

Matthew 27:55-66

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[0:00] Good morning. I feel the power today. For those of you who have not met, my name is Dave. I'm one of Shoreline's pastors. I invite you to turn with me to the end of Matthew chapter 27.

As you turn there, this passage is all about risk. Mitigating risks. Taking risks. I'm going to work backwards through this passage. You're reading the end of chapter 27. I'm going to work backwards through this text, just because it works better in my own brain. And I hope that as we go through this, you and I will be challenged to take great risks for God. For the gospel. For the good of those around us. So let's pray and then dig in. Our Father in heaven, the world around us is every day giving us testimony that we are fallen.

[1:26] Lord, we think about wildfires disrupting communities and a pandemic. We see also, Lord, terrible crisis in Greece where a refugee camp burned to the ground and displaced thousands.

thousands. In Belarus where unrest over a disputed election is tearing a nation apart. In China where minorities are being systematically erased from the map in the Uyghur community. And in our own home where our nation is seriously divided. Over things related to politics and race and economics.

Lord, we know that this world is not as it ought to be. And so, Lord, as we come to today's passage where we see that your son entered into the very brokenness.

[2:49] Entered the grave. The symbol of all that is broken and wrong. The final end of brokenness. And I pray that you would excite our hearts.

To see him. To long for him. And to take great risks for him. We pray these things in Christ's name. And for his glory. Amen. I said that we were going to try working backwards to this passage. So, let's begin with the chief priests and Pharisees.

In Matthew 27, verse 62. The next day, that is, after the day of preparation. The chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate.

And said, sir, we remember how that imposter said while he was still alive. After three days, I will rise. Therefore, order the tomb to be made secure until the third day.

[3:56] Lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people he has risen from the dead. And the last fraud will be worse than the first. Pilate said to them, you have a guard of soldiers.

Go, make it as secure as you can. So, they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard. What do we see here?

We see that the priests and the Pharisees recognize they've killed Jesus.

But their victory isn't bulletproof. Whether they believe Jesus could truly rise from the grave. Or whether they simply think that his disciples are interested in a hoax.

They still carry some risk here. One way or the other, this could end up not to their liking. It's interesting though. The disciples, they're nowhere to be found.

[4:59] They're not in this text. We're introduced to a new character who's going to care for Christ's body. The Sanhedrin are actually giving them more credit than they deserve. The disciples are fearful.

Worried about the risks. One pastor put it this way. The disciples weren't concerned with stealing Jesus' body away. They were concerned with someone else stealing their bodies away.

And that's why they were nowhere to be found right now. But back to the priests and the Pharisees. They're victors in this situation. But it's not over.

And not in some omniscient narrator. Unbeknownst to them, it's not over. Not that way. They know that they've won, but it's not over. Have you ever gotten just what you did?

And still felt unsure? Unsettled? Has it not been quite the victory you had hoped it would be? [6:03] That you anticipated? That's how they felt. They had won, but their victory, and here's the secret, all human victory, is fragile.

The works of our hands, and even if they're not evil, works like these ones, like all of them, are temporary.

And that's going to come into play in just a moment here. But, right, vines swiftly overtake gardens and then buildings. Our successes in the workplace will likely not be remembered very long. I remember in my Coast Guard career, a supervisor wrote an award for me. Great. But it was obvious that he had no idea what I had done when he wrote the award.

And I can't even be mad about that, because today I've forgotten, honestly, what it was really for. I only remember the bad job he did, not the good job I did.

[7:10] Right? So not only does history forget our success, so do we. Our achievements are often short-lived. And the priests and the Pharisees know that.

They know that in a matter of days, their work can be undone. Even when they win that decisive victory, Jesus is dead. They're scared that it won't last.

So they go to great lengths, right? They're breaking their own Sabbath regulations by going to the Praetorium. They probably make themselves richly unpure during one of the high holy days by going into a Gentile building.

And then they presume, again, upon the same Roman governor from whom they just extorted a crucifixion by stirring up a near riot. And ask for another favor.

