

The Honor of Jesus' Body

Luke 23:50-56

August 31, 2025

Turn in your Bibles to Luke chapter 23. Luke chapter 23. We're looking at the final portion of this remarkable chapter, the burial of our Lord, Luke 23:50 through 56. Luke has recorded the final day of our Lord's earthly life and that commenced at the Last Supper in Luke 22. This 24 hour period, he went out to pray in Gethsemane, as we studied and saw, and then there in the Garden of Gethsemane, he was betrayed by his friend. He was arrested by soldiers and led by the Sanhedrin officials. Luke then took us through the trials of Jesus, standing before the religious authorities and then the secular authorities, and ultimately, they all delivered Jesus over into the hands of sinners.

Those sinners took him outside the city to Golgotha, to the place of the skull, and there they crucified him between two criminals. After Jesus committed his spirit into the hands of his father, he breathed his last, and he died. And Luke records

his death, as we've seen, not with any focus on the dramatic elements of his physical suffering, but really focusing all of our attention on the spiritual realities that Christ accomplished: Redemption with his death. Even leading up to his death, he is accomplishing redemption. He's speaking as if redemption is about to be accomplished. He makes promises to people on the cross. He prays for his people from the cross.

And now that Jesus has died, Luke records the burial of Jesus. And as he records the burial of Jesus' body, we see something kind of emerging here; the mist starts to clear, the clouds disperse. What becomes refreshingly clear, in this account, about really what we'd call the careful handling of Jesus' body. Now that Christ has accomplished redemption through his death, God brings his people forward to honor Jesus, to honor Jesus, and starts with his burial.

There's a 5th century Greek manuscript of the Bible called Codex Alexandrinus, and it's one of the oldest complete, most complete, Bibles that could be found from that time frame. So that's like 5th century, means the four hundreds. That's very

short time after Christ and the apostles and Codex Alexandrinus had paragraph breaks or section breaks in the text, kind of like our Bibles have to break up the text a bit. And the paragraph or section breaks in that manuscript set a pattern for later Greek manuscripts. And as it began the resurrection chapters in all four Gospels, Alexandrinus begins the resurrection not with Easter morning, but on Good Friday with Jesus burial.

It's James Edwards who rightly points out that by starting the final chapter of the Gospels like that, not with the first day of the week and entering into where the tomb is, but actually starting here with the burial, by starting the final chapter of the Gospels like that, we can see how, and this is, these are his words. "The proper understanding of the resurrection begins with the placement of Jesus' body in a tomb." End Quote. There are several very important reasons for that. We'll mention those later.

But suffice it to say, for now we need to see from this point, the time of Christ's humiliation is over, starting right now, with the honor shown to Jesus' body. God said it through Isaiah

in that great 53rd chapter about the meaning of the atonement. Isaiah 53:9, after the atonement is accomplished through the death of His Son, the One who carried our sorrows, and carried our griefs, and carried our sins, and bore those to the cross, that though "His grave was assigned with wicked men, was crucified between two criminals, yet He was with a rich man in His death."

In fact, he's buried in that man's tomb. Why? Because he himself had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in his mouth. Once he died and made the payment for our sins, that's it for him personally and with his body, there's nothing but honor and glory to follow. This is the beginning of that. When he died in shame on the cross for our sins, that was the end of his humiliation there, that's where he paid for our sins not in his burial in a tomb, but dying on the cross. And once he died, he paid the price.

So everything from this point onward signals the right and the proper and glorious exaltation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And that is why Luke begins the account with, the Word.

It's in my copy of the Scripture, maybe not in yours. Some translations don't include this word, but it begins with the Word, behold. Behold: Because we've just come out of a long section of some of the saddest and frankly the most upsetting narrative in all of Scripture. It has been horrible and has hurt the heart, hasn't it, to see how sinners have treated our Lord. And so Luke knows he has to stop that track of thinking. He has to arrest our attention and help us to turn the page. He wants us to keep on reading.

There's more to see, more to focus on, so let's do that starting in verse 50 of Luke 23, "And behold, a man named Joseph who was a council member, a good and righteous man (he had not consented to their counsel and action), a man from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who was waiting for the Kingdom of God: this man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. And he took it down and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid him in a tomb cut into the rock, where no one had ever lain. It was Preparation day, and the Sabbath was about to begin. Now the women, who had come with Him from Galilee, followed and beheld the tomb and how his body was laid. Then after they returned, they prepared spices

and perfumes. And on the Sabbath day they rested according to the commandment.”

And boy, don't you hate it that I stopped reading there, but we must. May seem strange at this point in the narrative that Luke has introduced a brand new character, someone we'd never seen before. At this stage in the narrative, Joseph of Arimathea has had no part up to this point in the Gospels. In the Gospel account, he will have no part after this point in the early church. But we've seen this kind of thing before in Luke's Gospel, haven't we?

At the beginning of Luke's Gospel, Luke introduced us to several pious saints in a very similar way. We saw Zacharias and Elizabeth there. We saw Anna and Simeon, older saints at the temple. Those, with all of these people with godly character, God gave these special choice saints of his a place in the story of his son. A very special place at particular moments and notice at the beginning and at the end of his life, giving them a special place to honor Jesus Christ. And so it is here.

As it was at the beginning of Jesus life, so also at his death; God rejoices and he does, by his Providence, he weaves godly people into the redemption story. He gives them special privileges, gifts them with special honors, gives them special roles to play, duties to fulfill. So God puts this man, Joseph, a believer, he puts him in the Sanhedrin. Remember, this is the political body that officially condemned Jesus to death. But God has placed this covert believer in their midst. By a wise, remarkable providence, God now activates this man at this crucial point, and he does so to guard the gospel narrative, to fulfill prophetic Scripture, and to ensure the theological integrity and apologetic value of this redemption story. It's absolutely amazing.

