

Take Courage

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Preacher: Rev Kenneth I Macleod

[0 : 00] Let's turn again for a little to the chapter we read in Mark's Gospel, Mark chapter 15.

And reading verses 42-43, And when the evening had come, since it was the day of preparation, that is the day before the Sabbath, particularly this verse, Joseph of Arimathea, 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.

He took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. As we know, discipleship is very much part of the Christian faith.

The definition that the dictionary gives of discipleship is this. A disciple is someone who embraces and assists in spreading the teachings of another.

Someone who embraces and assists in spreading the teaching of another. So it's obvious that a disciple is someone who is known to be a follower of a particular person, adheres very closely to what that person believes and what that person teaches, and they in turn spend as much as they can of their time in sharing the teaching and encouraging other people to follow this particular person.

[1 : 45] And of course that rings very true with regard to Christ and the Christian, because that is part and partial of what we do in our witnessing, in our following of the Lord Jesus Christ, in being a disciple of Jesus.

Once we come to faith in Jesus Christ, we want others to experience what we have as well. And in order to do that, we want to tell others about Jesus.

Now, of course, for different people, that is done in different ways. The Lord takes note of our differing personalities. And for some people who are shy and retiring by nature, it may be very difficult for them to speak to others.

But there are lots of ways in which we're able to share and to tell others about the Lord Jesus Christ. We know, of course, that all the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ don't maybe openly confess and profess that Jesus Christ is their Lord and their Savior.

We have a term known as a secret disciple. It's not a great definition, because at one level, there isn't such a thing as a secret disciple. Because any person who follows the Lord Jesus Christ, any person who has been truly saved by the Lord Jesus Christ, it is virtually impossible for them to hide the fact that Christ, through the Holy Spirit, has come to dwell within their heart.

[3 : 18] The Bible says, by their fruits you shall know them. And a tree will always evidence what kind of tree it is. You don't need to put a sticker on an apple tree to say, this is an apple tree.

When you see the apples on the tree, you know it. Same with a plum tree. You don't need to put a wee notice saying, this is a plum tree, because you will see the fruit, the plums on the tree.

And so it is with a Christian, that the Christian doesn't need a t-shirt saying, I am a Christian, I belong to Jesus Christ, I'm going to tell you about Jesus Christ.

because a person's life, over the course of their life, that doesn't mean that every single hour of every single day, that that person will be living an altogether consistent Christian life.

But that the main thrust of their life, by what they say, by their conduct, by their character, not just on a Lord's Day or in church, but at work, in the community, in their leisure, at home, and all these things, the main thrust of their life should evidence that Jesus Christ is in their heart, through the fruit of the Spirit.

[4 : 34] And of course we know what the fruit of the Spirit, we have a definition of that in Galatians. So that's what I mean. It's actually very hard for a person to remain a secret disciple.

They may, within themselves, never take it on themselves to tell others. They may never have said to people, I'm a Christian. I fully believe I've been saved by the Lord Jesus Christ.

They've never actually said that. Maybe they've said it to one person, but they've never said it out. They try and keep that, for differing reasons. And that is what we would term a secret disciple.

But, as we said, it's very hard to be a secret disciple. And of course, one of the great places where we have the opportunity to confess and profess that the Lord Jesus Christ is our Savior is at the Lord's Supper.

This is one of the places that Jesus has given the church an opportunity to confess him. The Lord's Supper, of course, is a means of grace to strengthen us, to encourage us in the faith.

[5 : 44] It's like a place of refreshing in our wilderness walk home to heaven. But it's also a place of testimony, a place of where we tell people by what we do that Jesus is our Savior.

Because it tells us that that as often Jesus said that, as often as you eat this bread and take this cup, you proclaim or you show forth the Lord's death till he comes.

In other words, when you take that cup to your lips in the presence of everybody, you are making a confession and you're saying, Jesus Christ came into this world and he died for me.

It's a great statement. It's an awesome statement. So you're making this declaration, this proclamation, Jesus is mine. And that's powerful. And that's why it's very important that those that Jesus has saved, those who love the Lord Jesus Christ, do what he asks.

