

# Joseph of Arimathea

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Let's turn again to John's Gospel, John chapter 19, and if we could read at verse 38. 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.

In this section that we read in John's Gospel, from verse 28, we read of how Jesus had cried out that he thirsted, and then that he cried out that it was finished.

But it's very interesting that when Jesus said, it is finished, the other Gospels, although John is one of those writers that he tends to underplay things very much.

He's not at all dramatic. But when you go to the other Gospel writers, they will all tell you, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. We read from Mark's account that when Jesus said it was finished, that he gave us, as it were, a loud cry.

That at the very end, just as his life was closing, he gave it as if he yelled out, it is finished. And that really was quite remarkable, because humanly speaking, he should not have been able to do that.

[ 1 : 3 1 ]     Crucifixion was a quite horrendous means of execution. And the person who was crucified, along with all the intense agony and suffering that they went through, slowly suffocated.

That was one of the things that happened. So, in the normal course of events, a person could not cry out when they reached the end, because the very nature of the crucifixion was that the body was sagging and sagging, and eventually they were suffocated by the nature of the body shape and what was happening.

But Jesus, when he came to die, he gave out this incredible cry, a cry of triumph, a cry of victory, because Jesus is at this point saying, it is finished.

Everything that the Father had given him to do, he had accomplished. He had come to reveal the Father. That's part of what he was saying to us all the time when he was here in this world, that he came to reveal the Father.

He who has seen me has seen the Father. He came to do all the work that the Father gave him to do, which was to offer himself up as a sacrifice for sin.

[ 2 : 5 2 ]     That he was the one, the righteous, who was to take the place of the unrighteous. He who was pure and perfect was to take the place of the sinner. And so Jesus is able to say at this point, it's finished.

Everything that you gave me to do, I have completed. And so there's this incredible cry of triumph. And in fact, the centurion who was in charge of the operations, when Jesus cried out and gave up, and actually the language indicates to us that he dismissed his spirit.

See, Jesus' death, although it was at one level exactly the same way as any other human death, it was different. Because he himself was in control into death.

He dismissed his spirit. We cannot dismiss our spirit, but Jesus did dismiss his spirit. He was in control to that very point where the physical aspect, the nature of death, where there was a severing of soul and body, where life ceased within his body.

And it's really quite amazing. So there is an absolute similarity there had to be. Jesus had to die in order to fully do for us what he had to do.

[ 4 : 18 ] He had to go through every aspect of it. And as we say, to fully die. And yet there was this difference. And that's part of why the centurion, who would have been as used to executions, because the Romans had a passion for crucifying.

They didn't crucify their own. They didn't crucify Romans. But it was kept for the worst. It was kept for slaves. It was kept for terrible criminals.

And we know that the Romans crucified many, many, many people. And this centurion who was in charge of operations, he would be as used to a crucifixion as anything.

But he had never seen anything like this, because as we say, at the end, there was this cry of victory. And in fact, it's very interesting that the centurion who was in charge of operations, he tells us, you see, the different gospel writers tie everything together.

And one person is focusing on one thing maybe more than another. But it's beautiful when you bring all the four gospels together. Each one highlights maybe another aspect of it.

[ 5 : 24 ] And we get a wonderful picture of all that took place. And we find that the centurion, that he stood facing the cross as all the things happened.

And as he stood facing the cross, he heard Jesus speak seven times. And although the other soldiers who were involved in the crucifixion, they were below the cross and so on, they weren't watching in the way that the centurion, this was his job to oversee everything.

And as he watched, and as he took note, and as he heard Jesus speak the seven times, and then heard him utter this amazing cry at the very end that it is finished, we find the centurion actually saying, truly, this was the Son of God.

Here is this man, hard as nails. And yet, as he stood facing the cross, and as he listened to Jesus, and as he observed Jesus throughout the hours of the crucifixion, he came to the absolute persuasion that Jesus is, and Jesus was, and Jesus is, exactly who he said, truly, this is the Son of God.

And whether, I like to think that that centurion in that declaration, that it was a declaration of faith, it certainly was a declaration of a mental assent to the truth, that Jesus truly was the Son of God.

[ 6 : 57 ] But I would love to think that, that this centurion was the first result of Christ's prayer, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do, as they hammered the nails into his hands and feet.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if the person who was in charge of it all is the first person to come to faith in Jesus as an answer to that prayer, Father, forgive them?

But certainly, his declaration is quite an amazing declaration. So we find that Jesus has declared this, that it is finished.

Now, the focus then moves from Jesus on the cross back to the Jewish leaders. And we know that the Sabbath was just about to begin.

It began at the sundown, just at the very end in the evening. And it was impossible. They just could not have the body, in fact, any of the bodies, but particularly the body of Jesus, hanging on the cross on the Sabbath.

