

INTRODUCTION

EXPOSITION

I. HIS OFFICIAL POSITION – v.50

- A council member – a member of the very council that had condemned Jesus to death.

II. HIS PROVEN CHARACTER – v.50

- According to Mark 15:43 he was a "prominent" council member. This does not mean high in rank as much as one who was highly esteemed because of his character. It could be translated "honorable" or "respected. Why was he esteemed so?
- A good and just man – This dual designation shows that he was a man who loved God and loved God's law. He was himself good in that God had worked in him a character of those things which marked a godly man. He was good and did good, not only in his personal deeds, but also in relation to others. He was a man who did justly or righteously.
- Unlike many of the Jewish leaders, he not only pretended to be righteous, he was righteous.

III. HIS SECRET DISCIPLESHIP – Matthew 27:57/John 19:38

- Had become a disciple – He may have been baptized, but accepted Jesus as his rabbi or teacher. He had listened to some of Jesus teaching, and committed Himself to Jesus.
- But secretly for fear of the Jews – We are told in John 9:22 that the leaders had agreed that if anyone committed themselves to Jesus, that they would be put out of the synagogue. They would be shut out attending the teaching and community elements of the local place of worship. In John 12:42 we find that Joseph is not alone, but among the rulers there were many who believed in Him but they did not confess Him because of fear of being put out.
- He was waiting for the Kingdom of God - this is more than general, but assumes that as a disciple he believed Jesus was connected to that Kingdom.
- Why specifically was he fearful? It may have been the very things that are mentioned. He was rich (Matthew 27:57), he was respected, and he may have feared losing that prominence by being cast out of the Synagogue and the council. Perhaps he thought about how difficult it would be to care for his family if he was shunned by the religious leadership. There was lack of trust in God for providing for him and caring for him even if he should lose his job.
- Maybe there are some here who, because of fear, are not publicly committing yourself to Christ. What will your family think, your friends, your work associates.
- While at first this may give comfort to some. Joseph was a secret disciple, so I guess I could be to. But Spurgeon points out well what He missed.

I feel sure that Joseph of Arimathea was a great loser by his secrecy; for you see, he did not live with Jesus, as many other disciples did. During that brief but golden period in which men walked and talked, and ate and drank with Jesus, Joseph was not with him. He was not among the twelve: as possibly he might have been if he had possessed more courage and decision. He missed that sacred training and strengthening which fitted men for the noble lives of primitive saints. How many opportunities he must have missed, too, of working for the Master and with the Master! (Spurgeon)

IV. HIS EVIDENT DISSENT – v.51

- He had not consented to their decision and deed – Being on the counsel, yet an important event came into Joseph's path. As the council had been called together, and he heard the false witnesses and the rulers condemning Jesus unjustly, when time came for agreeing to put Him to death, Joseph did not vote with them. He was a dissenting opinion. This would certainly begin to cause suspicion and problems within his professional acquaintances, but God was beginning to do a work in him.
- Being a good and just man, he obeyed the Word of God found in Exodus 23:2 "you shall not follow a crowd to do evil." Perhaps he thought of the words of Proverbs 1:10 "my son, if sinners entice you, do not consent."

V. HIS COURAGEOUS REQUEST – v.52

- In love for the Lord Jesus, Joseph goes further than simply not agreeing to His death. He now comes forward, when it seems the powers of darkness have won, and makes a courageous request.
- We are told that this happens in the evening (Matthew 27:57/Mark 15:42) meaning sometime after 3pm and before sunset, at the "dawning" of the Sabbath.
- We are told by Mark that he coming and taking courage went and asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. (Mark 15:43)

- What would probably have happened if Joseph hadn't done this is that Jesus' body would have been thrown as a criminal on the garbage heap in the Valley of Gehenna. There His body would have been exposed to the birds and rodents that would forage and feed on human flesh, or because of the perpetual fires that burned there ignobly cremated with the other bodies and garbage.
- So Joseph goes to Pilate, the only one who had the authority to grant this request. Joseph recognizes God's ordaining civil authorities, and shows respect even though Pilate had done great evil.
- Pilate is surprised that Jesus is already dead, and sends to make sure; then grants to Joseph the body (Mark 15:44).
- This request would eventually become known to the Scribes and Pharisees. Joseph was burning a bridge that could probably never be rebuilt. He was to show honor to the Lord, and this is clear evidence of a profession of faith that now becomes public. In these circumstances it is quite remarkable.

What a number of objections would not human prudence have made to Joseph's conduct, had he consulted it on this occasion! It would have represented to him that, "this was to expose himself, to bring himself into trouble, to render himself suspected, to put himself out of all capacity of doing good, to ruin himself irrecoverably; and now it could do no good to his teacher - he is now dead, and needs no longer any office of kindness from men." (Clarke)
- But God is more concerned about our honoring His Son than in indulging Joseph's fears. He moves in Joseph's heart, and God shows honor to His Son by giving Him a place to lay His head even in death.