Because he says, do this in remembrance of me. So, when Jesus gives a command, it's not for us to say, poof, I'll think about it.

[6 : 56] Maybe I will, maybe I won't. Jesus gives a command and he says, because of what I have done, because I have saved you, I want you to do this in order to remember me.

And as you do this, remembering me, certain things happen. And one of them is, you are witnessing, you are declaring publicly that I am the Savior.

Something else so, and that I'm coming again. It's a powerful witness. You do show forth the Lord's death until he comes. Well, the incident that we have here before us is the day that a secret disciple comes good.

Here's this man, Joseph of Arimathea. The man who had, and, I can't just say, I suppose, that this is the first moment that Joseph threw off his cloak of secrecy.

Because this wasn't the first time that Joseph hadn't, at least to a certain extent, sided with Jesus. Because we'll see in a moment who Joseph actually was, and that there was a point where he did side with Jesus.

[8 : 11] But he hadn't really nailed his colors to the mast until this particular moment. And he, in a very public way, at one of the most dangerous points in history, when Jesus' immediate disciples have forsaken him and fled.

If you ask, where's James just now? Where's Andrew? Well, we don't know. But here's Joseph. And he's come out from, come out from hiding. And he's publicly putting himself, and aligning himself to Jesus Christ.

So here we have an account of the funeral, the burial, of the greatest king that this world has ever seen. And how different to the funerals and burials of most of the world's rulers.

The majority of this world's rulers have had amazing funerals. But here is the king of glory. And from a human point of view, those who were watching, and it must have been so distressing for them, those who were watching what was happening, and they were seeing Jesus, they would see, they were watching from a distance, and they were seeing everything that took place and his death.

And they'd be wondering, what's going to happen? What's going to happen to the body of Jesus? Jesus. Because Jesus had been despised all the way through.

[9 : 44] The prophet had said he was despised and rejected of men. And he was despised in his life, he was despised in his ministry, he was despised in his arrest, in his trial, he was despised in his crucifixion, and now they are afraid he's going to be despised in his death.

Because those who were crucified, the bodies were taken down and very often just thrown in amongst the river, thrown, discarded into a rubbish heap, often didn't even get a burial, just thrown with a refuse.

Surely that wasn't going to happen to the Lord of Glory, the greatest king ever, but as we know, heaven had already made arrangements. And this is what we see now.

And just as the prophet had written long ago, he made his grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death. And so, the world, as they would have seen, the centurion, who we believe came to faith in Jesus Christ, but the soldiers who would have been still there who came to break the legs, and of course Jesus was already dead, all those of the world who still looked and were there, who saw what was happening, that was the last time that the world ever, ever witnessed or saw the body, the human body of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We know that Jesus made lots of appearances after the resurrection. Before his final ascension, he appeared and reappeared and reappeared to his people.

[11 : 23] We know that up to 500 were witness to the resurrected appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ, but he never, ever, ever showed himself to any but those who were followers of him, apart from to Saul of Tarsus when he was being converted.

So, that was the last opportunity that the world ever had of seeing Jesus until he returns again. One day he's going to come back in his human body, glorified, majestic, awesome.

And the world that pushed him, the world that couldn't bear him, the world that despised him, when Jesus returns they're going to wail and to cry upon the mountains and the hills to fall on them, to cover them from the wrath of the Lamb.

It's a fearful thought and picture. But that's how it's going to be. It's going to be so unbelievably different to the appearance of Jesus who came as the babe of Bethlehem before.

He will come in all his awesome glory and splendor. And then every eye will see him. So this was the last time he was seen humanly in this world.

[12 : 40] And so this little band of followers who were watching from a distance, they were wondering what is going to happen. they didn't have the means for a proper burial.

They didn't have the influence to go and ask for his body. But it's amazing how the Lord has prepared a person.

In fact, there were two when we go to John's Gospel we see that there was another man but in Mark's account it just focuses on the one person. And here is this man Joseph of Arimathea.