[ 8 : 07 ] And, you know, you see the absolute hypocrisy of these men, just how distorted that their thinking was. And they're saying, we can't enjoy the Passover if Jesus is hanging on the cross.

His body has to be taken down. It's not right to leave him there. And so they went and they asked Pilate that the bodies would be taken down. And, you know, we've always got to remember that these are religious leaders.

These are the people who put Christ on the cross. Yes, it was the Romans that crucified him. But the Romans only crucified what the Jews wanted done. It was the Jewish religious leaders who put Christ on the cross.

And it's one of the things that we see right down throughout the centuries, the bloodshed that comes out of religion. And it's not bloodshed that is coming out of true Christianity.

Because a lot of people dismiss religion. They just turn their back and they say, look at the state of the world. Look at the state of the world because of religion. Well, there's a huge difference between the Christianity of Christ and many of the religions.

[ 9 : 21 ] Because so much of what is religion is of man. It is human. It is fleshly. It is people's lust for power and control and all these kind of things that has nothing to do with the Christ-centered submission of the heart before a risen Savior.

Well, these men had no idea or understanding of exactly what it was that they were doing. And so they come to Pilate and they asked that the bodies would be taken down.

So they asked, of course, that the legs would be broken. This is what was going to have to happen. The Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away. It was an awful thing.

So that this is really what... The reason that they did that was because the person who was being crucified, their feet were on a kind of a wee bit of a... like a wooden ledge. They were hammered in there.

And in order to get breath as the hours of crucifixion took place, they would try and lift themselves up a wee bit in order just to get a wee bit more air into their lungs.

[ 10 : 30 ] But in order to speed up death, they would come with an iron mallet and smash the legs so that they would be no longer able to lift themselves up so that death would come very quickly.

So that's what happened. And we find that the soldiers come to the first and they do that to the first criminal and to the second criminal. But when they come to Jesus, they find that Jesus is already dead.

So they don't break his bones. And again, this is in keeping with Scripture because the Bible said that not one of his bones would be broken. And it's amazing, it's absolutely wonderful when you follow through the Old Testament to see just so many, even just focusing around the cross, focusing around the life of Jesus, the fulfillment of Scripture.

You know, a lot of people think that the Old Testament and the New Testament are so far apart that they have no bearing one on the other. The Old Testament is full of Christ. from Genesis all the way through, all the law, all the prophets, all the Psalms, the songs, it's all full of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so, we find that one of the soldiers, when he comes to Jesus and finds that he's already dead, it tells us that he plunges his spear into his side.

[ 11 : 58 ] Whether this was gratuitous violence or whether it was an order to make absolutely sure that he was dead, whether he'd be plunging the spear upwards, hoping to puncture his heart, just making absolutely sure, whatever the reason, this is what he did.

And it tells the seer that when he did that, that at once there came out blood and water. And he who saw it has borne witness, his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth.

And it's very interesting that this is John who's writing here because when we go to the first John, we find also that John there is speaking about in first John chapter 5, this is he talking of Jesus.

He says, this is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ. Of course, I think on that occasion, the water there, I think would be referring more to the baptism of Jesus.

But water and blood were the two agencies that the Bible speaks of all the time with regard to salvation, to our forgiveness, to our cleansing, to our pardon.

[ 13 : 17 ] Now, at one level, what happened was very physical, was very human. Because as the spear was thrust in, this is what, and I'm sure there's medical reasons why blood and water would be seen.

But it is also spiritual because here is this wonderful picture that we have of what has taken place on Calvary's cross.

Because when again, if we go to the Old Testament, and particularly to the prophecy of Zechariah, it tells us there about, this is one of the great prophecies, they looked on him whom they have pushed.

And that's exactly what happened. There is Jesus on the cross. And that's what they were doing. They were looking on the one that they had pushed. And we, to this very day, look on the one that is pushed.

But following on from that in Zechariah's prophecy, he then goes on to talk about the fountain that is opened for sin and uncleanness.

[ 14 : 28 ] So here we have this powerful prophecy and this powerful fulfillment of the prophecy where Jesus at this moment, this is the supreme moment where this fountain is being opened for sin and for uncleanness.

And that fountain is open tonight. And if there's anybody here who has never washed in that fountain, who has never found or yet discovered the cleansing, the forgiveness of sin, the great invitation is to go and to experience the washing and cleansing.

Let us remember we can never, not one of us can make ourselves right before God. If we could, Jesus need not have come. It is because we are incapable of making ourselves right before God.

We do not have the ability, we do not have the merit or the value or anything that we can come to God and say, because of this, then, I deserve to be right with you.

We haven't anything. We're bankrupt. And it is because God so loved the world that he gave us only begotten son. And it is God who has opened up this fountain for us in order that we might be cleansed and pardoned and forgiven and made right with God.

