Series: Jesus Died

Message: 03 Joseph of Arimathea John 19\_38-42

Text: John 19:38-42

Theme:

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Great courage was demonstrated on the day Jesus died. He was born sinless to die a sinner’s gruesome death on a Roman cross.

The entire purpose of Jesus’ incarnation [coming in flesh] was to walk a perfectly sinless path all the way to Calvary and experience the most excruciating torture on a physical, mental, emotional and spiritual level.

Before the “Light of the world stepped down into darkness” as the song lyrics suggest, Jesus knew what this darkness would include: a head to head battle with sin, death, Satan, and hell.

And He stepped into this darkness with great courage.

Not only do we witness the courage of Jesus on display during Good Friday, but also we see the courage of one of His followers stepping out of the shadows of secrecy and into the light of open association with Jesus.

**If you would, please turn in your Bibles to John chapter 19.**

This secret follower’s name was Joseph of Arimathea. John’s gospel tells us why Joseph followed Jesus in secrecy up to the day when the horrible things happened to Jesus causing his death.

John 19:38 **“After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews…”**

Jewish people, especially the religious leaders of the Jewish people, brought great fear into the life of Joseph and other Jews of the day.

And he, himself, was considered a Jewish leader among the religious elite.

Joseph was a dissenter (he voted no) when it came to the decision to have Jesus sent to an early death. All four gospels reference Joseph around the death and burial of Jesus.

Each account gives glimpses of who Joseph was as a prominent man in that day.

Matthew tells us Joseph was rich. In Matthew 27:57 we read: “**When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph…**”

Mark tells us Joseph was a prominent member of the Sanhedrin, Mark 15:43.

In Luke 23:50-51 we are told that Joseph was a good and righteous man who could make his own decisions as he looked for the kingdom of God.

While Matthew 27:57 says that Joseph was rich, it also shares another important distinction about Joseph at the end of verse 57.

Joseph “**…was a disciple of Jesus.**” Although not one of the original 12 disciples, Joseph was a bona fide disciple of Jesus.

However, the fear of the Jews kept Joseph’s association with Jesus as one of His followers in the shadows of secrecy.

Joseph had witnessed first-hand how the religious leaders of the Jews could turn his people on anyone who did not go with the flow and found themselves on the wrong side of an angry current of Jewish emotion and fury.

In multiple places in his gospel, John directly mentions the very real “**fear of the Jews**” that was a real problem that stuffed action and quieted conviction for others who may have wanted to align themselves with Jesus and his teaching.

John 7 speaks of the Feast of Booths and how Jesus was a topic of conversation among the Jews. (The feast of Booths was a time to remember that they lived in tents after leaving Egypt.)

Notice the mounting tension among the Jewish people as John describes it in John 7:11-13. **“The Jews were looking for him at the feast, and saying, ‘Where is he?’**

**And there was much muttering about him among the people. While some said, ‘He is a good man,’ others said, ‘No, he is leading the people astray.’**

**Yet for fear of the Jews, no one spoke openly of him.’”**

Two chapters later John writes about how Jesus had healed a blind man who had been born in that condition. Soon afterward the religious leaders summoned the man and his parents to try and get to the bottom of what had happened.

This healing had taken place on the Sabbath which was against the religious rules of the day. If a Jew broke a rule, then a consequence soon ensued. John describes the interrogation that took place by the Pharisees that again stirred up great fear.

In John 9:18-23 we read: “**The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight 19 and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?”**

**20 His parents answered, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. 21 But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” 22**

**(His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.)**

**23 Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.**”

To be put out of the synagogue was to be ostracized from the heart of Jewish life. (This puts me in mind of the Amish.)

This was the ultimate disconnection and exile from all social assembly and life for a Jewish person. To be banished to “sit alone in the lunchroom of life” caused great fear among Jewish people.

They had to belong. They had to be together with their Jewish friends, family, and neighbors. Not to be a part of the whole community surfaced great anxiety and fear.

This was the reason Joseph of Arimathea was a secret disciple. This was why he feared the Jews.

Fear is a powerful force that causes people to run and hide in the shadows of secrecy. This has been the case since the first sins were committed by the first two people on earth.

When Adam and Eve sinned by disobeying God and eating the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, after realizing they were naked and then clothing themselves to hide their shame, notice their next actions:

“**And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the Garden**.” Genesis 3:9

Why did they hide from God? They hid because their fear of being found out overwhelmed them and caused them to slide back into the shadows of secrecy.

But notice how God seeks them out from their hiding place within Eden.

“**But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ And he said, ‘I heard the sound of you in the garden and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.’**

**He** [God] **said, ‘Who told you that you were naked?’ Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?’**” Genesis 3:10-11

Adam came to the point where he admitted his fear. God helped him face his fears and did so by asking him questions. This series of questions helped Adam face his sin and own it as he tried to hide from God.

God did not ask the questions of Adam and Eve because He was trying to understand or gain knowledge of a situation. He asked the questions to help Adam and Eve face the music of their sin, so they then could deal with it and move forward.

God never intends for people to remain in hiding and shame. He provides a way forward once the sin in our lives is dealt with out in the open and repent.

In the case of Adam and Eve, after the confession of sin took place, God sacrificed an animal to cover their nakedness and shame with the skin of the animal. (cf. Genesis 3:21)

This is a beautiful foreshadowing of what would take place on the cross when God the Father would send God the Son to be the once and for all perfect sacrifice to cover the sin of all humanity in their hiding, shame and nakedness before Holy God.