And Joseph was a member of the Jewish Council of the Sanhedrin, a body of 70 men and these were the top officials that were in charge of religious life and social life amongst the Jews.

It was the supreme body. It was the body that had carried the most influence and power amongst the Jewish community. It was this body, the Jewish council, the Sanhedrin that had tried Jesus and had condemned him to death.

[13 : 51] So it's amazing how out of this body of men comes this man, Joseph of Arimathea. Of course, we read in Luke's Gospel that Joseph actually didn't side with the others regarding putting to death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I think it's Luke's Gospel tells us that. But regarding this man, Joseph, it tells us that he was a respected member of the council. He was a man of very good standing.

He was an honourable man. He was a man of influence. We're told in Luke's Gospel that he was a good and a righteous man. So that amongst all the scribes and the Pharisees and all the religious leaders of the day, here was a man who was highly respected, highly thought of, and he was a righteous man.

In other words, his conduct, the way he lived his life amongst others, it was always decent and honourable and right. It was also obvious that he was a very wealthy man, because to have a tomb cut out of the rock, these tombs cost a lot of money.

Only somebody with a lot of money could afford a tomb like this. And so he was the kind of person that most in the community would have looked up to.

[15 : 21] But one of the wonderful things that we know about him was that we're told that he was looking for the kingdom of God.

Joseph Aramathy, a respected member of the council who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God. So this man had come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We don't know how, we don't know when. But it's very obvious having lived under and mingled with society, he would have heard Jesus' teaching.

He would have seen the miracles. Because all these Jews, all these religious leaders and all these people of high authority, they were constantly hearing Jesus. Most of them were there to find fault with him.

But Joseph possibly at one stage was like that. But he heard and he saw sufficient. And being a really good Orthodox Jew, he would have a real understanding of the scripture.

[16 : 23] He would have been reading the scripture. And when he read the scripture and he saw the life of Jesus and heard the words of Jesus, it all came together.

And he realized that this is the Messiah. He was absolutely persuaded of it. And it just shows the incredible sin of the Jews in putting Jesus to death.

When they had the word, they were the people who had the word, they were studying the word, and yet they refused to believe the word being fulfilled amongst them because of their prejudices.

It's an awful thing, prejudice. That's what was happening. But anyway, this man, Joseph, he saw and he believed, he understood sufficient of who Jesus was.

He could contrast the authority and the power of Jesus' teaching over against the deadness and the emptiness of the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees.

[17 : 27] So we don't know how long he was a disciple, but it tells us in Luke's gospel that he was one who had not consented to the decision and action to put Jesus to death.

But for a couple of moments I want us to focus just on these words, that he took courage. As we said, he's a secret disciple. Now it doesn't say here that he's a secret disciple, but in John's gospel it uses these words about Joseph, that he was a secret disciple.

After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews. That's what it says. He was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews.

And I wonder how many people are disciples of the Lord Jesus, but secretly. Why? Why? Why, if you tonight love the Lord Jesus Christ, why I have to ask you this question.

Why keep it under wraps? Why not come forward and confess that Jesus Christ is your Savior? It could be, and this is a very genuine reason, and I'm sure it's a reason that most of us once had.

[18 : 51] What if I go forward and I go back? What if I go forward and confess that Jesus Christ is my Savior, but then I just don't keep going, and I end up going back where I once was, and all I will do is bring dishonor to the cause of Christ.

And there's a lot of people like that who actually, they have a fear in their heart that that's what they'll do. And you say to yourself, am I right or am I wrong? Well, I'll say you're wrong.

Because we've all thought like that. You see, the Jesus who saves is the same Jesus who keeps. Jesus doesn't just save you and then it's up to you.

Jesus saves you and he keeps you. And so we have to believe and trust him. That he will keep us all the time. Now, that doesn't mean that every single day that our walk is going to be perfect, that we're going to speak perfectly and do perfectly, our conduct, everything is going to be perfect all our lives, which it would be true.

