

Today's Quick Word Mark 15:43-45

By Bruce Christian

MARK 15:43-45 Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph.

There are many things about the death of Jesus that were so atypical that they had the authorities and bystanders baffled. The more obvious external ones were the mid-afternoon darkness (33) and the splitting of the temple curtain and the earthquake (Matthew 27:51). But there were other things that were more subtle, more 'internal feelings', such as whatever it was that caused the on-duty Roman Centurion to say "Surely this man was the Son of God!" (39). There was also Pilate's surprise at hearing that Jesus had died so quickly. The purpose of the Roman invention of crucifixion was to make the execution of convicted criminals as public, as painful, and as drawn-out, as possible - as a deterrent. What Pilate didn't know was that this particular execution did not serve any of those purposes. This was rather the innocent 'Lamb of God' suffering God's wrath and dying in the place of a world of guilty sinners; this was the eternal, sovereign Creator of the Universe bringing all human history to its predetermined climax: the demonstration of the love of God for his world by the 'giving' of his One-and-Only Son, so that "WHOSOEVER believes in him will not perish, but HAS eternal life" (John 3:16)! It is possible that Jesus died more quickly than

was normally the case because he died, not by the normal slow asphyxiation, but of a 'broken heart'. (Many years ago, I heard a medical doctor explaining that the 'water' that flowed with the blood when the Saviour's side was pierced - John 19:34 - would have indicated such a probability.) Another aspect of Jesus' death that was atypical was the fact that Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, was prepared to 'stick his head above the trench' and take responsibility for the honourable burial of Jesus, the condemned 'criminal'. Let us all reflect on these things that show the uniqueness of Jesus' death, not as a criminal, or as a martyr, but as the Promised Saviour - a death that demands a PERSONAL response. I can identify fully with Dora Greenwell, who wrote "I am not skilled to understand what God has willed, what God has planned, I only know, at his right hand stands one who is my Saviour. I take him at his word and deed: Christ died to save me: this I read, AND IN MY HEART I FIND A NEED of him to be my Saviour. And was there then no other way for God to take? I cannot say; I only bless him, day by day, who saved me through my Saviour. That he would leave his place on high and come for sinful man to die; you count it strange? So once did I before I knew my Saviour. And O that he fulfilled might see the travail of his soul in me, and with his work contented be, as I with my dear Saviour. Yes, living, dying: let me bring my strength, my solace from this spring: that HE WHO LIVES TO BE MY KING ONCE DIED TO BE MY SAVIOUR.