

Message #123**Luke 23:50-53**

One of the best loved stories concerning the life of David was the way God selected him in I Samuel 16. Samuel was sent to Jesse to anoint the new king to replace Saul. When Samuel arrived at Bethlehem, he found Jesse and all but one of his sons.

At a family gathering, Samuel was very impressed with Eliab. He figured this was quality king material—but the Lord told Samuel, “Don’t be looking on the outside appearance” of a person, he is not my choice. Then Jesse called Abinadab, Shammah, and a total of seven sons to pass before Samuel and none of them were God’s choice.

Well by this time Samuel was totally frustrated and he wanted to know are these all the sons you have? Jesse informed him that one of the sons was missing. He was out taking care of the sheep. He was the youngest of the sons, the one you would least expect. Samuel said go get him and you know the rest of the story. It was David and he became the next king.

The one that you would least expect to do great things for God was the one who ended up doing great things for God.

There is a pastor friend of mine who said that when he first went to his church, he spotted some people that he really thought would go someplace for God. He said I thought these people will excel and accomplish wonderful things. It didn’t take long before he said, “Boy, was I wrong.” He said I learned a great lesson and that is God does His greatest work in the lives of those you would least expect.

These verses of Scripture are put here by God to describe what happened to the dead body of Jesus Christ. There is a man who surfaces to take care of this body; a man you would never expect. Luke reveals a great deal of information about this man.

In fact, a good thesis statement from this text is:

THOSE WHO WILL ULTIMATELY END UP CARING THE MOST FOR JESUS CHRIST ARE NOT THOSE MOST WOULD LOGICALLY OR TYPICALLY EXPECT.

Now this passage has to do with taking care of the literal body of Jesus Christ. But this principal may also apply to the spiritual body of Jesus Christ. Sometimes it is people you would never expect who end up doing amazing ministry things. These are the kinds of people who do behind scenes things. They are not public people or in the spotlight. They quietly work behind the scenes for the glory of God.

This is a remarkable story. Of all the people you would expect to surface to take care of the dead body of Jesus Christ, I guarantee you Joseph would not have been your choice. But Joseph was God’s choice.

There is nothing physically glamorous about his ministry. His ministry is caring for a dead body. But there is something eternally glorious about his ministry.

Now the truth is in our culture this would not even be possible. If you went to someone and said I'll take the dead body and do something with it, you would never be permitted to do it. There are papers to fill out and laws that must be followed. But back at this time, you could do this.

Joseph was the man who claimed the dead body of Jesus Christ. There are eleven specific characteristics that we want to see about him:

CHARACTERISTIC #1 – He was a man. 23:50a

The Greek reads “and behold a man.” The emphasis of this is you need to see this and look at this. There was a man who surfaced wanting the dead body of Jesus Christ.

The noun “man” (anhr) is gender-biased. In other words, the text stresses this is a man and not a woman. This is a male gender, not a female gender (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 37).

There are two genders God has designed—male and female, man and woman.

CHARACTERISTIC #2 – He had a name. 23:50b

The name of the man who came forward to take care of the dead body of Jesus Christ was Joseph. Joseph was a very important name in Jewish history.

Joseph was the name of the 11th son of Jacob. He is still esteemed today as being one of the great men in Israel's history. We may remember that Joseph was a Jew who reached the pinnacle of power in the Gentile/Egyptian world. Josephus, the first century historian, who himself had a form of the name Joseph, said that Joseph was “a man of admirable virtue.”

Mary, Jesus' mother, was married to Joseph. In fact, this Joseph was probably a contemporary of that Joseph, even though most believe he was dead.

Now what we could conclude from his name is that he came from parents who were interested in naming their son after one of Israel's heroes. His parents were very spiritually minded and Jewish minded.

We may assume by his name that he did have parents who did teach him things about God. Often times, those who surface later in life to do things for the Lord did come from parents who raised them.

CHARACTERISTIC #3 – He had an occupation. 23:50b

In light of the position and occupation of Joseph, he had nothing to gain by doing this; but he had plenty to lose.

Joseph was a leading member of the Sanhedrin. He was like a senator of a Jewish Congress. Mark says that he was a “prominent” member (Mark 15:43). He held a very high political and religious position and to publicly come out and defend Jesus Christ at this tense moment was a real risk.

This is the last person on earth you would expect who would surface to want to take care of Christ’s dead body. He was part of the group who condemned Jesus Christ.

We must be careful not to stereotype people. It is true the majority of the Sanhedrin was rotten to the core, but there were a couple who weren’t. Each person must be analyzed individually. There can be those in faulty religious settings who can truly be saved. Whether Catholic or Lutheran or Presbyterian or Methodist or Episcopalian or Reformed or Baptist, there can be those who really do love the Lord and know they are not really being fed the truth.

CHARACTERISTIC #4 – He had a good character. 23:50c

Joseph was a good man. As near as I can determine, this is closely connected to the next adjective. He was a righteous man. So Joseph was both good and righteous. This is in total contrast to others on the Sanhedrin who were “hypocrites and whited sepulchers” (Matt. 23:27). Almost all of the religious leaders were people who “pretended” to be righteous. In fact, Jesus called them serpents heading to hell (Matt. 23:28-33).

But Joseph was different. He was, by God’s classification, “good and righteous.” Now what that actually means is that Joseph was a man who believed in Jesus Christ (John 19:38) and that is what gave him the “good” and “righteous” classification in the Word of God.

Joseph was a man who had been justified by faith in Jesus Christ. It is one thing to be a justified man and it is another to be a good man. Not all justified men are good men, but Joseph was.