The passage divides into two major parts. The first follows Joseph's action of burying Jesus in his own tomb and then in the second part we see the reaction of the women who watched what had happened. And what joins Joseph with these women, what joins these actions together is God, God who uses faithful believers to honor his son. And so first God used the noble action of capable men.

I'm giving you an outline point. God used the noble action of capable men, verses 50 to 53. And then God used the humble affection of loyal women, verses 54 to 56. The noble action of capable men and the humble affection of loyal women. God used both to honor Christ. As we get into our first point, which is going to take up the majority of our time this morning; so don't judge the length of my second point by the length of my first point, that's the warning.

Anyway, number one: the noble action of capable men. God used the noble action of capable men to honor his son in the burial of Jesus' body. Luke introduces first the character of Joseph in these verses and then he shows the nobility of his action. So two verses on his character, two verses on the nobility of his action. So we see who he was, and then we see what he did, and I want you to notice the godly action second two verses. Godly action is sourced in godly character.

The first two verses, Luke introduces Joseph of Arimathea with five identifying marks about his character, his name, or we could alliterate and say his appellation. It's just a big word

for a name, but it rhymes. It has a TION. So it rhymes with my other points. Five identifying marks of his character, his appellation, then his position, his disposition, his conviction, and his devotion. You're like, slow down, we're going to come back to him don't worry. Appellation, position, disposition, conviction, and devotion.

First, his name, his appellation. His name is Joseph and that's such a common name, as we know, among the Jews. The, the one supposed to be the father of our Lord, Joseph is one among many Josephs in Scripture, this is another Joseph. So to distinguish this Joseph from all the other Josephs, he is Joseph of Arimathea. The precise location of this town, the city of Arimathea, is really unknown to us. It may have been obscure for Luke's readers too, which is why he added in verse 51 that Arimathea is the city of the Jews.

Arimathea is the Greek form of the, the Hebrew word Rama, the Hebrew city name Rama. It could be a shortened form of Ramathaim Zophim, which would refer to the, birth, birthplace and the home of the prophet Samuel. And if that's so, that would mean that

Joseph was born and raised in the same place that the Prophet Samuel was born and raised. So well-known place and that would be about 5 to 10 miles north, northwest of Jerusalem.

But now as we are meeting this Joseph of Arimathea, we see that he is a member of the Sanhedrin. So he is living permanently in Jerusalem. He's no longer in that town, that's just where he's from, but that's how he's known, distinguishing him from other Josephs that would be on the Sanhedrin Council. This man purchased and developed a burial plot there in Jerusalem, hewn from limestone rock. That's no cheap endeavor. That's very costly. So he's staying, that's what we need to see. Joseph has no plans to leave Jerusalem, but he is a Jewish man with a very Jewish name and from a Jewish city. What is Luke trying to show us here just with his name is Appellation? Well, at the very least he's showing us this, that not all Jews rejected Jesus.

Remarkably, we can see that not even all members of the Sanhedrin rejected Jesus and that brings us to a second identifying mark of his character. Second: his position, verse 50, his position, he was a council member. He's on the

Sanhedrin. Now, he's a good and righteous man. He's a man who's waiting for the Kingdom of God. So that means for sure he is not a member of the Sadducee party, which made-up a large chunk of the Sanhedrin.

This man's a Pharisee and a Pharisee in all the best senses of what a Pharisee was at that time. He believes the Bible. He follows the law and the prophets. He has a hope in resurrection. He has a hope in life after the grave. This man's a believer. The Pharisees, as we know from our study of Luke's Gospel, they were not religious professionals. They were mostly businessmen. They were wealthy men, accomplished men. That's what allowed them to serve as council members or serve in their community.

Matthew 27:57 calls Joseph a rich man from Arimathea. So he was renowned for his wealth, not just his position. He had high social standing. He succeeded to a point in his business, in his in his, his endeavors that he could hire others to run his businesses for him. So they kept making money for him. And that increased wealth allowed him time to serve his community. He

used his time well, exercising leadership, judging in local courts, serving in his local synagogue.

His wealth wasn't for him an opportunity to splurge and indulge himself. No, he gave himself instead to serve others. This man Joseph, had evidently become known for sound wisdom, for good judgement, and that's why he ascended into this role of political oversight in the nation, serving on the nation's Sanhedrin Council. So he's a distinguished man, and he's distinguished even further in a third mark of his character.

A third mark of his character, he's known among his peers by his disposition. So his appellation, his name, his position, and now his disposition. He's a good and righteous man, good and righteous. He's morally good. He is devoted to righteousness. That is, to find the standard in God's Word and to live according to the standard. Does that mean he is sinless? No, it just means that when he has sinned, he follows the prescriptions of the law to rectify his situation before God. He comes to the temple and offers the sacrifices, he prays, he confesses his

sins, so he's a good and righteous man. Mark calls him a prominent member of the council.

Mark 15:43, he's prominent. That word can also be translated honorable, noble, respected. This is a widely esteemed man. He is a man of good character. He's actually distinguished here, above his companions and now we got to stop and ask the question, at this point, wait a minute, wasn't the Sanhedrin, if I recollect correctly, wasn't the Sanhedrin unanimous in its vote to condemn Jesus to death?

Mark 14:64 certainly gives that impression. Says they all condemned him to be guilty of death. So what does that mean for Joseph of Arimathea, as a Sanhedrin member? What was his role in all of this? Well, Luke has anticipated that question and answered it in verse 51, which identifies a fourth quality of his character, his conviction. His conviction. He had not consented to their plan and their action. He'd not consented. He stood firm, he stood fast, he would not go with the flow, that speaks to his conviction. He knew the truth. He knew what was

right and wrong. And he would not go along with the rest of his Sanhedrin board members.

