

Luke 23:52

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

This man went unto Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus.

Analysis

This man went unto Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Joseph's action is described with stark simplicity, yet it required immense courage. **This man** (οὗτος, houtos) emphasizes Joseph specifically—this very counsellor who had opposed Jesus's condemnation now acts decisively. **Went unto Pilate** (προσελθὼν τῷ Πιλάτῳ, proselthōn tō Pilatō) indicates approaching the Roman governor—a journey requiring both physical access and social standing. As a Sanhedrin member, Joseph had the credentials to gain audience with Pilate.

Begged the body of Jesus (ἤτήσατο τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, ētēsato to sōma tou Iēsou). The verb aiteō (αἰτέω) means to ask, request, or beg. While it can indicate a simple request, in this context—asking a Roman governor for a crucified criminal's corpse—it likely involved humble petition. Roman law typically left crucifixion victims hanging as carrion for birds, or threw bodies in common graves for criminals. Requesting the body was unusual and required official permission. Pilate's granting the request (Mark 15:43-45) indicates respect for Joseph's standing and perhaps Pilate's own conclusion that Jesus was innocent.

The phrase **the body of Jesus** (τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ) is theologically significant. Sōma (σῶμα, "body") emphasizes Jesus's true humanity and actual death—He died bodily, not metaphorically. Joseph requested Jesus's actual corpse, not merely permission to honor a memory. This physical detail refutes later Gnostic heresies claiming Jesus didn't truly die or didn't have a real body. It also sets up resurrection—what is buried bodily must be raised bodily. Joseph's request fulfilled prophecy unknowingly: Isaiah 53:9 foretold the Suffering Servant would make 'his

grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death.' Joseph's wealth provided the tomb; his courage provided the means.

Historical Context

Roman crucifixion was designed for maximum humiliation extending beyond death. Bodies were normally left on crosses for days to decompose, serving as gruesome warnings. Carrion birds and wild animals often consumed corpses. Alternatively, bodies were thrown into common criminal graves—mass burial pits for the executed, denying individual burial and family mourning. For Jews, this was particularly horrific: Deuteronomy 21:22-23 required burying executed criminals before nightfall to avoid defiling the land. Leaving a body exposed overnight brought a curse.

Joseph's request was thus both pious (honoring Jewish law) and personally risky. By publicly requesting Jesus's body, Joseph revealed his allegiance to a condemned criminal. Pilate could have refused, or worse, suspected Joseph of sedition for honoring an executed 'King of the Jews.' That Pilate granted the request (after confirming Jesus was actually dead, Mark 15:44-45) shows either respect for Joseph's position, recognition of Jesus's innocence, or desire to appease Jewish sensibilities before Sabbath.

Mark 15:43 notes Joseph came 'boldly' (τολμήσας, *tolmēsas*, daring, venturing courageously), emphasizing the risk. John 19:38 adds that Joseph was 'a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews'—his public request ended his secret discipleship. The timing was also providential: Jesus died at 3 PM (v. 44-46); Sabbath began at sundown (approximately 6 PM). Joseph had only hours to secure permission, retrieve the body, prepare it, and bury it before Sabbath. His quick action fulfilled both Jewish law and divine purpose.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. What made Joseph's request for Jesus's body so courageous, and what risks did he face?
2. How does Joseph's action fulfill Isaiah 53:9's prophecy about the Messiah making His grave 'with the rich'?
3. What does this passage teach about how crisis can move secret believers to public confession of Christ?

Interlinear Text

οὗτος	προσελθὼν	τῷ	Πιλάτῳ	ἤτήσατο	τὸ	σῶμα	τοῦ
This	man went	G3588	unto Pilate	and begged	G3588	the body	G3588
G3778	G4334		G4091	G154		G4983	

Ἰησοῦ
of Jesus
G2424