" (2 Timothy 2:12)
3. Joseph and Nicodemus had to identify themselves as both Jewish leaders, and believers in Jesus to Pilate, an action that would get them both thrown out of the Sanhedrin.

Conclusion: The cost of discipleship:

1. Matthew tells us that Joseph was a disciple, a learner-Matthew 27:57-60
2. A true disciple of Christ will serve no matter how rich he/she is. It is not easy though. Mt 19:24
3. A true disciple stands out when others are fleeing. Peter and the other close friends of Jesus forsook Him, but Joseph asked for His body-Matthew 27:58
4. A true disciple will serve no matter his positions at work. Mark 15:43
5. A true disciple waits upon the kingdom. Mark 15:43
6. A true disciple must be courageous. Mark 15:44
7. A true disciple must be a good man. Luke 23:50
8. A true disciple must be just. Luke 23:50
9. A true disciple does not follow the multitude in doing wrong. Luke 23:51
10. A true disciple doesn't hide his faith!

“Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. “But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 10:32–33)

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