Some imagine, and commentators I've read, that Joseph, and by the way, Nicodemus, I'll speak to him in a bit. He's with Joseph too, on the Sanhedrin as a believer. But some imagine that Joseph and Nicodemus, that these two men sat in that Sanhedrin during this time of condemning Jesus and they sat there, sort of with their brows furrowed, their arms crossed, and they stubbornly protested the proceedings and slammed down their fists. Might be a nice, nice to romanticize this a bit; Imagine some kind of a Luther at the Diet of Worms moment. But there really is no hint of any of that in the Gospels.

But clearly Joseph and Nicodemus, what we can surmise as these men were not at these meetings, they were not at these, these midnight court proceedings. These early morning hour condemnation of Christ, these kangaroo courts, sham trials, they were not a part of it. They were not at the meeting. In fact, some believe, and they have some good warrant for this, some

believe that these men were not even invited. Sanhedrin could get a quorum easily without them, without these two men.

We can go back to John Chapter 7. You can just jot that down and look at it later, but Nicodemus spoke up to register at that time in John Chapter 7, kind of a mild word of caution. The Sanhedrin had sent out some of the temple police to go and arrest Jesus at the festival, because he's there, he's speaking openly, and the temple police came back to the Sanhedrin without Jesus. Now that's a problem. They didn't do their job and they're like, what gives? They said, look, "no one ever spoke like this man." And so they ridiculed them.

What do you want to become his disciples? Go look and see. No one comes from God. He's not. And they start to ridicule them. And Nicodemus just speaks up and just offers a mild word of caution. Does the law judge a man before we hear from him? And they ridiculed him. So some may have started to suspect Nicodemus and maybe his friend Joseph, of suspecting them, of having sympathy for Jesus. Perhaps it's for this reason that

Joseph and Nicodemus may not have been invited at all to these proceedings.

Perhaps they knew what was coming and knew it was an ungodly business and an unlawful use of the Sanhedrin body and so they recused themselves and said we're not going to be a part of it. We can't know for sure. Scripture doesn't identify the actual reason that they were not a part of this, but what we do know from verse 51, clearly Joseph did not consent. And it's interesting not just to their action, but to their plan. Now their plan, that takes us back to Luke 22:2, where it says that the chief priest and the scribes were seeking how to put him to death and then they, as the chapter goes on, they conspired with Judas Iscariot. They gave him blood money to betray Jesus. Joseph and Nicodemus had no part in that.

Unlike those men, the rest of the Sanhedrin Council, Joseph and Nicodemus were believers. In fact, Joseph was a kingdom minded man and that takes us to a fifth quality of his character and this is the most important quality of them all because this quality explains all the rest. We could speak of, fifthly, his

devotion. His devotion. Now how do we see that Joseph was as Luke tells us, "he was waiting for the Kingdom of God" end of verse 51.

Biblically, you understand this because we have taught this for many years around here. Biblically, the exercise of waiting is never passive in nature. Waiting doesn't mean just sitting around. Waiting doesn't mean sleeping. Waiting doesn't mean self indulgence. Biblically, a biblical kind of waiting is always active. It's always praying, it's always seeking, it's always striving in holy obedience. So those who wait for the kingdom are like that. They're expectant, they're hopeful, they're prayerful, they're fervent in their worship, they're obedient in their living. They get down on their knees. Seeing what's written in the Scriptures, they get down on their knees and pray for its outcome, and then they get up and they do something about it.

Many examples of this in scripture. I'll just use one to illustrate the point. I mentioned Simeon earlier. Let's go back and take a look at his words in Luke chapter 2. So find your way

back to Luke chapter 2 starting in verse 25, because we see a very similar character of man, very similar language used, in fact, about the same language of Joseph of Arimathea.

We see that language first to speak of Simeon. Simeon encountered Jesus, that as a baby in the temple when Joseph and Mary brought him to the temple to dedicate him. Look at Luke 2:25. "Behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon," and here it is, "This man was righteous and devout, waiting for the comfort of Israel." It's a kingdom minded man. "The Holy Spirit was upon him and it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he'd seen the Lord's Christ. He came in the spirit to the temple, and when his parents brought in the child of Jesus to carry out for him the custom of the law, then he took him into his arms and blessed God and said, 'Now, Master, You are releasing your slave in peace, According to Your word. For my eyes have seen Your salvation, Which You prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, And for the glory of Your people, Israel.'"

Okay, so take that kind of thinking, take those affections, that heart, take it from this text and inject that back into Luke 23, into what you see in Joseph of Arimathea. Injected into that phrase, this man was waiting for the Kingdom of God. He is devoted to God, he loves God. Just as Simeon rejoiced to behold Jesus at the beginning of his life, so Joseph of Arimathea is privileged to honor Jesus at the end of his life.

Zacharias and Elizabeth, Anna and Simeon, those with godly character. Joseph of Arimathea is one among their company. Don't know when it happened, but we do know from Matthew 27:57 very clearly. Matthew says he was a disciple of Jesus. He's a disciple, and that's what explains everything else about him. We started with his name, his appellation, talked about his position, his disposition, his conviction, but it's really his devotion to Jesus Christ, as one of his disciples, that is what explains all the rest; qualities of his disposition, that he was a good and righteous man.

It's not according to a natural disposition. He wasn't born a kindly child and then just was nice to all his pets and his

siblings and just went on being nice. No, he grew in goodness and righteousness because of what God had produced in him by grace. Unlike most of his peers in the Pharisee party, Joseph, this man was a believer. He's a regenerate man. He's a new nature, his virtues of grace growing within him. So his commendable character and his nobility were not by his own merit, not from natural temperament. It's by grace in the temperament that was produced by the Word and the Spirit.