But that our desire that we will be followers of Jesus Christ, the main thrust of our life is one of following him.

[20 : 14] Our desire is to him. Our desire is for him. Our prayer is that we want to become more and more and more like Jesus. We know where we're going and we're happy with that.

So, it's very, very important that you have sufficient trust in the Lord to say to him, well, Lord, I know what your word says. Your word says that I should remember you.

I'm scared. But you know, it's good to fear. You know, it's not a good way to come to the Lord's table and say, oh, look at me. Oh, I'm strong as an ox. If anybody will keep going, I'll keep going.

I would say to a person like that, hey, tread carefully because we don't go in our own strength. It's in the Lord. I will constantly go on in strength of God, the Lord, not in our own.

So, sometimes people keep back because they're afraid that they won't keep going. But the Lord who saves is the Lord who keeps. So, it's very important.

[21 : 18] And you know, when the Lord commands us to do something, he will give us the enabling to do it. And that's what we've got to do. We've got to take that step of faith because it is a step of faith.

We're saying that on Sunday about the crossing of the Jordan. The Israelites, the priests, could have spent all day up and down and up and down the sides of the bank of the Jordan but until they actually put their foot, as they were told, into the water, the waters wouldn't stop.

They had to take that step and it was by faith. And as they did so, they could then take the next step and the next and the next. And then all Israel crossed over. And it's the same for you.

You have to take that step. But as you do so, the Lord will continue to strengthen you and enable you. Again, some people don't go forward for the fear of man.

And the Bible tells us that the fear of man brings a snare. And again, it's a really challenging thing.

[22 : 26] One of the, I suppose, one of the problems in life is that we want, nobody wants to lose their popularity or lose their standing as they have it or lose whatever, however life is because many people are afraid.

And we've all been there. How will people view me once I join the church? You see, you can be a secret disciple, you can be kind of following, but you haven't nailed your colors to the mask.

People aren't just too sure maybe where you are. Once you've done this, then you're marked out. A lot of people can say, oh, I can't handle that. Not ready for that.

Well, that's exactly what was the case with Joseph and the other followers of Jesus, because it tells us back then that they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

It tells us that there were followers, there were those amongst the religious leaders who believed in Jesus, but they didn't openly confess and profess him because they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

[23 : 46] That's what it tells us. And there's no doubt there's a point where that's where Joseph of Arimathea was. In his standing, he had power, he had prestige, he had privileges, he had just so many different things in his life, and he was afraid if I confess Jesus, if I come out on the side of Jesus, I lose all these things, I'll be ostracized, I'll be out of the council, I'll lose all that I have.

And so at that point he wasn't prepared to stand up and be counted. And you know sometimes there are good people who love the Lord Jesus, and yet they're living in the fear of what people will say, or the attitudes that people may have to them.

If I take this step, how will people react to me? And you know, it's not only true with regard to the church, you know it's a serious thing not to do what the Lord asks us to do, but you know it would be interesting to know, and it would be a fairly tragic thing to know, and I hope we don't ever know this, how many people are lost eternally because of the fear of man.

People who have been sitting under the gospel and have known the strivings of God's spirit, have been touched in their heart, know their need of a savior, and yet because of what the opinions of people and what people might think, they pushed Jesus away.

It's a fearfully solemn thought. But anyway, here's this great moment in Joseph's life. He took courage, and Joseph, of course, the Lord enabled him, gave him that strength and that courage, but he took courage in going to Pilate and asking for the body of Jesus.

[25 : 44] That took great courage, aligning himself with Jesus. And of course, it was a great cost because, first of all, that was his grave. It had cost a lot of money. Joseph didn't know that in another couple of days or so, Jesus was going to rise.

He didn't know that his grave would be empty and ready for him when his time came to die. So it was very sacrificial in giving this what was a very expensive burial place for the Lord Jesus Christ.

And of course, we know that Nicodemus also joined with him because we're told that in John's Gospel. And then we see that the embalmed Jesus. Tells us of what they did.

