

“Joseph of Arimathea”

29 May 2022 - Led by Rev. Stanley Millen

Welcome & Call to Worship

Hymn of Preparation: Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven

Prayers of Adoration & Confession

Reading: Matthew 27:57-61; John 19:38-20:8

Sermon:

Today we are considering one person, one man, in relation to Jesus. In this consideration we are led to consider our own personal relationship to Jesus.

The person we are considering has a common enough name then and now. I suspect that you and I know people called Joseph (or Joe for short).

There are quite a number of Josephs in the Bible. Best known is Joseph in the OT with the coat of many colours. Then there is Joseph married to Mary.

The Joseph we are considering today is the Joseph known as Joseph of Arimathea. He is mentioned in the 4 gospel accounts; we have read 2 of them and we will refer to the whole four to get the full biblical picture of Joseph. The Bible reveals to us what we need to know of Joseph; it doesn't reveal what we might be curious to know about him, but what we need to know.

He comes to the fore on one particular day in the life of Jesus – the day of crucifixion.

3 'R's' will help us to focus on him.

The first 'R' we get from Matthew's Gospel Ch 27 v 57. A 'rich' man from Arimathea, named Joseph. We all have a reaction when we mention a rich man. We can admire a rich man or be jealous of him. We can even suspect that he must have done something underhand to become rich. But the Bible has no word of disapproval of Joseph's Riches. We can be rich in assets or finance. We are told of Abraham that he was rich in livestock and in silver and gold.

Joseph of Arimathea was rich and the only sign of his riches was his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. For us it might seem strange but God knows that it ties in with the biblical story.

Secondly Joseph of Arimathea was religious as a Jew. He was a member of the Sanhedrin, the top 70 Jews who ruled Jewish religious affairs in Jerusalem. Mark 15 tells us that he was a prominent member of the Council. He was no nominal member but active and important to the work that it had to do. Later in John's Gospel, we find him at work alongside Nicodemus, another member of the Council. Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. Jesus told him that he needed to be born again.

At this point many people would conclude that Joseph had enough to deal with life – riches for this life and religion as an insurance policy for the next life; this is the creed of many.

This is how many people in our own country North and South see things. They ask – “What more do we need”?

Riches and religion were not enough for Joseph and neither should be enough for us. It leaves out discipleship.

Jesus had been preaching about discipleship. We find the terms in Luke 14 v26 “If anyone comes to me and does not put me before his relatives and his life cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple”.

The terms of Christ's discipleship are clear. Jesus first and with the crucified Jesus. Matthew tells us (ch27 that Joseph himself had become a disciple of Jesus.

Where and when it had happened, we are not told but it was a real relationship. He had consented to the terms of discipleship and had become committed to following Jesus as a disciple. Commitment is personal faith in Jesus.

Can you say this of yourself? Or are you still in the observation stage? You see others but either you are not a disciple or not sure that you are?

According to John 19v38 there is one qualification to the discipleship of Joseph. He was disciple of Jesus but secretly because he feared the Jews.

John 12 had earlier stated – v42 “many even among the leaders believed in him but because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue”.

This was the state of Joseph's discipleship until a decisive day came for him – it was the day he had to vote/not vote for Jesus to be crucified.

Luke mentions the early morning meeting of the Sanhedrin and Joseph's vote – Luke 24 v 51 “he had not consented to their decision and action”. Here was a prominent member of the Council going against the vote of his colleagues.

What had happened? Simply this – the fearful disciple had become a bold witness for Jesus. This is the key message for us today – gathered in this meeting house- a fearful disciple can become a bold witness. You and I can become a disciple and a bold witness for Jesus. It will make a world of difference.

Let us examine this slowly and carefully.

Recall the 2nd condition of discipleship mentioned earlier. ‘Carrying the cross’ means identifying with Jesus who was crucified for sinners. Jesus was not crucified for his sin for he had no sin. Therefore, the Sanhedrin was wrong in voting to crucify Jesus. Joseph as a fearful disciple could no longer be a secret disciple – he had to stand up and vote against their decision and their actions.

You and I will need to be prepared to stand up for Jesus among our colleagues.

We may even be outvoted like Joseph and Nicodemus but it will give us a spiritual impetus in our Christian life like that of Joseph.

Before that day was out Mark tells us – Ch 15 v43. Joseph went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. This was the day of Jesus' death. It was also the day that Joseph had become a bold witness. Before this he had been fearful of fellow Jews; now he wasn't afraid even of Pilate – a Putin like figure. This is a figure of the world of today and Pilate was like him.

All the other 'official' disciples had gone off and here was Joseph. He hadn't become disillusioned or disappointed with what had happened and he stepped forward and did for Jesus what John the Baptists disciples had done for him. Boldness was the new characteristic of Joseph. We find the same in Acts 4 where the early Christians prayed that God would enable his servants to speak Gods word with great boldness.

After they prayed this the place where they were meeting was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word of God boldly. (The Church in China is bold).

Joseph was acting boldly; it included action (in going to Pilate) and donation (he donated his own tomb for the body). It also involved bodily discipleship in taking the body down from the cross and bringing it to the tomb.

Nowadays, we have undertakers to deal with dead bodies – Joseph and Nicodemus had to become such with Joseph supplying the tomb and Nicodemus the spices to anoint the body.

Our discipleship involves serving God with our spirits as well our bodies. As the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians – “you are not your own; you were bought with a price; so honour God with your body”.

During Covid many in the Health service and Care professions put themselves at risk to help others; they (along with others were honouring God with their bodies in roles of worship and service.

Christian discipleship is bigger than attendance at the Synagogue or the meeting house; it is personal and involves service to Jesus in the opportunities we have to witness.

Joseph had the company of Nicodemus to assist him and it is good to offer assistance to others and to receive assistance from them. This is fellowship in the things of God.

Pilgrims Progress is a good book to read. I recommended it to a man back from Russia. In the book you will find Christian and Faithful talk to each other. Christian and Hopeful are together after Faithful is put to death. The fellowship of other Christians will be an encouragement along the path of Christian discipleship.

I have a book available on 20 Biblical Characters. I will leave some here so that you can learn from other Biblical Characters.

Meanwhile we come back to Joseph of Arimathea. He was rich and religious; he also had a relationship with Jesus. As a disciple he volunteered to take down the body of his Master. He laid it in his own tomb and rolled a large stone in front to the entrance and went away as a follower of Jesus into history and the sacred record of Scripture. Jesus did not remain in Joseph's tomb. He rose on the 3rd day and is alive for evermore. Let us trust Him and follow Him as disciples.

Praise: Jesus Shall Reign Wher'er the Sun

Prayers for Others

Closing Hymn: I Need Thee Every Hour

Benediction

Announcements