This is a man who gave himself to God, gave himself to his neighbor out of a heart of loving devotion to God and it was because of spiritual regeneration. It's because of God's work in him that he was obedient to the truth. He pursued holiness in the fear of God. And for that reason, because he continued in obedience, because he pursued his God and he trusted in Christ, God granted this Joseph of Arimathea a gift above his companions.

Listen, God does not reward those who are spiritually lazy. He doesn't reward those who are spiritually mediocre. He doesn't reward those who have divided hearts and other passions. He

doesn't reward idolatry. He rewards those who love him.

Remember, faithful in little, faithful in much. That's this man. God rewards the faithful with an even greater stewardship, gives greater honor to them, which is what we're about to see with Joseph as he is honored with the gift and the privilege of handling the body of Jesus.

I don't know what arrangements you've made for your body once your spirit has left, but whatever arrangements you've made for yourself, can you imagine the Lord Jesus, his body, taking your spot? Would that be an honor to you? Certainly, it's a privilege if you take any stock of your own spiritual accomplishment, if you look at the progress in your faith or the lack thereof, if you look at the fruit you've borne for the Kingdom. If you consider those who have come to Christ clearly through your faithful gospel witness, or even those who have repented of sin because of your confrontation or walk more faithfully because of your loving exhortation and your counsel.

Again, maybe you don't see much of that. Let me suggest how you can chart a better course. Go back through these five qualities

that mark Joseph's characters, starting at the last one first; start with the fifth, the fifth quality. Move your way back through them to the first quality. Feed your devotion to Christ. Feed it; fan into a flame what God by his Spirit has put within you a love for Christ, fan into flame.

How do you do that? By reading and studying the Scripture, like I mean, intentionally make time in your day to do that. Read, study the Scripture and through prayer and through obedience, meditate on it, and that deepens your conviction. That's the fourth point. And then the Third Point about his character, when it deepens your conviction, it's going to transform your disposition into a Christ like disposition. Christ like disposition is going to eventually elevate your position in life, your position in the church, your position sometimes in the world too.

You will gain by a Christ like disposition out of deep conviction and steadfast devotion to Christ. You will gain a greater reputation among the saints as a godly man, a godly woman. That reputation brings more opportunity for influence

from your life. It creates a greater prominence for you as a wise and a godly person. Prominence is a good thing. Paul said, You keep your eyes on me. You follow me as I follow Christ. Imitate me. Do we say, man, what an arrogant dude. He thinks so much about himself. So hottie Toddy, look at that. I'm not following him.

It's only the ungodly who think things like that about righteous people when they say follow me as I follow Christ. God will do this in you, if you're devoted to Jesus Christ. If you fan that into a flame, it'll deepen your conviction, and your deepened conviction will transform your character your disposition into a Christ like one and when that happens, God elevates your position. He gives you a reputation among believers, among the godly. And should God so choose, he will also give you a special name, an appellation.

In fact, that is the promise, isn't it? In Revelation 2 and 3, "I'll give you a name, a name that no one can know." So don't ask me what it is, I don't know. Give you a name, it'd give you a name and a reputation for faithfulness, for godliness, and to

this kind of a life, to this kind of a person, God often adds special duty, special privilege, special honor, as we see here. It's what we see in Joseph of Arimathea, this man of good character. To him God gave special honor.

I love this verse in Isaiah 32:8 and I think Joseph of Arimathea is kind of an illustration of this verse. "The noble man devises noble plans, and by noble plans he stands." It's got a rhythmic kind of rhyming quality to it, doesn't it? "The noble man devises noble plans and by noble plans he stands." Look at verse 52. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. He didn't do this on the spur of the moment, wasn't some sudden impulse. He did this because he'd been planning, planning it. He'd been thinking about it.

This man described in verses 50 and 51, we know from Matthew 27:57 and from the account in front of us that he was a devoted disciple of Jesus. But the rest of the Sanhedrin, his companions did not know that. His fellow Pharisees no doubt had suspected him of some softness to Jesus, some sympathy, but they did not anticipate this, did not anticipate a full-on Apostle Peter

level of discipleship, didn't think he was one of those Jesus freak nuts. Turns out he is.

We know that this is hidden from their sight because of, kind of an important caveat, that is added by John in his Gospel. He tells us, John 19:38, that although Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, he was, in John's words, "a secret one for fear of the Jews." Interesting expression for fear of the Jews. John gives that same expression three times in his Gospel at John 7:13, John 19:38 and John 20 verse 19.

The last of those, John 20:19, if you know your Bible a little bit, you know that that is about the disciples after the resurrection. The disciples after the resurrection, they gathered together behind closed doors, locked doors, and it says they did that for fear of the Jews. Jesus came, wasn't dissuaded by the locked door, just passed through the wall, stood among them and said, "peace be with you."

Well, this Joseph of Arimathea, he's not too far out of step with Jesus' chosen apostles there, after the resurrection. Here

he is before the resurrection. He's a secret disciple for fear of the Jews. Now, covert discipleship is obviously no commendable quality for a Christian, no commendable quality for a believer on either side of the cross. We don't look at this covert nature of his discipleship and his adherence to Christ as something to, to be emulated, something to be followed. But at this time and in these circumstances, prior to the resurrection of Jesus, prior to the coming of the Holy Spirit, can we imagine that we would have acted with any greater courage than they did?

But the secrecy, even though we don't commend it, as it turns out, this secret discipleship happened all according to the perfect plan, the providence of God. God used it. Here's how. The Romans typically left the victims of crucifixion on the crosses long after they had died, leaving the dead body of a crucified criminal on the cross and allowing that body to decay, to be picked apart by birds for the stench to pour out, all that stuff. That was the point. It was to deter future crime and future insurrection and future rebellion.