[ 15 : 53 ] The question is, have you tonight been made right with God? If not, please ask God to make you willing tonight. Make you willing tonight that you will experience the salvation of Jesus Christ.

Because, you know, it's one of the easiest things and one of the hardest things. Because I believe that every time the gospel is offered and people sit under the gospel and people are maybe affected or touched or challenged by the gospel and there is something within you saying, you know, I need to get right with God.

There will be another voice whispering. This is a devil who will be whispering to you, aye, but not now. Leave that for later. Leave that for another time. Don't see to that.

Leave that for some other time. No, my friends, it's now. Now is the accepted time. Now is the day of salvation. So here we have Jesus hanging on the cross.

And as it says, he looked on the one whom they pushed. And just for, we can ask the question, who was looking on the one that pushed? Well, we had different groups of people. There were there, you had the Jewish leaders.

[ 17 : 10 ] They were looking on Jesus and their hearts were filled with hatred. You know, it's quite extraordinary. The Son of God. These were the men who were steeped in the Word of God. These were people who were filled with a knowledge of the truth.

And they were looking on Jesus and their hearts were full of hatred. I don't believe there's anybody in that category in here tonight. I don't think you'd be here. If you don't believe in Jesus Christ, you're an enemy.

You might not accept that. You might be saying, hey, don't say that. Well, that's what the Word of God says. But I don't believe that you're filled with hatred. Because I don't think you'd be here if there was active, real hatred of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There's rebellion. There's enmity. There's all these things the Bible tells us. But these religious leaders, they were filled with hatred. There was another group, the Roman soldiers. And although they acted so cruelly to Jesus, they were kind of almost neutral.

They didn't care. They had no axe to grind with Jesus. They were only doing their job. They were cruel men. They were hard men. They were just doing what they were ordered to do.

[ 18 : 24 ] But they were kind of almost immune to the suffering. But Jesus didn't really mean anything to them. It's a different level to the active hatred.

Active hatred. And there are so many people up and down Orlando who have an active hatred to Jesus Christ who are trying to obliterate the very name of Christ from all society.

They're trying to remove the influence of God from within our culture, within our society. It's a fearful thing. But the Roman soldiers, they were kind of, they were indifferent.

It's possible that there might be somebody here tonight who's indifferent. You accept a lot of what the Bible says. Maybe you accept everything that the Bible says.

But the power of it, the reality of it, these things have just kind of passed you by. There's just this, you come and you go. And it doesn't really go down deep. It doesn't really affect you.

[ 19 : 24 ] It doesn't really challenge you. Every week you come in, you go out, and you're kind of just the same. There's no change. And you ask the Lord to change you.

But there were others under the cross, and they were ones who loved Jesus. They were the followers of Jesus. The women who had followed that tells us about them. So there were all those who looked upon Jesus.

But then we find, after all this, we find then that, verse 38, 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.

So here are these two men, because it then tells us in verse 39 about Nicodemus. And we find here are two men who come out of the shadows when Jesus dies.

And I think it's absolutely wonderful. Because we've got to remember, remember, as Jesus in this world, although he had all the riches of all the riches of his passion, all the riches of everything, yet for our sakes he became absolutely poor.

[ 20 : 46 ] That's what it tells us. He who was rich for our sakes became poor. And Jesus lived in this world with nothing. He lived in poverty.

He had nothing. Didn't even have anywhere to call home. He just went from place to place. And the band of followers, his immediate disciples, they weren't men of means or wealth.

And so, it would seem that there was no provision being made for Jesus because normally when people who were crucified, they would be just taken down from the cross and thrown.

Thrown in arabeship. They were discarded. They had no rights. They had no privileges. They had nothing. But God is making preparation. And out of the shadows, not from the close band of followers, there's no sign of Andrew or James or Peter.

None of his immediate disciples barred John who had taken Jesus' mother home. Come these two men. And these two men were told here that they were, this man, Joseph, was a disciple of Jesus, but he was a secret disciple.

[ 21 : 59 ] And Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, the man who wanted to know about Jesus, wanted to know more about Jesus, but he didn't want anybody to know that he was interested.

Come under the cover of darkness. Here are these two men, but you know the wonderful thing about secret disciples is that they cannot remain secret disciples.

There comes a time when something is going to happen that will push them out. I believe the church is full of secret disciples, people who love the Lord Jesus.

And yet, for one reason or another, have never come to publicly confess or profess that Jesus is their Lord and their Savior.

These men were told why, it tells certainly of Joseph for fear of the Jews. You see, it was a crime to confess Jesus.

[ 23 : 08 ] You were put out of the synagogue. And it tells us further back in John's Gospel that there were quite a lot of the Pharisees who believed in him. But they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

They were scared to confess Jesus because they knew that if they confessed Jesus, that would be it, they'd be out. And they didn't want to lose their place, they didn't want to lose their privileges.