We learn from Matthew and John that Joseph was a closet disciple (Matt. 27:57; John 19:38). He had kept quiet about his commitment to Jesus Christ because he feared the Jews. Being a member of the Sanhedrin put him in a difficult position, but eventually he came out publicly and this was a key moment.

CHARACTERISTIC #5 – He had a conviction. 23:51a

The conviction of Joseph was that “he had not consented” to the things they had done to Jesus Christ. Now the word “consent” is critical. This word means that he did not vote in favor of what the rest of the Sanhedrin wanted to do to Jesus Christ (*Ibid.*, p. 430). He did not agree with them and what they voted to do to Jesus Christ.

We do not know if he ever publicly defended Jesus Christ, but we do know that he voted for Jesus Christ and voted against what the rest wanted to do.

In fact, from the Biblical record, we conclude that there were at least two religious leaders who did not support the things done to Jesus Christ. One is Joseph and the other is Nicodemus (John 19:39; 3:1). These two did not go along with the majority.

Do not ever just go along with the majority in opposition to truth. Often one who knows truth and defends truth will stand alone. It isn't the majority who is really after truth. Joseph was one such man.

CHARACTERISTIC #6 – He was from a specific city. **23:51b**

Joseph was from Arimathea. According to the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the O.T. Hebrew text, Arimathea is the city Ramah (I Sam. 1:19). Arimathea is the Greek word for Ramah.

The city was located 12-20 miles NW of Jerusalem. Ramah was a city associated with rebellion, death, mourning and sorrow (Matt. 2:18).

It had been an area that had witnessed the slaughter of little babies 33 years before. The reason for this judgment was because God's children had abandoned their relationship with Him (Jer. 10:20; 31:15).

Joseph came from this city, but he did have a relationship with God. Just because a city or location has had a bad reputation does not mean all people have it.

CHARACTERISTIC #7 – He had a specific hope. **23:51c**

Joseph's hope was to see the Kingdom of God. He believed Christ was the Messiah and he continually was waiting for Him to establish the Kingdom.

The verb "was waiting" is a perfect tense middle voice verb. What that meant is that he had trusted Christ from some point in the past and was continually looking for Him to establish that Kingdom in the present. He did not want Jesus Christ dead because he knew He could establish the Kingdom.

As a Jewish leader, he realized this is the One who is the Messiah. His focus was Jesus Christ is the One who is our Messiah and He is the One who can set up our Kingdom. The last thing in the world Joseph wanted was to see Jesus killed.

CHARACTERISTIC #8 – He had great wealth. Is. 53:9; Matt. 27:57

Isaiah says, "He was with a rich man in His death." Matthew adds that Joseph was a "rich man."

Luke leaves this quality out, but Joseph was a very wealthy man. Joseph did end up using some of his wealth for the glory of God. He invested a very large sum of money just to get the dead body of Jesus Christ.

We know from Mark's account that Joseph "bought" a linen cloth and wrapped Christ's body in it and laid Him in a tomb which had been cut out in the rock and rolled a stone against the entrance of it (Mark 15:46). Just this action would have cost more than the average person could afford.

Many people who have quite a bit of money often have difficulty doing things with it that God would classify as good (I Tim. 6:17-19). Joseph was not that kind of man. He used his wealth for God.

CHARACTERISTIC #9 – He was very brave. 23:52

Only a Roman magistrate had the authority to release a body of a dead criminal. The Romans liked to let a body hang on a cross out in public for all to see. Rome typically let crucified dead bodies hang out and rot for a while. This was a great intimidation tactic that said you do not want to not submit to Rome.

Joseph went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. To this point, Joseph has not taken a public stand for Jesus Christ. He was a closet believer. Mark implies that this took real courage and Joseph did this courageously (Mark 15:43). It took courage to go to Pilate and ask this and it also took courage because he was a Jewish religious leader doing this in front of them. It can be very intimidating and scary to speak up for Jesus Christ. It takes courage and Joseph had that.

CHARACTERISTIC #10 – He had great humility. 23:53a

Joseph himself took down the body. This is no glamorous job. This is a humble, quiet behind scenes action. Even Christ's closest disciples were not there to do this job.

Most people in Joseph's prestigious religious position would never think of doing this kind of job. This was a very private thing he did. The show was over and almost everyone else had left. Not Joseph. He demonstrated great humility by doing this.

Now this was not the typical way a believer served God. But when you think about it, Joseph is serving God in a way no one else could serve God.

God keeps records of those who do humble behind scenes things in His service. God knows who does things no one else sees. He sees who helps in ministries no one else sees. There are many non-glamorous jobs people do and not one is unnoticed by God.

CHARACTERISTIC #11- He had great integrity. **23:53b**

Joseph wanted the best for his Lord. He was very respectful of Christ's dead body. He wrapped Christ's body in expensive linen (Mark 15:46). He put the body in a brand new tomb. Matthew says it was Joseph's own new tomb (Matt. 27:60).

Joseph wanted the dead body of Jesus Christ to have the best. There is nothing cheap about what Joseph is doing here. Joseph was not cheap and neither was Nicodemus. He bought all of the expensive spices and a lot of them for the body of Jesus Christ (John 19:39).

No one would have ever expected Joseph to surface. But he did and he stands out as a man who truly loved Jesus Christ. Joseph of Arimathea surfaced at just the right time and God used him to help care for the dead body of His only begotten Son.

Crisis moments often produce unsuspecting heroes. Joseph is forever honored as a believer who ministered in a very unique and special way.