The cross, the crucifixion, crucifying criminals, insurrectionists, that is a deterrent. That's the point. Romans love to leave the victims there, but one commentator says, "If requested, corpses might be handed over to relatives or friends for proper burial." So they weren't all that heartless. In fact, the Roman governors of Judea were known to soften their typical practice of leaving the body there because they tried to govern the Jews with wisdom and kind of a pragmatic sense of honoring their customs, knowing that happy Jews in the land who are able to follow their religion, it kind of quells rebellion and discontent toward the Romans. So they said, have your customs.

According to Deuteronomy 21:23, the Jews did not leave the dead on, hanging on crosses. Once they died, they wouldn't leave them there overnight and especially before a Sabbath. So we may wonder then, well then why didn't Jesus' family or friends come to Pilate and petition him for the body? Why didn't they come forward so they could bury him? Well, let's walk through the list.

Among Jesus family members at this point, only Mary believed. She's a widow. And as old Simeon had prophesied, we didn't continue reading in Luke 2. But he said this after giving that those wonderful words. He said that, "a sword would pierce her own soul." Here it's happened, her soul's been pierced in watching what's happened to her son, she's heartbroken. She's in no position to go boldly before Pilate in his praetorium and demand the body of her son.

Could she enlist one of her other sons or daughters? Well, according to scripture, we know that none of them believed at this point. None of Jesus' brothers believed until after he'd risen from the dead. So they're no, no use. What about his friends? Where are they? Well, they'd all fled. His closest friends fled. John seemed to have some type of a, a connection in some of those religious circles, but he's gone too.

So God has planned by his wise providence for Jesus to die all alone, so that it's very clear he paid the redemption price by himself, no assistance from anybody else. But being left all alone also by his wise and perfect providence, ordered by his

meticulous sovereignty, he plans that this Joseph of Arimathea, an unknown disciple of Jesus, a secret disciple, a stranger to the rest of Jesus disciples, and therefore not under any suspicion by the Sanhedrin or the Romans.

God had called this man, converted him, prepared him, matured him, put him in the perfect position. He's not only wealthy, he's well connected, he's prominent, he's trusted by all the religious and political establishment. What did the, what the others disciples of Jesus were unable to provide, God did through Joseph; amazing Providence.

This man has the funds. This man has the position and the clout, and when the time came, this man had the courage that he needed to come forward. So God keeps this Joseph in reserve until the opportune time. And now that the time has come, God brings him forth. He's the ultimate sleeper agent. He's activated for this moment. Don't think for a moment it was easy for him to go before Pilate. Mark says that Joseph had to gather up courage to go in before Pilate, request the body, Mark 15:43.

Yes. Saints can be fearful. Saints can be timid. If you go and ask him, you know that Joseph would tell you about his thinking. He'd tell you about what had been rolling around in his mind. He'd tell you that he knew these bodies are going to be taken down. Sabbath, it's hours away. It's going to start at sundown, the day of preparation, not only before the Sabbath, but before the whole Feast of Unleavened Bread, starting with the Passover. That's all happening.

He's thinking about this. He knows where his tomb is located, not far from this crucifixion site. So He's been rolling this around. He's been preparing his men to go and execute when he gives the word. And so he does go before Pilate, and he asks him for the body of Christ. As I said, the Roman governors like to leave the corpses on crosses for days. But since it was Friday, preparation day before the Sabbath, this one a High Sabbath, as I said, preparing for the Sabbath and the Feast of the Unleavened Bread. The Jews had asked Pilate to have the bodies removed before sundown so they can go home and observe Passover with their families, so Pilate acquiesced. You can read about it in John 19:31 to 37. This whole section.

Pilate knowing this request is coming from the Jews, the Jews want the bodies off the cross, so Pilate orders the soldiers to go and break the femur bones of the victims with a club or a big huge hammer, practice called *crurifragium*. Literally, it means broken leg. It's the broken leg practice, and as you can imagine, having your femur snapped while you're on a cross with a huge sledgehammer, that's excruciatingly painful.

Some assume that the soldiers did this by Pilates order, that they did this to hasten death. It would hasten death, but not right away. These, these victims could hang there for days after the broken femur, so that's not fast enough for the crucified victims to die and then get everyone home before sundown. This *crurifragium* is really yet another cruel mark of Roman ingenuity. In their minds, since the victims are going to escape this suffocating experience of a slow and painful death by crucifixion, which is how they want them to die as a public example.

Well, the Romans compensated for it by elevating the intensity of the pain. Broken femur evidently rates pretty high. Hasn't

happened to me, but I hear, not good. Soldiers come breaking the legs of the victims. First one on the left of Jesus, then on the right of Jesus. They come to Jesus, they see that he is already dead. They're surprised. Pilate is surprised when he gets the request from Joseph of Arimathea, he inquires of the soldiers, Is he really dead? Yeah, he's dead. So they didn't break his legs.

To be sure he was dead, that he'd not merely fainted from pain or exhaustion, the soldiers pierced his side with a spear. Who would have done that to all the victims there? But they pierced his side with the spear and they penetrated the pericardium, releasing pericardial fluid, that's the water, and then piercing the coronary arteries, the two vena cava arteries.

"Immediately," John says, "there came out blood and water."

John says all this happened, not breaking his bones and piercing his side happened so that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

Again, amazing providence is here. Not a bone of his shall be broken. Another says, "they shall look upon him who they have pierced." God has protected the integrity of Christ's body as

the Passover lamb, Exodus 12:46. Not one bone broken. Not even a pinky.