This is no small move on that part. They're taking a big risk. Why? Because human achievement is often fragile, precarious. And friends, let that humble us.

[8:21] Our grand designs are not as grand as we think. Let that also make us consider our goals today.

What are you working for? What are you hoping for? But let it also, not only humble us, but let it also show us where to rest.

On your own, your work is never done. But when you're in Christ, Jesus has said, It is finished. For you. Which, interestingly enough, means you can take even bigger risks.

Which is exactly what we see in Joseph of Arimathea. Look with me at verse 57. When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus.

[9:27] He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him, and Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in a new tomb, his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock.

And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb. Now, this is the first time we've met Joseph of Arimathea.

He's a brand new character on the scene here. But he goes through, in this short moment, something of a character arc. There's development before our very eyes.

What we learn from Matthew is that he is rich. The other gospel writers fill in the picture of Joseph just a little bit. The gospel of John, John chapter 19.

After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, and by that we should understand the Jewish leadership, not just the whole country, secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus.

[10:42] And Pilate gave him permission. Why was he afraid? Why did he have his discipleship in secret? What? We find out in the gospel of Mark that Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage, took courage to do this, and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

That's Mark chapter 15. So in one event here, he goes from secret, private follower of Jesus, to courageous, public follower of Jesus.

Why might that be? Before we answer that, let's look a little closer at the risk he's taking here, because it might not seem to our eyes at first like that big a risk, but when we examine it just a little bit, we'll realize that he's actually taking a huge risk.

It reads, verse 58, like a simple request. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. That sounds like a small step, like just the next thing in the story.

It's a lot more than that. Let's look at it first in relationship to Rome. He, first off, must be someone very important.

[12:20] It takes a certain gravitas, social capital, to get an audience in a moment's notice with the governor, right?

If you wanted to get something in front of Governor Malloy today, it's Lamont, right? Sorry, I'm living in the past here. If you wanted to get on his docket today and get a favor, could you?

Unlikely. Especially, you know, Friday afternoon. He's looking for the weekend, right? I don't have that kind of clout.

I don't know anybody here who does. Perhaps you do. We'll talk later. But, so not only is he leveraging his prominence here, what is he doing with it?

He's not doing something to gain status, right? Not something the governor wants to be involved with. Pilate has already washed his hands of this whole affair. He doesn't want to wade back into it, but that's exactly what Joseph's asking him to do.

[13:28] And it's not something that's going to improve his status, right? Something that would, this is instead something that would blemish his status. First, just by guilt, by association. association.

Hey, that super controversial guy that you just executed, I'm with him. Not a good look. And then, not only that, it's an undignified request, right?

Crucifixion was designed to shame people. And, Joseph is saying, can I take down his body, which is supposed to be a public display, a spectacle, of shame and disgrace, and give it a dignified burial?

Can I basically undo what you're doing? But it's not only, even further, it's not only a risk with Rome. The biggest risk of all, or sorry, there's a bigger risk that he's going to face here with Rome, right? In Rome's eyes, the crucifixion of a Messiah figure was Rome suppressing an insurrection.

[14:42] In Rome's eyes, Messiahs are terrorists. So, so, so what does that mean about Joseph here?

Right? When the U.S. killed Osama bin Laden, if someone had come forward and said, hey, I'm with him, can I have the body? What would happen to that person? I suspect, they'd be detained.

I suspect, we'd have questions for that person. I suspect, they wouldn't just be given free reign. Right? That's the kind of risk he's taking when he's going to Pilate.

He's risking his very freedom. But Rome is not the only audience that this is a risk in front of. Because, it's a risk in front of the Sanhedrin as well.

Right? Remember from John chapter 19, he was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews. Right? He has already been silenced in his discipleship.

[15:44] Because, he's afraid of the, the powerful people who are in opposition to Christ. But now he has even more reason to fear them. Because they've won.

They are taking their victory lap. Right? They are now unopposed among the Jewish people as the leaders of the Jewish nation. They had bested their rival.