Joseph brought a linen shroud and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb. But we're told in John's Gospel that they had 75 pounds in weight of myrrh and alabaster and so on as they anointed the body of Jesus.

This was a preservative, an embalming. And of course, what they did for Jesus went way beyond what they had to do for Jesus. They didn't know that the body of Jesus wasn't going to corrupt.

[27 : 01] The body of Jesus in his death, that was the last. The body of Jesus had been so abused and it's almost like heaven is saying, we abuse no more.

Heaven would have smiled and would have appreciated the service of these two men that went beyond the call of duty in embalming and anointing the body of Jesus.

But it wasn't a necessary work because Jesus' body wasn't going to corrupt in any shape or form. His body saw no corruption.

And so, again, it was a particular cost to Joseph and Nicodemus because by doing what they did, they would be banned from the Passover.

The Passover was the most important feast for them in the year. But if you touched a dead body, you became ceremonially unclean and you couldn't engage in the Passover.

[28 : 04] So what they were doing was going to prevent them from engaging in the Passover. So there was a lot of cost involved. But what a reward these men got.

What a reward these men have. And what an honour. You know this, there would come a day when Nicodemus and Joseph would be so thankful that they came out on the side of Jesus.

And you think, just put your mind ahead for a moment and think of the homecoming, the day when you're going to leave this world and you're going to enter into glory and you're going to come face to face with Jesus.

It must have been wonderful for Joseph. And I would imagine, I very much imagine that Joseph, although it doesn't tell us, was one of the people that Jesus would have visited and would have revealed himself to him.

That's not saying that that did have, but I would very well imagine that he showed himself to Nicodemus and to Joseph because he did to 500. But imagine the homecoming.

[29 : 08] well done, good and faithful servant. And on that occasion, oh, they would be so thankful. Oh, Lord, how thankful that you enabled me to do that for you.

But imagine going to glory. Jesus has done everything for you. Lay down his life, couldn't do more. Then you're leaving this world and you're going to face Jesus.

and you're going to have to say to him, you know, I couldn't do it. I was kind of ashamed. I was afraid. I hadn't enough faith in you to believe that you could keep me.

You know, it doesn't matter what we say. It's going to be wrong. It's so important that we do what the Lord Jesus asks us to do.

And if you've never taken that step, and you love the Lord Jesus, may you tonight do that very thing. Let us pray. Oh Lord, we again give you thanks for the gentle way that you lead us.

[30 : 18] Although sometimes our path can appear to us upside down, but yet you love us and you're so intimate and personal in the way that you work with us.

We give thanks for your word, which is our instruction and our guide. We give thanks, Lord, for the way that you have set things out for us. We give thanks for the Lord's supper and the great privilege that it is.

We're in the busy world that we live in. We have a time of drawing aside and focusing in particular upon you. Bless us then, we pray, and strengthen us and bless your people and particularly any who have not taken this step.

Help them and enable them to do so. Watch over us, we pray, and to do us good and take away sin in Jesus' name. Amen. Concluding singing in Psalm number 16, and this is from the Scottish Psalter, Psalm number 16, verses 8 to the end, page 216, dr.

Of I shall be left by thee, nor will thou give thine holy one corruption to see. Thou wilt me show the path of life, of joy that is full store before thy face at thy right hand are pleasures evermore.

[32 : 04] Psalm 16 verses 8 to the end. Before me still the Lord I sit. Before me still the Lord I sit.

Sit this is so that he shall never stand my right hand I shall not move it be.

Because of this my heart is glad and joy shall be expressed in my glory and my flesh in confidential rest.

Because me soul in grave to dwell shall not be left by thee.

Lord will now give thy holy one God love to see.

[33 : 36] Thy world be sure the path of life all joys there is full store before thy face at thy right and our pleasures ever more all.

The session will meet afterwards in the session room and as I said at the beginning if there is anybody who desires to profess their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for the first time please come and meet with the session.

Now may the grace and mercy and peace of God the Father Son and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forever more. Amen.