This context makes John’s first phrase and subsequent sentence from 19:38 so rich in meaning.

“**After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly…**” then stepped out of the shadows of hiding and moved forward in his devotion to his Lord.

One of the sins Joseph overcame at that moment was the sin of fear of losing his prestige, power, and position among his fellow Jews while Jesus was alive.

And, after witnessing what happened to Jesus on the night he was betrayed, beaten, illegally tried, scourged and then put to death by crucifixion, Joseph stepped out of hiding and into the light of public association as a follower and disciple of Jesus.

Outside Pilate’s headquarters is where we see his courage overcome his fear and his loyal devotion to Jesus surface in a new light.

“**After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body.**” John 19:38

It took guts to overcome his fear and make such a request of Pilate.

Stepping out of the shadows and into the light of association as one caring and concerned for Jesus could have moved beyond banishment from the Jewish circles of influence, position, and prominence; it could have cost him his life as a fellow insurrectionist against Rome.

Pilate had just ordered Jesus to be killed because he was making an example of what happened to rivals to the throne of King Caesar.

This so-called king of the Jews named Jesus would be strung up and left to die. And any associated with this rebel king probably should suffer the same fate. And still, Joseph went to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body.

Some biblical scholars suggest Joseph likely was a leader of some prominence since he had direct access to the Roman governor and his request was received with favor.

Perhaps Pilate was so filled to the brim with Jewish leaders that he just wanted to be done with this whole ordeal concerning Jesus and the angst He had caused for all who were in town for the Jewish Passover festival.

Maybe a burial would bury this burden for Pilate. But Pilate first had to be sure Jesus already had died.

Mark’s account states that when Joseph came before Pilate with the request for Jesus’ dead body, Pilate was surprised at the news that Jesus’ struggle on the cross to survive already had ended.

Mark 15:44-45says that **“Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died. And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph**.”

Pilate was surprised that Jesus died so quickly as crucifixion usually did not kill its victims until sometimes two and three days later. This was the case of the other two men crucified next to Jesus.

Each was still alive at the end of the day and had to have their legs broken to speed up the suffocation process that soon would kill them.

However, as the scriptures state, once they came to Jesus’s body on His cross, Jesus was already dead. The soldier thrust a spear into Jesus’ side to make sure thus piercing his heart and lungs which caused blood and water to spew out.

In all this trauma that unfolded, Jesus had only been on the cross for six hours according to Mark’s gospel. Mark 15:25; Mark 15:33-37

When Pilate summoned the centurion, who was the commander of the execution squad to see if Jesus already had died, he gave clear confirmation that in only six hours Jesus no longer was alive.

It was then that Pilate gave his permission for Joseph to take ownership of the body for burial.

Once Joseph retrieved the body of Jesus after Pilate granted permission, he had to move quickly to ensure Jesus was entombed before sunset thus beginning the day of rest for the Sabbath.

If Jesus was dead by 3 pm and the sun normally set in Jerusalem around 6 pm, Joseph had a window of somewhere between two and three hours to get the body of Jesus from the cross, prepared in the tomb and then retreat to his own home for the required Sabbath rest.

But Joseph would not act alone.

John 19:39-42 “**Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight.**

**40 So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.**

**41 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. 42 So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.**”

It is interesting that both Nicodemus and Joseph were followers of Jesus in the darkness and in secrecy until they emerged after Jesus had died.

It was from the cross forward that they followed Jesus openly and out from hiding in the shadows.

Yet, at the same time, those disciples who had followed Jesus openly throughout Jesus’ public ministry, ran to the shadows and hid once Jesus was arrested and taken to the cross.

Only John, and some of the women, remained by Jesus’ side throughout the crucifixion.

But Joseph and his friend and fellow council member, Nicodemus, were there to help in the final preparations.

They prepared Jesus’ body with a number of spices, myrrh, and aloes that were sufficient for a king.

Seventy-five pounds were almost one-hundred times the amount that Mary had anointed Jesus with when she broke her vase of ointment to anoint His head and feet before wiping it off with her hair at Bethany as recorded in John 12:1-8.

This final anointing and preparation by Joseph and Nicodemus was a hefty sum and costly gift of honor, not to mention the burial inside the tomb in which no other body had been laid to rest.

Burial in this culture usually takes place within 24 hours after death. Had Jesus’ body not been claimed by Joseph, He likely would have been flung into a common pit with the bodies of the two other victims.

But with courage, Joseph intervened.

And although Jesus had no estate of his own from which to draw funds for his burial, and his family was too poor and probably afraid of the authorities to assume responsibility for it, Joseph of Arimathea stepped up courageously and honored Jesus in death.

Joseph did not expect to see Jesus alive on the third day. If he was expecting a resurrection, he and Nicodemus would not have applied the volume of ointments and spices they did.

This was one final act of devotion in honor of the one they loved. This was a final act of courage.

Yes, courage was demonstrated by Jesus and His follower, Joseph, on the day Jesus was crucified for the sins of the world.

On this day, the secret disciple became one who stepped out of the dark shadows of secrecy and into the full light of being associated as a true follower of Jesus.

May we do the same in our own lives. May we move from the shadows of secrecy in our devotion to Jesus and into the light so others can see and know that Jesus is our Lord.

**Benediction**

**“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.” (Num. 6:24-26)**