

Mark 15:42-47

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[0:00] Please do open up your Bibles again to Mark chapter 15. We'll be looking at verses 42 to 47. That's on page 853. You might remember I preached on the burial of Christ a few months ago.

Well, I want us to go back to it today because there is one character that we didn't really get to. But he's a character that is a really helpful picture of the Christian life.

And he's actually quite key to the burial of Christ. Today, I want us to look at the character of Joseph of Arimathea. And he's a really interesting character because this is the only time we hear of him.

He's mentioned in all of the Gospels, but only for this moment, the burial of Christ. We don't know much about him. We know he's from Arimathea, a town likely 20 miles north of Jerusalem.

He's high up in the Jewish council, the religious leadership. But we are kind of just thrown into his life in this moment. Yet he appears at such a precious and important moment of salvation.

[1:14] And he's given such time and detail in this passage, isn't he? We see who he is, what he believed about the kingdom, his character, what he did for Jesus, all down to the little details of the burial.

But there's a reason this man is given such attention and such an important moment here. It is because Joseph of Arimathea is the shining example of how to respond to the death of Christ.

Because actually, this is the first response to Jesus' death that we see in real detail in the Bible.

And do you see how this man is described?

Verse 43, Joseph of Arimathea is looking for the kingdom of God. He's a follower of Jesus.

Matthew's gospel calls him a disciple of Jesus.

This is a man not outside of the kingdom, but looking for the kingdom and in it. You could say this is the very first account of a Christian response to the cross.

[2:25] And he's given such attention because we see in this man what it means to be a disciple. What it means to be a follower of Jesus.

And it all comes down to how we respond to the death of Jesus. And so if you are here today and all of this is new to you, this Christianity stuff, it's all new to you.

This is showing us the very heart of what it means to be a Christian. And in particular, how to respond to this moment of Jesus' death. And for those of us for whom this isn't necessarily new, I want us to use this moment to readjust the lens of our lives and to bring into focus what really matters in our lives.

And so there are two things I want us to see today. Two things about following Jesus. I want us to see following Jesus means being devoted to his death.

And I want to see following Jesus takes courage. So those two things I want us to see. But first, following Jesus means being devoted to his death.

[3:38] Let's just remember where we are. We're just outside Jerusalem. Jesus hangs on the cross. Darkness has just covered the land, but then it passed.

And around 3 p.m. Jesus took his last breath. And then he died. But it has been maybe a few hours since that moment.

Verse 42. Evening was approaching. And so Jesus has been hanging there motionless for a while now. And usually criminals were just left to hang there indefinitely.

Just so the birds could get at them and rot away. There was no Roman ceremony for the crucified. But Jewish law was different. Jewish law says that you can't leave a crucified body hanging there. It needs to be buried the same day. Otherwise it would defile the land. Which is when we meet Joseph of Arimathea. He knows Jesus.

[4:47] He's been following him. Listening to him. And Joseph knows he can't just leave Jesus hanging there. He needs to be taken down.

He needs to be buried. But there's no one around to do it. All Jesus' friends have left him. No one dares associate with a convicted criminal.

But Joseph of Arimathea is the one man who does something. Verse 43. He took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

Now you couldn't just take down the body. You couldn't just go up to the cross and do it yourself.

No. You had to ask the Roman authorities for permission to do it. And Pilate, when Joseph goes up to Pilate, the governor, Pilate's surprised that Jesus has died so quickly.

Usually it takes longer. Crucifixion could sometimes last for days. And so Pilate gets a soldier to go and confirm. And the soldier comes back and says, yes, Jesus really is dead.

[5:56] And so verse 45. He gives permission to Joseph. And verse 46. We see that Joseph has been to the shops, hasn't he?

He's bought some linen cloth just for Jesus. Wrapping a body in linen cloth. That was the burial custom of the day. He wants to do things properly.

This is how you honor the dead. And he takes Jesus down from the cross. He wraps Jesus' body in that cloth.

The big question is, well, where can he bury him now? Well, he gets a tomb for Jesus. And these were proper tombs carved out of a huge rock face with a small entrance near the floor.

And you could stoop into that entrance. And it would open up and you would see shelves usually carved out in the rock along the wall where the bodies would be laid.

[6:56] And these tombs, they weren't free. It was property. Property to own. You had to buy them. And so remarkably, Joseph gets one for Jesus.

In fact, we read in Matthew's Gospel, it turns out to be Joseph's own tomb. That he would have been buried in when he died. He owned it, yet he gives it up for Jesus.

And so he carries Jesus' body, goes to the tomb, places Jesus in it, seals the tomb with a big boulder over the door.

And Jesus is buried before nightfall. And we never hear of Joseph of Arimathea again. Yet here he is. With all these details and all this space on the page.

And it is because all these details, in all of these details, we are seeing something really striking about his response to Jesus.

[8:02] In all of this, we see a man utterly devoted to the crucified Jesus. He sees his Savior hanging there.

And he knows he can't just stand back and do nothing. He knows he must honor Jesus. He knows this man deserves the right burial.

This man deserves the right treatment. You just see the astonishing respect and care Joseph has for Jesus. He could have just thought, well, no, this is someone else's problem.