This is where they're strongest. So now, at their strongest, he defies their position, their victory, and tries to honor Jesus.

And not only that, Mark's Gospel, Mark 15, tells us that he was one of the council, the Sanhedrin. Right? He was a respected member. So he's jeopardizing his own position.

Not only is he taking a risk with Rome, honoring an enemy of the state, he's taking a risk among his own people. This could jeopardize his position, his livelihood, his family. So that one line, verse 58, he went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

[16:55] That's huge. That's huge. That's huge. That's huge. But now his faith has really taken root.

He's no longer a secret disciple. He's gone all in. In a moment, we're going to explore why. He's taking big risks with his life.

He's spending, he's damaging his reputation for Jesus. He's leveraging his personal prominence not for his own gain, but sacrificing it for a shamed and slain rabbi. And he's using his personal finances. He's literally risking his freedom. Every resource that he has that can make a difference, he uses. Suddenly, he's taking courage. Suddenly, he's taking risks. Suddenly, he stops looking out for himself. Suddenly, he is investing his resources, his wealth, and giving away his brand new family tomb.

[18:04] His reputation and asking Pilate for the body and turning his back on the rest of the Sanhedrin. His manpower, right, he must have used his servants to get Jesus off the cross.

Suddenly, he's all in. What would it look like for us? What would it look like for us to be all in? for you?

Right? To make that transition from participating on the sidelines to being all in, a risk-taking disciple of Christ.

Right? Some of us attend church. We don't participate. When we come to worship, friends, we need to sing songs from the heart and to the Lord, not just into empty space.

When we really pray, actually engage the living God who calls us to himself. Some of us arrive at church, but we haven't given ourselves to the church.

[19:19] We need to be the church, friends. we need to look around, look around, with spiritual eyes.

God has made, God has made these people my brothers and sisters. And we need to treat them as such.

We need to get involved in their lives. We need to bear their burdens, encourage them, confront them when necessary, worship with them, bring them always to Christ.

Does that describe you? And that naturally means to church membership, by the way, where you commit to a church body and the church body commits to you for our growth and for our worship and for our spiritual care.

Talk to an elder about that. Are you in attendance or are you here? are you there? Some of us need to be all in their finances.

[20:27] In an elders meeting a while back, Pastor Mike said something that stuck with me about money. He said, there are very few ways to spend money well in this life.

Think about that. the world's consumerism says, you know, spend money on yourself. Now, the world's wisdom, in contrast, says spend money on experiences, not things.

That's actually some good advice. It's still about you. What was Christ's more lasting wisdom from chapter 6?

Do not lay up for yourselves treasure or experiences on earth where moth and rust destroy, where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Some of us need to take more risks with our relationships and our reputation.

[21:45] Some of us don't share the gospel, won't share the gospel, because, you know, that might be an awkward conversation. I guarantee you, Joseph's conversation with Pilate was awkward.

Some of us won't confront a brother or sister in Christ over sin or a blind spot in their life or foolishness, because, well, that might be an awkward conversation.

There are so many ways that our lives ought to be moved from the sidelines into the spotlight, just like Joseph of Arimathea is doing right here.

the question is the how. I want to be super careful here in the way that I preach this.

I don't want to guilt you into this. The Lord is not after a bunch of followers who begrudgingly do what he says.

[22:59] If you don't desire to serve the Lord, I want to start with that, not just guilt you into doing it anyway. I want to ask you, why don't you desire to serve the Lord?

What stands in your way? If I had to guess, it is some flavor of this. story of Jesus is one of the stories in your life.

But it doesn't define you. If I had to guess, it competes with something else alongside it. Maybe it fits in underneath. Maybe it competes with the story of vocation, whether that's a career inside or outside the home.

maybe it sits alongside the getting ahead story, whatever that looks like for you, whether it's a social ladder or improving your finances or whatnot.

Perhaps it's the story, and right now, there's a big thing in the life of our nation, right? The story of his kingdom holds the same amount or maybe less of your attention than the kingdoms of Democrats and Republicans, et cetera, et cetera.

