

Title: **JOSEPH OF ARIMATHAEA**
Text: Luke 23:50-56

Introduction:

Some flowers only bloom at night. Joseph of Arimathaea was just such a flower. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John all tell us the story of this man. Yet, there is no mention of him anywhere in the Word of God, until late in the evening of our Lord's crucifixion; and there is no mention of him afterward. In so far as the record of Holy Scripture is concerned, he **seems to step onto the stage of history** just after our Savior died, **does just one thing**, and then **steps off the stage into oblivion**. Let's read about him in Luke 23.

(Luke 23:50-56) "And, behold, *there was* a man named Joseph, a counsellor; *and he was* a good man, and a just: (51) (The same had not consented to the counsel and deed of them;) *he was* of Arimathaea, a city of the Jews: who also himself waited for the kingdom of God. (52) This *man* went unto Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. (53) And he took it down, and wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a sepulchre that was hewn in stone, wherein never man before was laid. (54) And that day was the preparation, and the sabbath drew on. (55) And the women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulchre, and how his body was laid. (56) And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the sabbath day according to the commandment."

This rich man of Arimathaea, was **a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin**, that mob of self-righteous Pharisees, that horrible Jewish religious court that had the Lord Jesus crucified. Yet, the Holy Spirit expressly tells us that he was "**a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews**" (John 19:38). **Because** he was a member of the Sanhedrin, because his fear of the Jews kept him from openly confessing the Lord Jesus, Joseph of Arimathaea is often overlooked, or looked upon with disdain.

¹ Danville — Sunday Evening — December 3, 2006
 Merida, Mexico — Wednesday Evening — December 7, 2006
Tape # Z-16a

We all naturally imagine that **we would not have feared** those men Joseph feared, that we would not **keep our faith in Christ a secret thing**, and that we would not **remain a part of any church or religious body that had condemned the Lord Jesus and cried for his crucifixion**. In fact, our proud, self-righteous hearts would cast this man aside as a reprobate hypocrite in a flash, except for one thing. — **God the Holy Spirit tells** (vv. 50-51) **us that Joseph of Arimathaea** “was a **good** man, and a **just**...who also himself **waited** for the kingdom of God.”

- The word translated “good” in this particular place means “ready.”
- The word translated “just” means “righteous, right, innocent, or faultless.”

That sure messes things up. Doesn’t it? It messes things up **only if** we are so foolish that we imagine that we know the heart of another and insist upon sitting ourselves up as judges before whom all the world must stand or fall!

Though no one around him, believers or unbelievers, church folks or street folks, no one, imagined that Joseph was one of the Lord’s disciples. “If he had,” as proud religious idiots say, “been put on trial for being a Christian, there would not have been enough evidence to convict him.” But Joseph of Arimathaea was **the right man in the right place at the right time**. He was one of God’s saints, a man chosen for a specific service, brought forth to the light at exactly the right time.

- No, I do not excuse his fear of the Jews.
- No, I do not excuse his refusal to identify himself with his Lord.
- No, I do not justify his membership in the Sanhedrin.
- And, no, I do not imagine that you would have done any better, or any different than he did, had you been in his place. — I am dead sure I would not have behaved better.

Having said all that, somehow, when he saw his Savior whom he dearly loved, whom he trusted, the King for whom he had been looking, crucified upon the cursed tree, extraordinary courage nerved his spirit, and boldly he went to Pilate, and begged the body of his Lord, that he might give him a proper burial.

- When others were cowardly, Joseph was courageous.
- When others showed themselves lax, Joseph was loyal.

- When others denied their Savior, Joseph stepped forward to identify himself with his Redeemer and Lord.
- When others were reluctant, Joseph was ready.

Multitudes, like Joseph, have been emboldened by the cross of Christ to do what they would never have thought of doing otherwise. **When night comes the stars appear; and in the darkest night in the history of the world this star shined brightly.**

SEVEN LESSONS

1. Our great **God rules and overrules all things** for his own glory and the good of his elect. How could Isaiah’s prophecy have been fulfilled, that Christ would make his grave with the rich in his death (Isaiah 53:9), except as it actually came to pass? He who was numbered with the transgressors and bare the sin of many” made his grave with the rich.

(Isaiah 53:9) “And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither *was any* deceit in his mouth.”

When the Jewish leaders went to Pilate to have the Lord’s legs broken and the body taken from the cross, they didn’t say, “We need to bury the body,” and did not ask that his body might be buried. No sir! The bodies of the crucified men were thrown into a common pit, to be meat for buzzards and wild animals. The bodies were left in the open to rot, until the sun had bleached their bones. There was no thought of burying the crucified felon.

Even if the disciples had gotten up the nerve to have their Lord buried, they had no grave in Jerusalem. They were Galileans. They could not carry the Savior’s body back to Galilee.