And, indeed, as he exposed himself to the dislike and hatred of the whole nation, and to great dangers, there can be no doubt that this singular courage arose from a secret movement of the Spirit; for though he had formerly been one of Christ's disciples, yet he had never ventured to make a frank and open profession of his faith. When the death of Christ now presents to him a spectacle full of despair, and fitted to break the strongest minds, how comes he suddenly to acquire such noble courage that, amidst the greatest terrors, he feels no dread, and hesitates not to advance farther than he had ever done, when all was in peace? Let us know then that, when the Son of God was buried by the hand of Joseph, it was the work of God. (Calvin)

VI. HIS HONORABLE DEED – v.53-54

- Having received permission from Pilate to remove and bury the body, we are told that then he took it down. What a difficult task this would be. This would entail lowering the cross (or cross beam) and removing the nails from Jesus' hands and feet. What emotions would flood Joseph's soul as he thought about his unwillingness to lay down his life for the Lord Jesus.
- Then, he wrapped it in linen. In that day they would "swaddle" the body, wrapping it tightly with strips of cloth. We are told by Matthew and Mark that Joseph went and bought new fine linen. This would be very costly (remember the soldiers gambling to get the Lord's garment).
- He then laid it in a tomb that was hewn out of rock where no one had ever lain before. John adds that this was Joseph's "own tomb", one that he had for his own burial. This too would be at great cost, for to have a private tomb like this was very expensive. Yet, it is the way that he honors the body of the Lord Jesus.
- In this process Joseph is fulfilling the prophecy about Christ Isaiah 53:9 they made His grave with the wicked, But with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth.
- John adds (19:39) that another man, Nicodemus (from John 3), was also a part of this deed. He donated 100 lbs. of myrrh and aloes. This was for the purpose of keeping the tomb from becoming offensive because of the rotting of the corpse.
- We are told that that day was the Preparation, and the Sabbath drew near. This probably indicates that this was done in haste, and was yet incomplete? There was more that needed to be done, but it would have to wait until Sunday after the Sabbath.
- Here Joseph is showing a higher allegiance to Christ than the Law of Moses. To touch a dead body before the Sabbath and the Passover would make him "unclean." This would make him very offensive to the Jews. Yet, he counted honoring Christ as of higher importance.
- We could ask "why care for such a tortured and abused body?" Joseph believed in the resurrection, and that this same body would eventually be resurrected, even if they didn't anticipate it happening within a couple of days. To treat a dead body in such a way is honorable, and testifies to the hope of the resurrection.

VII. HIS FAITHFUL COMPANIONS

55 And the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid.

- We have already seen that Nicodemus was with Joseph. But he also has other companions who watch from a distance. There were women who had come with Jesus from Galilee. This had been a long and emotional journey for them. They had come all the way from Galilee, and now when the other disciples (i.e. the 10) had fled, they were there at the cross.
- Luke writes that after Jesus dead they "followed after." They accompany Joseph to the tomb and are present and watch from a distance as he and Nicodemus care for the Lord's body.

- This fact is setting us up to realize that they are witnesses to where Jesus is laid. They will be key witnesses to confirm where Jesus was laid after His resurrection when they return in two days and find His body gone.
- Notwithstanding their disappointment (without anticipating the resurrection) they continued to want to honor Him and are with Him to the last possible moment. What a display of devotion and love for their Lord!
The strong, the mighty, the youthful, had fled; but female love never forsook him, even in his deepest humiliation. This is the nature of true love; it is strongest in such scenes. While "professed" attachment will abound in prosperity and live most in sunshine, it is only genuine love that will go into the dark shades of adversity and flourish there. In scenes of poverty, want, affliction, and death, it shows its genuineness. (Barnes)
- After this they return and begin to prepare spices and fragrant oils for a more complete embalming.
- Jesus' teaching on the Sabbath had not undone their respect for it. They still felt that there were certain things appropriate, and would not even account the embalming of the Lord is a sufficient excuse to violate the command to rest. God uses this in His providence to fulfill the prophecy.

APPLICATION

What is the main lesson that we learn from Joseph? What can we learn above all? Here is the antidote to fear.

We see then how the Lord in a moment forms the hearts to new feelings, and raises up by a spirit of fortitude those who had previously fainted. But if, through a holy desire to honor Christ, Joseph assumed such courage, while Christ was hanging on the cross, woe to our slothfulness, if, now that he has risen from the dead, an equal zeal, at least, to glorify him do not burn in our hearts. (Calvin)

- What was it that caused the change? The cross of Christ!!! If you wish to overcome your fear, then look to the cross. Can you be ashamed, fearful, backwards in the shadow of the cross?
- It was love for His Savior that enabled him to do things that were unthinkable, and grated against everything that Joseph was. He at one time desired the praises of men, but the love for Jesus that was invoked when He came into contact with the suffering and death of the Lord that gave strength to do things that were costly for him, not only monetarily, but in every way.
- We are not told what happens with Joseph. Was he rejected by his colleagues? Was he rejected by his family? Was he cast out of the synagogues? We are not told, and it doesn't matter. The consequences are not important here, but we are being shown the worthiness of our Savior to count all things loss for the sake of Christ.
- There are some of you who need to step out and confess Christ before the church.
- Seeing the Lord suffered for our sake, can you continue to live as a secret disciple in your everyday life?
- For others, this is a call to speak out for the Lord Jesus in the various arenas of your life. Yes, it is difficult. Yes, it is hard. Yes, people may say and do bad things to us. But Christ is worthy! Go and view the suffering and dying Savior, and ask if anything is worth holding back for His sake.
- For those who are not Christians, is there anyone or anything worth living for like Jesus Christ? I challenge you to ask yourselves this question. You are living for something. Measure it with the immeasurable love and condescension and sacrifice of God's Son for the sake of rebel sinners.