There are plenty of other disciples. Let them do it. No. He goes out of his way to go to speak to Pilate. He could have just taken the body down, buried Jesus naked, but he goes to the shops to go and buy linen.

He could have found any makeshift burial site, maybe a hole in the ground. But no, he gives up his own tomb. Why? Because he knows Jesus is worth it.

[9:11] He knows this crucified man deserves all the respect and the care that he can give. And we do that with our loved ones, don't we?

It matters where they are buried, how they are buried. We take time to choose the right headstone. We take time to think where they are going to be buried.

We take time to think about the words that are going to be written on that headstone. Well, we see here Joseph's love for Jesus, his utter devotion.

And we see just how he identifies with Jesus here. Think about it. All of Jesus' disciples ran away. They denied him, betrayed him.

But Joseph steps up in front of the Romans and in front of the Jews. And with these acts of devotion, he is showing this crucified man, I'm with him.

[10:15] And I will do everything for this man. Joseph, he really is a shining example of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

What it means to follow Jesus and to be a part of the kingdom of God. And it all comes down to, it all comes down to how we respond to this very same death.

How we respond to the crucified saviour. Will we just stand back and ignore him and think, well, this is just for someone else to deal with.

This is just the religious type or the spiritual type or those who have grown up in a Christian family. Well, it's for them to deal with. They can deal with Jesus and the cross. Or, like Joseph of Arimathea, we can devote ourselves to this crucified man.

This first response, it is written down for us because this is the right response. And this is what separates the disciple from the non-disciple.

[11 : 20] This is what separates the kingdom of God from this world. It is whether or not you identify with this crucified man. Because that is the nature of faith.

It is trust in the Lord Jesus. But specifically, it is trust in the crucified Lord Jesus. Not only that he is Lord, but he is the Lord that died for sinners.

And just like Joseph of Arimathea, faith is to recognise that this is no mere death. This is my crucified saviour. And he deserves the honour.

I can't ignore this crucified man. Because this is where forgiveness is found. And so, to follow Jesus, it means to be devoted to his death.

And when you are, you identify with Jesus so much that this death becomes yours. You own it.

[12 : 25] Joseph of Arimathea, he may not have understood this at the time, but as he was carrying Jesus down from that cross, Joseph was carrying the end of his own sins.

He was holding the satisfaction of divine justice in his hands. As he placed that body in the tomb, his own guilt was going down with Jesus into that tomb.

To be devoted to this death means this death belongs to you. And that's what we enjoy in the Lord's Supper, isn't it?

When we receive this bread and wine by faith, we devote ourselves to his death. And in this meal, the Lord Jesus tells us, my death is now yours.

As this bread and wine becomes a part of you, so now my death is a part of you. And so, for us here today, we are still in a very similar position to Joseph of Arimathea.

[13 : 32] There is a crucified saviour before us. Yes, he is now risen. The defining question of your life. Because this is what it means to follow Jesus.

It's not about me and how good I am and what I can offer Jesus. No, it is about this man and this death and what he can offer you. And it will change your life.

It changes Joseph's life, doesn't it? What shaped all of his actions in this passage? What shaped the course of his day on this Good Friday?

It was having the crucified Lord at the focal point of his vision. Christ was at the centre and everything else in his life just started to be pulled in that direction.

His choice to go to the shops to buy that linen. The decision to risk speaking to Pilate. Giving up his tomb, giving up his time, his efforts.

[14 : 34] Devotion to this death shaped his life in all the right ways. And in the Christian life, it's when we lose sight of this.

It's when we lose sight of our crucified saviour. When he's not the focus. That's when everything else becomes distorted, doesn't it? We can be overwhelmed with our guilt.

The things of our past, even the things that we did last week, last night. And our sin can overwhelm and that can become the focus of our lives. But when the crucified Lord takes that place, it's like a soothing balm to our conscience.

Or we can just be overwhelmed and overcome with all the hardship of life. All the things that have gone wrong. That can so easily become central.

And we can get consumed with bitterness and grumbling. But it's when our saviour reclaims that focus. That's when we realise, I have a saviour that loves me.

[15 : 44] And cares for me. And I have so much to give thanks for. When we struggle to forgive. It's the cross that helps us.

And we even begin to see other people the way that we should. We see our friends and neighbours not as a waste of time. But we see them as the lost needing this same death.

We see brothers and sisters in the church around us not as a nuisance. But as blood-bought souls who, like us, are devoted to this death. And the future can so easily become this chaotic unknown in

our eyes.

We begin to see... We can so easily just think of the future as this scary journey ahead of us. Full of fear and problems and obstacles. But when the cross comes back into focus.

We begin to see the future not as something to fear. But as an opportunity to serve this crucified man. Wherever he may lead us.

[16:50] And so it's here. As we see Joseph of Arimathea. Jesus is bringing us back to our senses. Back to what matters. And showing us the devotion Christ deserves.

Because he's given everything for us. But there's also something else Joseph shows us. He's an example of something else about discipleship.

We see in his actions how he responds to the death of Jesus. We see something important about being a disciple. We see following Jesus takes courage.