[24:33] What holds your attention? Is the story of Jesus one of the many stories in your life?

Is it one slice of the pie? if it's not the story of your life into which, under which, all the other stories fit, you're not going to be like Joseph of Arimathea.

God, if you go to church on Sunday and then to disconnected from that work on Monday, and then to recreation on Saturday, and those are each different stories, each story sitting side by side, God is just one activity among many in your life.

And if that describes you, if all those other stories hold equal weight alongside Jesus, of course you won't sacrifice the many for the one, but math doesn't work.

Not until Jesus, only Jesus, becomes your highest pursuit, your highest end, the apple of your eye, will you, Philippians chapter 3, count everything else as loss because of the surpassing weight and worth of knowing Christ Jesus your Lord?

[26:00] only then. And then every risk is acceptable to you. That's what happened to Joseph.

And so my aim today is not to convince you just to give more of your time and your talents and your treasure. It's a Christian cliché, right?

it is not simply to do that. My aim today is much higher. And it's not one that I can actually do or accomplish.

I can probably persuade you to volunteer more for a while or to give some more money for a while. I can wing you over to some behavior change for a while, I think.

I can probably get you to do some of that stuff. After all, five years ago, you know, I convinced you to hire me as a pastor, right? I can convince you to do some things. but what I truly aim to do is something that no one can do.

[27:11] It's not something that I can convince or cajole or persuade anyone into. I can only point to the surpassing greatness of Jesus Christ and pray that the Holy Spirit lights a fire in your heart.

That's his work, not mine. So I'm going to do my part. I'm going to herald Jesus. And I'm going to trust God the Spirit to do his, his part, to excite in our hearts a passion for Christ Jesus so that we'd follow the same path Joseph traveled.

Maybe today you're like him, a secret follower of Jesus. I remember especially in middle school and high school, I didn't want anybody to know I even went to church, to know I was a Christian.

Maybe you go through great lengths to kind of hide that, keep your religion private. The Lord wants you to see it is a good thing, a worth it thing, and a thing he expects of you, to take risks for him in every area of your life, including your relationships.

Some of us need to ask someone how we can pray for them. Ask someone if we can share something really important, the gospel, with them. Invite someone to Christianity Explored, or to a community group, or to church on Sunday.

[28:53] all of us need to be taking risks, some of us for the first time, and all of that is based, built on, the foundation of seeing Christ Jesus as the all-surpassing goodness.

Because I'm not going to say to you, don't worry, it won't be as bad as you fear. You won't really lose anything. I'm not going to say that.

Honestly, it's probably true in most cases, it's the enemy exciting fear in us, or our own fallenness, that is exciting fear and causing a barrier to us taking risks. But, your fears might come true.

Joseph had no idea how this was going to play out. But he went and asked anyway. It might cost you. I'm not going to say it won't be as bad as you fear. Instead, let me tell you, it is worth it. Joseph probably did all this with trepidation. Ask him today if it was worth it.

[30:01] he had been a secret disciple before. But he isn't any longer.

What changed? What has happened? That's not a trick question, right? The cross happened. He saw what the Savior did for him.

And now he could take any risk. in a moment, we are going to sing, and it is my prayer for all of you. We're going to sing these words.

Ever since by faith I saw the stream by flowing wounds supply. That is to say, ever since I've seen that Jesus shed his blood for me.

Redeeming love has been my theme. That is, his love for me has been the story, the central thing in my life.

[31:12] And shall be till I die. I pray that that is true of us all.

God will take all in. Because looking back to the applications, what would it look like for us to go all in, so to speak, to take the risks like Joseph here.

Don't just attend church, be the church, participate, really participate in your heart. Don't just be present among God's people, be family with them. Use your relationships, your reputation for something.

Practice hospitality. the principle of looking to the cross and being transformed into a giver, into someone who takes risks, that's the foundation for all of them.

And so, in the tomb, we need to see that Jesus tasted death for me. And in my heart, I need to know oh my goodness, that is perfect love.

