

Joseph of Arimathea was God's man for the moment.

Joseph has a really interesting story. He was from the small village of Arimathea which was just outside Jerusalem. In John we read that Joseph was a **secret** follower of Jesus because he feared the Jews (John 19:38). Joseph was also a member of the Sanhedrin (the Jewish ruling council). Joseph was a good and upright man, who had been there at the trial of Jesus but had not consented to the Sanhedrin's decision to crucify him.

Joseph was just the person that God would use to preserve Jesus' body.

Usually, the bodies of criminals were thrown into a mass grave and burnt, or eaten by the wild animals.
Crucifixion was about completely destroying the person in every way, even their bones!

Most had no grave.

Most had no memorial.

Most were completely destroyed and done away with, but Jesus' body needed to be preserved.

This was a problem.

It had just gone three o'clock and the next day was a Sabbath. The Sabbath day began at sunset of the day before. There were very strict rules about what could, or more importantly, what *couldn't* be done on the Sabbath. This meant time was of the essence. They would have just a few hours before the Sabbath began in which to get permission to get Jesus' body, and bury it.

For Christ's body to be preserved, God needed just the right person at just the right place.

That man was going to have to be rich. Isaiah said that: "*the Messiah was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death*" (Isaiah 53:9). He should, in other words, have been buried with the wicked but he actually would end up being buried with the rich.

This person had to be rich.

This person was going to have to have a grave close enough to get to before the evening.

They were going to have to have some clout.

Joseph ticked all three boxes.

Being a member of the Sanhedrin indicated he was wealthy and enabled him to go to Pilate and ask for the body.

The men who had followed Jesus in his life had now deserted him and gone under cover.

Now in Christ's death one who had followed him under cover stepped up and went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body.

This was a gutsy move.

Joseph was seen publicly associating himself with a criminal, one who had been stirring up a lot of trouble. In Joseph's position this meant he risked **excommunication**. It could mean the end of his **Sanhedrin rights**. It could mean the end of his **wealth** (no-one would do business with him again after this). This could mean the end of his **high social status**. His family could be **ostracised**.

The cost was great!

So why do it?

I find this really interesting. Joseph was prepared to **risk everything** for a **dead Jesus**.

Joseph didn't know then, what we now know, about what was to happen next. At the point that Joseph risked it all, **Jesus was dead**. There was absolutely nothing in it for Joseph, and yet he stepped up.

How often do we step up boldly?

How often do we really face true risk or loss?

How often do we do the right thing just because of what we'll get out of it?

Would we still do the right thing even if we got nothing?

What Joseph did was **enormous**.

Not just because he was associating with a criminal; but also because he *defiled himself*.

By going to Pilate who was a Gentile, Joseph made himself unclean. This was not something taken lightly by a Jew. He then further defiled himself by having contact with a dead body.

These things paled significantly as he and Nicodemus hurried to the site of the cross.

Still there were the faithful women standing solemnly around the cross. These two new disciples came and took down the limp body of their Lord. They tenderly drew out the nails. They washed His battered body. They wrapped Him in a clean linen cloth and anointed Him with 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes. The amount that would be used for a **KING**.

They laid Christ's body in Joseph's own brand new tomb, intending to come back and embalm him after the Sabbath. The stone was rolled in place to stop grave robbers and to stop the body deteriorating.

Jesus was left for the night.

The most famous crucifixion in history was complete.

History tells us that around **30,000** Jews were crucified at the time of Christ.

So why is it we remember **just one**? Other good men died,

Other innocent men died,

men died heroically for good causes that they believed in,

yet we remember the death of **one man**.

We remember Christ's death because of what it means.

It means God is no longer distant.

It means God came in person to earth to show us what he is like.

It means God held back nothing to show us how much he loves us.

It means God did everything to make it possible to have a relationship with him.

It means the debt of my sin and yours has been paid - **it is finished!**

And there we leave the Easter story.

Hang on, you can't stop there. You haven't got to the happy bit yet!

I know. This is a most unsatisfactory ending!

We all love happy endings, they leave us feeling so warm and fuzzy. But, maybe we need to just pause here for a bit.

Let's not rush on too quickly.

Let's just STOP and THINK about what his death meant before we move on.

Let's engage with it.

Soak it in.

So, here is where we leave the Easter story.

The women are mourning, the disciples are in hiding, Jesus is lying dead in a tomb,

but know this ...

the long weekend wasn't over.

Carla Lindsey, *the long weekend: reflections on the crucifixion of Christ*, Hamilton: Maruki Books, 2011.

Carla Lindsey is a New Zealand-based Salvationist, author and speaker.