That's my second and final point today. Following Jesus takes courage. All that Joseph of Arimathea did here. It showed real devotion. But it also took real courage.

Did you see that word in verse 43? Verse 43. He took courage. And went to Pilate. And asked for the body of Jesus.

[17:51] And just think about what courage is. Courage is heading into risk. Heading into danger. Because there is a good. Something worth it on the other side.

So think of the firefighter. Heading into the danger of fire. Because he knows it's worth it to save a life. Courage.

It's when the desire for that good ahead. It outweighs the fear of the danger in front of us. So when it says Joseph took courage.

It means he really was in danger here. The decision to be devoted to this death. It was a risk.

It took sacrifice. Just notice what his job was. Verse 43. He was a respected member of the council. Of the Jewish council.

[18:47] But who was that council? It was the very people who plotted against Jesus. Asking for the body of Jesus to show him this respect.

That is to side with Jesus. And to side with Jesus is to go against the express will of that council. It was to not only lose the respect of the other council members.

And the reputation that he had among them. Not only that. He could have lost his position entirely. They wanted to kill Jesus. But Joseph wants to bury him.

And not only that. Jesus. He's just been publicly condemned as a criminal. A shameful criminal. And by siding with Jesus.

Joseph is putting his whole public reputation on the line. Risking being an outcast. And even going to Pilate. That is risky.

[19:50] That is risking ruffling the feathers of the Romans. Making it seem like the Roman decision to leave the body isn't right. Not to mention the financial sacrifice of buying the linen.

Giving up the tomb. He could have lost a lot. He could have lost everything. And so it took real courage to follow Jesus. And why did he do this?

Why risk all this? Well why does anyone show courage? It's because the good ahead. It matters. It's worth it. And it is far greater than the fear in front of us. To side with Jesus is far greater than avoiding any danger down here on earth.

And again Joseph of Arimathea. He's a shining example of that. In this moment Joseph is saying I will give up everything for this man.

[20:55] I may face death. I may destroy my reputation here. But my saviour's death matters far more. Kids in Holiday Bible Club.

Do you remember one of the truths? We must obey God rather than man. Well Joseph. Well Joseph. Maybe he was at Holiday Bible Club listening very well.

Listening to the story of Daniel. Because we see it here. Joseph feared God more than man. He cared about Jesus more than caring about being comfortable.

Well Jesus' reputation. His honour. That mattered far more than his own reputation. It's as if as Joseph takes down that body.

It's as if he's saying Jesus died for me. So I will stand for him. And so with real courage. Real courage. Joseph buries our Lord.

[21:57] And this is showing us what is involved in following Jesus. It takes courage. Because we are not very far from being in a situation like Joseph of Arimathea.

We won't have to be asked to bury Jesus. But in the same way. We will have to take courage and stand for our crucified saviour.

In those moments at work. When that immoral policy comes in. And as a Christian you simply just cannot consent to it. Your reputation. The respect of your colleagues.

Your finances are on the line. We actually face a Joseph of Arimathea moment. Will we stand back and just let it happen?

Or will we take courage and stand for Christ. And be devoted to his death? In school. When you don't join in with that gossip.

[23:00] Or you don't join in with those jokes. Or you don't go to those parties. And you're known as that person. And you're just treated like that Christian weirdo who doesn't do those things.

That may be the cost. But that is you taking great courage. That is you being devoted to your crucified saviour.

Or getting baptised. Even if it could make your family situation very uncomfortable. That is courage showing that my saviour is worth it.

Courage. And courage. It isn't only found in these moments of persecution. Courage is there. Just as you persevere quietly.

Through the hardships of life. Through the hardships of marriage. And parenting. Through the pain. Heading toward an uncertain future. But you do so trusting that God is with you.

[24:01] And you may not understand what's going on. But your hope is in God. And you cling to his promises. And you keep serving your saviour. That is courage. That is devotion to your crucified saviour.

That is you taking up your cross. Putting to death your pride. And honouring the one who died for us. And that is life following Jesus. It's a battle we're in.

With our reputations. Our finances. Our pride on the line. Maybe even one day our lives on the line. And we enter this battle not taking up our swords.

But taking up our crosses. And why can we have this courage? Why can we head through that danger with such certainty? It is because in his burial.

The Lord Jesus has guaranteed our safety. The Lord Jesus has gone ahead into the grave for us. And he's come out the other side.

[25:04] Overcoming death itself. And so we can now go to the grave with every hope. A sure hope that our sins are forgiven.

That we will be with Christ in death. That death is not the end. And that reward ahead of us.

Outweighs any risk here on earth. And no one can take that away.

But that's our certainty. The world may take your life. But they can never take away Christ. And honouring our saviour is far more valuable.

Than any reputation or comfort. That we might be trying to keep here on earth. It's remarkable. As Jesus is buried here.

This is our freedom. We are now free to die. Because he died for us. We are now free to give up everything that we have.

[26:04] Because he gave everything for us. We have a crucified saviour. So let's devote ourselves to the Lord Jesus.

And take courage. Because he has gone to the grave for you. Let's pray. Let's pray.