[32:26] That's the thing. He's the one. My life is about this. That's when you'll take the risk. Friends, look to the cross and see.

Because the cross, that's the moment that changed Joseph into someone who was willing to take the risk. look to the cross and see that he is worthy of your life.

That there is no higher aim or end. There is no higher prize than belonging to this most high God who for forever has a son or a daughter.

there is nothing better than to stand among his redeemed saints as he loves you and reigns over you.

This is unmixed, undiluted, pure, and glorious love. What can compete? Friends, will you do the math? What can compete?

[33:40] that's when you'll go all in. What other story supersedes or even stands alongside the cross of Christ?

Career? Reputation? Wealth? What else you got that compares with death? friends, look to the cross, look to the tomb, and do the math for yourself.

What is most precious to you? I want to excite you to see the ultimate goodness of God in Christ Jesus and then let you do what your heart wants because when you're there, then you'll take the risk.

Then you'll undertake the journey of costly obedience with your time, your talent, your treasure, with your whole life. If the cross is big in your eyes, you will take relational risks, offer hospitality gladly, throw yourself into the life of the church, give your money to the work of the gospel, invest your life into the things of God because you know that God best.

Where else would you invest yourself? Sean, let's take big risks for God in every area of our life because we know what lasts!

[35:19] And we know who is best because we have hearts that are gripped by his love.

Love so amazing, so divine demands my soul, my life, my all. And friends, it is worth it.

have you ever looked back after a few days or months and a purchase you made or something that you said and said man, that wasn't worth it.

Maybe you clicked buy on something online on the way here today and are wondering was that worth it? And that's how we feel after even moments of making a purchase or saying something or taking an action.

How much more at the end of our life? What will you think was worth it? What will you be excited to say you did with your words, your money, your time, your life?

[36:37] I want you to be satisfied. I'm not trying to guilt you. I want you to be satisfied. Joyful in how you spent your life.

What will have been worth it? And not just to your deathbed. I want to take you further because the cross takes us further because it bridges the gap between life and death and eternal life.

Not just what will be worth it at the end of your life. What will you be glad that you invested your life in 10,000 years from now? You'll be alive.

Joseph of Arimathea lives today in the presence of his Savior. God made our souls to be immortal. God will and will be to be in the world. God in his love or with God in his wrath. We endure. The scriptures say that God loves a cheerful giver.

[37:48] That has just as much to do with investing our time as with our money. It means that we need to see the value now and forever of what we're giving to risking for if the church if missionaries if the gospel going forth isn't valuable most valuable to us of course we won't give cheerfully but if your eyes are pointed always at the cross what else compares and what else lasts really lasts Joseph could risk his position his prominence his name his freedom because he saw something more valuable in Christ do you it's my prayer for you that you do there's a third group in this passage who though they don't speak are going to play an important role read about them in verse fifty and fifty six there were also many women there looking on from a distance who had followed

Jesus from Galilee ministering to him among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee in the first century it would be unheard of to even mention them but they're going to feature prominently very soon Matthew is honoring them and the Lord is honoring them by making them a part of his redemptive plan here and more than that more than Matthew honoring them they honor Jesus first in serving they've been serving him it says verse 55 then in witnessing then in sticking by because they're at the cross they're here at the tomb when his disciples are absent and then God is going to honor them in the very next passage because as we're going to see next week they saw him when he was living right verse 55 tells us that they had accompanied!

him throughout his ministry they saw him dead they were there at the crucifixion they saw him buried verse 61 and what will they because they are the ones who will see it what will they see on the third day I bet you know let me leave you with this if the cross of Christ could transform Joseph from timid disciple to public missionary that's a transformation we have been hoping for that I am praying for for us all today if the cross of Christ could transform Joseph like that what will an empty tomb do let's pray oh lord our god may we look at the cross of

Christ and find there the story of ultimate value the story that defines our life lord may we not divvy up our lives a slice here for god a slice there for me a slice there for vocation may all be Christ lord may redeeming love be our theme this day until we die we pray these things in the name of Jesus Christ who died for us to write a better story about us amen