Time is short. Jesus has died, so we know it's after 3:00 PM at this point. Sundown is a few hours away, and that's when all the Sabbath restrictions come in force. Prevents the work that would be required to retrieve the body from the cross and bury it. And so Joseph, he discerns what's happening, he sees the time and he hikes up his robe and he runs and hightails it to Pilate's praetorium. He overcomes all his fears, gathers up his courage, stands before Pilate, the governor, to make a bold request.

So from an earthly perspective, we can see that this Joseph, this esteemed man in Israel, had a lot from an earthly perspective, a lot to lose, to be exposed as an, a disciple of Jesus, a condemned criminal on a cross. He risked losing status, position, probably wealth, losing reputation, esteem by others. That as Calvin says, "God imparted to this Joseph a heavenly and holy boldness. Joseph counted the cost of discipleship. He chose to forfeit his position, his wealth, reputation, esteem of his colleagues, all in exchange for his soul."

I'd say he made the good bargain, wouldn't you? He maintained his devotion to Christ, like the Apostle Paul, he counted everything else as rubbish that he may gain Christ, be found in him. What Joseph could not know before he came and asked, he could never anticipate, is that Pilate would actually welcome the request, that he'd be eager to grant him the body. This is yet another mark of divine providence as he prepared Pilate's mindset through this whole ordeal.

The irritation he faced from the Jews during the trial, Pilate had been painted by them into a corner. He was extremely irritated by the Jews. He was, he was never at rest with the condemnation and crucifixion of Jesus. He knew him to be an innocent man, doing nothing deserving death. He's been disturbed about how this whole thing went down. He's got a wife at home, "said I had a dream." I told you not to do that. I told you he's going to hear that for the rest of his life.

But now here's Pilate, the Sanhedrin member comes to him. What? What? What's the request? Now, Pilate, he can join rightly with

the Sanhedrin member, in his mind, representing even the Sanhedrin, he can honor those who honor the fallen Messiah. It's through this man, Pilate takes his stand firmly in the middle and grants Joseph's request. He granted the request to crucify him, and he grants the request to honor his body with a burial.

The lateness of the hour here is another mark of providence requiring a tomb a short distance from Golgotha. No time to explore the reasons for this, but if you look at information on the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, it's considered by most to be the most likely site of Joseph's tomb, very close to the crucifixion site. I having not studied all the archaeology, I tend to agree with what their arguments are. But we know that sometime between 3:00 and 5:00 PM, the sun's starting to set.

There's not much time to get the body down from the cross carried to the tomb, provide the most basic preparations of the body, which Luke outlines here for us in verse 53. He took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth and there's more involved in that, but that's the basic outline.

If you think about the weight of a dead body, it's heavy. So they had to remove the spikes out of Jesus hands and feet as he's there on the cross. He'd have somebody holding his body in place as they remove the spikes so that his body doesn't fall dead to the ground. He'd have transferred that body carefully into a cart for the short trip over to the garden tomb, or put it on a litter, a stretcher to take it to the tomb.

They'd have then cleaned the body with water and all the gore and stuff from the crucifixion, anoint it, wrap it in burial linen. Obviously Joseph did not do all this work by himself, as a wealthy man he had servants. So while he ran off to request Jesus body from Pilate, his servants got everything else ready and they met him there at the cross. Joseph had another partner, another secret covert disciple on the Sanhedrin. According to John 19:39, Nicodemus came also. He brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about 75 to 100 lbs.

There's no need to imagine that they used all 75 to 100 lbs to wrap within Jesus. Nicodemus, like any other man on short notice. Running to the marketplace, he's in a hurry. Like any

other man, he overbought, so he brought it all, and he just said, let's do this. So these two men of the Sanhedrin take the body of Jesus down from the cross, they wash it, they bind it in the linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews, and they carefully, and very respectfully, and gently lay Jesus body to rest.

Luke is explicit in verse 53 when he says Joseph laid Jesus body in a tomb cut into the rock where no one had ever been lain. Matthew says he laid the body in his own new tomb which he purchased for himself, purchased for his family. But Luke is very explicit, using three negatives to emphasize the fact that no one had been put there, no dead body had been there before, meaning this is not a defiled place.

One commentator says this, "Hewn tomb was fashioned by quarrying into the side of a rock face. It might have included a forecourt before a cave, the mouth of which could be covered by a large disc shaped stone, rolled, set into a groove cut into the rock beneath it. The entrance would lead into the burial chamber with a stone step and a central pit of sufficient height to allow

persons to stand, in order to prepare a corpse for interment on one of the stone benches carved into the rock along the sides of the chamber." End Quote.

It's a pretty good description. These burial chambers, many of them are all around that area. Evidence exactly this, that a burial chamber was to bury many members of the family. So it had many little slots for bodies to decompose and be at rest. And after the decomposition, at some stage they gathered the bones and then put them, took them out of that tomb and put them in an ossuary or a bone box and buried that. So after laying Jesus body in his own tomb, Joseph gave the command, and according to Mark 15:46, he rolled the stone against the entrance of the tomb.

Very careful handling of the body. Respectful, honorable burial, not put into a common burial site, not castaway, but buried with a rich man. He was not to be interred in a common grave. He was not to be laid among unknown men. As Calvin said, "His body was not thrown into a ditch. It's honorably laid in the hewn

sepulchre. He was more dignified in his death, than he was in his earthly life."

He was with a rich man in his death, Isaiah 53:9, an extremely wealthy man. Jesus was given a burial really that was fit for a king. The noble actions of these two highly capable men, these two very wealthy men, it did come at great expense to them. Cost of money, cost of reputation, cost of social standing, cost of influence, esteem, position, cost of Sanhedrin friendships that they built up over a lifetime.