And I often wonder if it's still the same, that there are people who hold back because they're afraid of what others will say. They're afraid, there's lots of fears.

And I understand these fears. people are afraid of what our community will think. It's part of the world. We're afraid of others rather than being afraid of God.

We're afraid of what our community will think. We're afraid of people going to be talking. We don't want people talking about us. And we're afraid that if we sort of come out on the side of the Lord, people are going to be talking.

[ 24 : 16 ] And that's, it's not something we want. But you know that we have to. Because the Bible tells us that salvation, that we believe in our heart and we confess with our mouth.

The Lord wants both things from us. And so here are two men who up till now had, although we do read about Nicodemus speaking up, here are two men who have tried to remain hidden.

And what I love is that the most dangerous time to be a disciple of Jesus is now that they both come out of the shadows. And they come and they throw in their lot and declare their love for the Lord Jesus.

And it's wonderful because here's this wealthy man, this wealthy man Joseph. And again, fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah chapter 53, remember how it tells us there that they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death.

Here's the rich man, Joseph, into Joseph's grave. So we find this amazing provision made. And what these men did was really quite remarkable.

[ 25 : 39 ] You can see that the spices that were brought, there was obviously a huge amount of, it would have cost a fortune. Joseph is giving up his own grave in all probability for Jesus.

In fact, these men are doing for Jesus more than need be done because while they were anointing the body of Jesus, they needn't have at one level because the body of Jesus never saw corruption.

That was one of the wonderful things. There are differences regarding Jesus' death and ours, and that's one of the most awful things of death, is corruption.

Jesus' body didn't see corruption. We'll sing of that in the last Psalm and Psalm 16. So these men were actually doing way and beyond what they had to.

And they're putting Jesus into the grave. Of course, the grave wasn't part of Jesus' suffering, but it was part of his humiliation. Jesus had to go into the grave.

[ 26 : 45 ] He had to go through these processes for us. He took on death and defeated death. He took on the grave and defeated the grave. All these different things Jesus did and he took on.

And so we find that also these men, from a Jewish point of view, wouldn't have been able to partake of the Passover. Because working with a dead body defiled you.

And you had to go through a particular process to cleanse in a particular time. So here you are, you're reaching into the Passover day and they're working on a dead body.

That would mean they couldn't partake in the Passover. None of these things mattered to them. Only one thing mattered. Was their love for Jesus. And they were going to do for Jesus all that they could.

And so we find here that it tells us that they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with spices as is the burial custom. And it tells us at verse 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.

[ 28 : 02 ] And you cannot help it and it's often highlighted there that you see here that the garden comes into play again. Because everything started in the garden and here is this climactic moment in the fullness of salvation and again the garden.

The garden by the cross. It was in the garden that man sinned. It was in the garden that God promised salvation.

And here we now come to the garden and there is restoration and there is fullness of salvation. And you know it's wonderful the way that God works and he ties everything in together.

You know I often wonder when we read about it in Mark chapter 15 when Joseph of Arimathea when he came to Pilate you know you think of the courage of this man.

Here's this man who was a secret disciple. He's never ever ever been able to tell anybody you know I actually love Jesus. I am a follower secretly of Jesus.

[ 29 : 14 ] Here he goes marching down into Pilate's palace. That's what we read in verse 43 Joseph of Arimathea this is in Mark a respected member of the council who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died. And what does Pilate do? Remember Pilate is a man who wrestled with Jesus. What do I do with Jesus?

Everything in Pilate wanted to release Jesus. Pilate actually became afraid of Jesus. Pilate had never met anybody like Jesus. Pilate's wife told Pilate have nothing to do with this righteous man.

Let him go. But Pilate gave in to the crowd. And Pilate summoned the centurion asking him whether he was already dead.

And when he learned from the centurion I wonder what all he learned from the centurion. I tend to think the centurion would have said yes he's dead and you know Pilate I'm going to tell you something else.

[ 30 : 26 ] That truly was the son of God. You can almost hear the centurion saying as he made that declaration before the cross. I tend to think that the centurion probably told Pilate you know it was true he was and is the son of God.

Do you tonight know Jesus Christ as the son of God? Do you know him passionately as the son of God your savior or is he still just the son of God somebody you know about but you don't know?

See there's a big difference between knowing about somebody and knowing someone. There's loads of people we know things about them but in order to know somebody you have to meet that person you have to be in that person's company and Jesus tonight will become a companion of you if you sincerely with all your heart ask him into your heart to become lord of your life let us pray lord our god we give thanks for the gospel of Jesus Christ we give thanks for what you have chosen to reveal to us in the word we give thanks lord for the deep experiences that so many people had that we learn of and we pray that we might not push these things away from us but that we might take them to heart and that they might affect us in different ways but always positively and for good we pray then to part us now with your blessing take us to our home safely bless all whom we love and forgive us our sin in Jesus name amen