RED HEIFER

But, back in Numbers 19 there was a law given in Israel, one of the ceremonies required by God that the Jews never kept. It involved the sacrifice of a red heifer. This red heifer offering was one of the most beautiful, intimate and intricate types of the offering of the Son of God for sinners given in the Old Testament; but it was never observed by anyone. Listen to what God required in Numbers 19.

(Numbers 19:1-10) “And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, (2) *This is the ordinance of the law which the LORD hath commanded, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring thee **a red heifer without spot, wherein is no blemish, and upon which never came yoke:*** (3) And ye shall give her unto Eleazar the priest, that he may **bring her forth without the camp,** and **one shall slay her before his face:** (4) And Eleazar the priest shall take of her blood with his finger, and **sprinkle of her blood directly before the tabernacle** of the congregation **seven times:** (5) And **one shall burn the heifer in his sight; her skin, and her flesh, and her blood, with her dung, shall he burn:** (6) And the priest shall take cedar wood, and hyssop, and scarlet, and cast *it* into the midst of the burning of the heifer. (7) Then the priest shall wash his clothes, and he shall bathe his flesh in water, and afterward he shall come into the camp, and **the priest shall be unclean until the even.** (8) And **he that burneth her shall wash his clothes in water, and bathe his flesh in water, and shall be unclean** until the even. (9) And **a man that is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer,** and **lay them up without the camp in a clean place,** and it shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for a water of separation: **it is a purification for sin.** (10) And **he that gathereth the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until the even:** and it shall be unto the children of Israel, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among them, for a statute for ever.”

“**And a man that is clean shall gather.**” — A ceremonially clean man, one who has kept the ceremonial law of Moses, one who had no taint of ceremonial defilement on him, he “**shall gather up the ashes of the heifer.**” All that was left after the sacrifice was to be gathered by a clean man. He was to “**lay them up without the camp in a clean place.**”

What was an unclean place? An unclean place, under the law was anywhere a dead body had been. So it was essential that Christ be buried outside the camp. It was essential that he be buried in a clean place. **Where could such a burying place be found.** In steps this rich man from Arimathaea, Joseph, who had a sepulcher nearby, “that was hewn in stone, wherein never man before was laid” (Luke 23:53).

If the Lord Jesus had been buried in a sepulcher where some other dead body had been laid, the ceremonial law would have been violated, but **there**

was a tomb already prepared by God's providence, where never man was laid. Joseph of Arimathaea had cut out the tomb for himself, it was to be for himself. He had no idea, when he cut through the stone that prepared that burial place that he was fulfilling the words of Isaiah chapter 53. — "He made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death." But that is exactly what he did.

Here is something else. The law required that **a clean man must do the job**. You could not have found a cleaner man in all Jerusalem, as far as the ceremonial law of God was concerned, than Joseph of Arimathaea. He was a member of the Sanhedrin, one who rigidly observed the ceremonies of the law.

Still, one thing stood in the way. — **Joseph was a terribly timid man**. He was a secret disciple. But something happened. A miracle was wrought in his heart, and Joseph suddenly became a very bold man. He went in boldly and craved the body of the Lord Jesus.

Still, there is a problem. **Once a clean man touched a dead body he was unclean**. That meant he could not keep the Passover. But that problem vanished in an instant. Joseph now understood that he did not need to keep the ceremonial Passover, because Christ his Passover had been sacrificed for him. **The dead body he was handling was not his defilement, but his cleanness**. The Lord Jesus had, by his shed blood, made atonement for his defilement (sin). The crucified Savior had made him clean; and he could not be made unclean again (Rom. 4:8).

2. **The bodies of God's saints ought to be treated with honor and buried**. — Our Savior was buried as our Surety, brought to the dust of death (Ps. 22:15), that he might conquer death in his resurrection. — We bury our brothers and sisters in Christ in hope and expectation of the resurrection. — Our Lord Jesus was wrapped for his burial in a linen garment like a priest. — We shall be buried in the white linen, priestly garments of his righteousness, as a holy priesthood.

(Revelation 19:6-9) "And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. (7) Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. (8) And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine

linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. (9) And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed *are* they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.”

3. **Death is not something God’s people have any reason fear.**

Spurgeon wrote, “That rock-hewn cell in the garden sanctified every part of God’s acre where saints lie buried. Instead of longing to live till Christ comes, as some do, we might rather pray to have fellowship with Jesus in his death and burial.

4. **None of us has the ability to look upon the heart of another.** — The fact that we do not see grace in a person does not mean that grace is not there.

(Romans 14:1) “Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, *but* not to doubtful disputations.”

5. **Salvation is altogether by the grace of God.** — Our only righteousness is the righteousness he gives us in and by Christ.

- Imputed
- Imparted

6. **God knows the best time to bring forth his servants to do the work for which he has ordained them, and the best means to secure it.**

7. **The sabbath was a day of rest in the Old Testament.** — Christ our Sabbath is our rest. We keep the sabbath by faith, resting in him.

(Luke 23:56) “And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the sabbath day according to the commandment.”