So by publicly identifying with this condemned and crucified criminal, they crossed a point of no return. This man who was branded by the Sanhedrin as a blasphemer, when they stood with him, they stood against all their friends. This man that they said was in league with Beelzebub, the chief of demons, Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, they took his side, they stood with him. And when you take your stand with Christ, you're going to be perceived as condemning everybody else. You may not be condemning everybody else, but if they don't stand with you, God

will condemn everybody else. They went where Jesus was, these two men.

Hebrews 13:12 says this, that Jesus, "That He might sanctify the people through his own blood, suffered outside the gate." They took him outside of Jerusalem, crucified him out there. So then the writer of the Hebrews says, "let us go out to him outside the camp bearing his reproach." That's what they did and it was so worth it, 100%. Would they do it all over again? Absolutely. They suffered no real loss. All they had was gain.

I like how Philip Raiken expressed this thought when he wrote, "It was at the cross where Joseph took his stand confessing Jesus in his death. He'd been looking for the Kingdom of God, and now he had found it in the body of the royal Messiah who died for his sins. And so with noble courage and gentle affection, Joseph gave honor to his Lord by wrapping his body in a linen shroud and respectfully laying it to rest." So that's how God used the noble action of capable men.

Let's move on to a second point. As I told you, this will be short, but a second point. Let's see how God used, number two: The humble affection of loyal women. The humble affection of loyal women. Let's see how God used that to honor his son in the burial of Jesus' body. Again, look at the text, verse 54. This is a transition, a hinge verse, "It was preparation day and the Sabbath was about to begin." The verse looks backward explaining the need for haste in getting Jesus' body. It couldn't stay on the cross since it couldn't be buried on the Sabbath. He had to inter the body in his own tomb that happened to be nearby.

Again, a meticulous sovereignty and providence makes this all happen. So the verse looks backward, but the verse also looks forward. Verse 54 looks forward, setting a, a time marker, kind of helping us understand the actions of the women so we can see what they're doing. They're about to come to the tomb on the first day of the week. Why didn't they do it just then? Because the Sabbath is coming. They had to rest.

Why would they come back to the tomb? Look at verse 55. Now the women who'd come with him from Galilee followed and beheld the

tomb and how his body was laid. Two things, what they beheld, they beheld the tomb, and secondly, how his body was laid. These women are the same women of verse 49, who accompany Jesus from Galilee. The term, to accompany, verb *synakoloutheo*, which means to accompany someone as a follower or accompany them as a disciple.

Well, here they are again. They're following literally step by step. Some translations in the Syriac translated that way. They followed step by step, followed along closely, intently. These women are loyal, so loyal, steadfast. Where the disciples, the chosen men abandoned Jesus, these women are there, and I find that beautiful. They're untiring, they're unrelenting, they're pursuing. This is precious. They just cannot let him go.

Same women, verse 49 who are standing at a distance seeing all these things. The verb for, seeing, there in verse 49, *horao*, refers to an actual visual perception. Clearly they were seeing him visually, perceiving him being crucified, nailed to a cross. They watched him die. They're just heartbroken. When the soldiers came around to start breaking his legs, they're,

they're horrified at the thought. Then as no mallet is smashed into their saviors femur, it's a relief.

When the soldier pierced his side with the lance, and the body didn't move, and they saw the blood and the water pour out, they knew their savior, their master was dead. But then as they're watching, they notice these two well dressed Jewish men come to the cross attended by a small retinue of servants, wipe their tears away, and through the mist of their tears and their grief, they observe these men retrieving Jesus' body.

So they're alert again. They're back in action. They follow after these men at a safe distance, but they follow after them and see where they're taking him. Matthew gives two names, Mary Magdalene was there and the other Mary. They were sitting opposite the grave having the perfect view. Mark says Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Josephs, that's the other Mary. They were looking on to see where he was laid.

In those two accounts the emphasis is on the location, identifying the tomb, very important apologetic point. Luke adds

something else though. As I said, the women beheld two things, the tomb and how his body was laid. Remember, these women, if they at all recognize Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus or any of the servants that were there, they would have only known them in association with their position on the Sanhedrin. They didn't know these men as disciples of Jesus.

When they're taking the body down off the cross, they have no idea what's about to happen next. They don't know these men as allies, as friends. Are they safe? Are they friends? Foes? Can we trust them? But they are like, of same heart with Joseph, they want to see Jesus body respected, handled appropriately, gently, with great care. They themselves, they had no connections at all whatsoever to retrieve the body. They had nothing they could do if they got the body.

They had no wealth, they had no strength to get him off the cross. They had no place to take him if they did. They had no time or money for any proper burial. So here they are, alert, laser focused, watching with interest to see what are these men going to do. So as they watch and as they follow these men, and

as Mary Magdalene, the other Mary sit opposite the grave, they not only see where Jesus was laid, but they see how he was laid. And how he was laid tells them everything they needed to know.

They watched the manner in which Joseph and his men handled the body of Jesus, not roughly but gently, not in any dishonor, flopping him around, but in honor, caring for him, wrapping him, washing him, told them everything they need to know about Joseph's character, about his devotion. The careful manner of Joseph's servants, the attentive personal present care of and leadership of both Joseph and Nicodemus not only settled their anxious hearts that their Lord's body is finally in the loving hands of friends. That also made them hopeful in having access in the future to the, to the tomb, so they could go back after the Sabbath is over, so they could care for the for the body of the Jesus that they loved.

Why would they go back if they saw Joseph, Nicodemus, his servants properly care for the body? We all know, however careful those men were with the body, just a bunch of men tending to the body, right? Women no doubt approved. Still, they

believe they could just lift the level just a wee bit. Maybe some flowers here, more aromatic spices there. So verse 56, "After they returned, they went back and prepared spices and perfumes." It wasn't for embalming. Jews did not embalm the dead, it was to mask, the smell of decomposition.

And then on the Sabbath, these loyal women, obedient to the Law of Moses, rested according to the commandment, such is the beauty of these loyal women, following Jesus to the end and beyond the end. I mean, they understood, Luke 9:23, "If anyone will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." That's what they did. They followed him to the cross, and they followed him through the cross to the grave. They're there, beautiful. They followed to ensure a proper burial for their dear Savior and their most beloved friend.

Such is the beauty of these believing women who subjected their emotions to the truth. They put their feelings in check. How did they do that? They observed Sabbath rest. You might think of any time that they would just violate the Sabbath just a little bit, it would be under these extraordinary circumstances, to say, you

know what, God's not going to mind if we just go in on the Sabbath and just rush in, do a little bit of and then we'll go home. No, they followed the law. They subjected their feelings to the truth and they're going to return at the right time, following God's providence, following the outworking of what he's revealed, they'll carry out their hearts desire in his time.

These choice disciples, Joseph and Nicodemus, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, these choice disciples received from God the special privilege, the unique honor of burying the body of Jesus, of honoring the Lord Jesus Christ. As I mentioned from the beginning, God has used the simple devotion of these faithful disciples to honor his son. God is all through this. He's the one doing this. We need to see that their treatment of his son's body is his treatment. They really are in a very true sense, literally his, his hands and his feet at this moment. And he uses them in honoring the body of Christ to guard the Gospel narrative, to fulfill prophetic Scripture, and to ensure the doctrinal integrity and apologetic value of this story of these facts.

Facts are a stubborn thing and anyone who wants to deny the truth of the scripture, the veracity of the resurrection, has the facts to deal with. Facts don't run and hide. The facts improve upon scrutiny. Doctrinally, the burial Jesus' physical body testifies to the reality of the incarnation. It's a real body. Doctrinally, the burial of Jesus body is the receipt of purchase for the redemption price that Jesus paid for our sins. He really died. That body is really dead. He really did accomplish our redemption by paying the price of his own life. And doctrinally, this burial of Jesus' physical body sets up the stage for the literal physical bodily resurrection of Jesus. Like he was literally physically dead, literally physically buried, and he was literally physically raised bodily from the dead. That's the hope of our resurrection. Doctrinally, this is so important.

Apologetically, I can't get in everything here. I can't. I want to, but consider the value of the facts in this account. They refute atheism, refute heretical views of the death and the resurrection. The burial of Jesus' body refutes Docetism. *Dokeo* is the verb for, to think or speak or even appear. And some of the Docetics came along and said, oh, Jesus just appeared to

die. He just, he swooned on the cross. Later he was resuscitated. He refutes those who think that the women went to the wrong tomb and found some other empty tomb and assumed Jesus is oh runnin.

And they just start spreading this big rumor. Disciples going in the wrong tomb. All those apologetic issues are dealt with in these facts. So no wonder Paul includes, when he writes to the Corinthians of matters of first importance, not only that he died, but that he was buried and then that he raised from the dead. No wonder God chose these three saints, Joseph, these two women. No wonder he chose these beautiful women in particular in their humble affection and their loyalty to Christ as a reward for their loyalty.

One commentator points this out that they are the only ones to witness all three events that make up the confession of the gospel, the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Jesus; these are the only women, as per 1 Corinthians 15:3 through 5. Also as we recite in our creeds, Apostles Creed and Nicene creeds emphasize that fact. It's women, not men. It's these

women disciples, but not the famous ones, as we'll see next time.

The women returned home, prepared spices and perfumes, but their preparation was all in vain. They went back to the right tomb, all right, on the first day, bringing the spices which they had prepared, Luke 24:1. But as it turns out, there would be no need. Why? Because the body of Jesus did not decay, didn't decompose. He was gloriously raised from the dead. And as Christ said through the mouth of David, Psalm 16:10, "You will not forsake my body or my soul to Sheol. You will not give your holy One over to see corruption."

Christ believed that, and as we see from Acts chapter 2, he taught his people to believe that too. That faith was rewarded indeed. And our faith also will be rewarded when we trust the gospel, when we believe, when we obey as good and righteous disciples of Jesus Christ, waiting for the consummation of our hope. Jesus Christ is no longer in the grave. He's risen and he is ascended on high and his ascension to glory, that is our hope, beloved.

So let's stir up together and stir up in one another these holy affections. Let's worship God our Savior in spirit and truth. Let's love Jesus Christ with our whole hearts, so together we can do good things for the Kingdom. Maybe God will grant us special privileges here at our own community to be bearers of his gospel to people that, that so desperately need him. Let's serve him zealously together, sacrificially, faithfully to the end. We do that together, can we? Amen. I got a, I got a one amen.

You and I are going to pray right now. Let's do that. Our Father, we thank you so much for this account and the meaning of it. And time fails us to be able to explore and mine through all the implications. But we do see ways to apply this just in our own devotion to Christ and deepening our conviction in the truth so that you will transform our lives and give us a holy disposition, pious life that is Christ like, and that through our life you will use us to influence many.



Let us be like these faithful women. Let us be like Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. Let us serve you. Let us go outside the camp and be with Christ and take on his, whatever shame may people think they would attach to that. Let us go out there with him and stand with him. Stand for him and speak these beautiful words of the gospel to demonstrate the wisdom and the power of your gospel, the wisdom and the power in your Christ, whom you raised from the dead and seated at your right hand in glory. Let us look to him and hope for the day when our faith will turn to sight, when we will be rewarded gloriously in your presence. We pray this in Christ's name, Amen.