

## It is Time to Step Out

**Matthew 27:50-56; Luke 23:50-54; Mark 15:43-46; John 19:38-42**

In 1983, Bruce Larson, The Communicator's commentary (page 329) wrote, "I believe that one of the things most lacking in America today is moral courage, the courage to do right even if you have to stand alone. Some writers have dubbed this age in which we live the "post-Christian era," in this age that insists on political correctness, and moral relativism, at least a portion of the lost world has already written us off as inconsequential. Robert Kennedy has said, "Few men are willing to brave the disapproval of their fellows, the censure of colleagues, the wrath of their society. Moral courage is a rarer commodity than bravery in battle or great intelligence, yet it is the one essential, vital quality for those who seek to change the world, .... I believe that in this generation those with the courage to enter the moral conflict will find themselves with companions in every corner of the world."

What areas can a follower step out or up? Live out their faith?

Can you think of a time in your lifetime where you have seen more chaos than now? Uncertainty, hatred, division, isolation, anger? (in and out of the church)

Doesn't it seem like the bride of Christ is under more persecution in America than ever before?

At the same time, as I speak with a few of my minister brethren the church in America seems to be falling apart. The Americanized church is falling apart, so it seems, or could God be shaking it up?

We are living in a day that we see fellow believers and ourselves living contrary to the scriptures instructs us...**2 Timothy 2:22-26.**

The scripture that keeps reeling me back in is **2 Timothy 4:1-5.**

This brings us to **Luke 23:50-54** and the parallel verses. It is time to step out, live by faith in wherever we have been holding back. God is shaking things up in the lives of his followers. Followers of Christ can sit on the bench for so long.

We meet a man who decided to step up and out in our story today, Joseph of Arimathea demonstrated such courage. Here was a man with the courage to step-out and be counted for Christ when Jesus' twelve disciples were too confused and frightened to leave the safety of a locked upper room.

**Read Luke 23:50-54**

Who was this man Joseph of Arimathea? All four Gospels (**Matt 27:57-60, Mark 15:43-46, John 19:38-42, and here in Luke 23:50-56**) tell of this man who stepped forward to bury the body of Jesus. We are told that he was a council member, the he was a member of the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of the Jewish people. We are also told that he did not agree with the decision reached by the council concerning Jesus. This can mean he disagreed by not attending, or that he was there but did not vote, or that the council had not informed him because they knew how he would vote.

**Luke 23:50, says he was "a good and just man."**

But Joseph of Arimathea wasn't all that different than us. John's account shares something with us.

**Read John 19:38, "being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews,"**

Joseph allowed his fear to keep him from making his decision about Jesus to be made public. His fear had caused Joseph not to take a bold stand for Christ even though he knew that his heart was telling him to do so.

What kind of fear was this that kept Joseph a secret disciple? Could it be he feared for his life, for his family or for his position? It's not always easy to step up against the authorities.

So, for a while Joseph remained a "secret" disciple. It is as if he is on the proverbial fence trying to keep a foot on each side.

In **Luke 16:13** Jesus had taught, **"No servant can serve two masters; for tither he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Mammon."**

If there has ever been a time that you should have taken a stand for Christ but instead just blended in with everyone else, take encouragement from the story of Joseph of Arimathea.

If you have given up on Jesus, He has never given up on you.

Even if you have been a secret disciple in the past, God can still use you if you will just recognize a few simple truths.

**I. It is Never too Late to Take A Stand.**

- Mark 15:43 emphasizes him "taking courage" going before Pilate to request the body of Jesus.
- What Joseph did in going to Pilate and requesting the body of Jesus took courage for several reasons
- First, it took courage because under Roman law those condemned to death had lost the right to be buried. They were either left for the birds to consume or they were taken down thrown where the city's garbage was disposed of.
- Secondly, it took courage because Pilate was already rather put out with the Jewish religious leadership.
- Third, it took courage to request the body of Jesus because in so doing he was declaring that he was a believer in Jesus Christ.
- Is it time for you to step up or step out? It is time to deal with those areas.

**II. You Will Pay A Price.**

- I don't think that we today can imagine the price that Joseph paid by going to Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus.
- **The price to his personal dignity.** It is hard to humble himself to such an extent. In our text **Luke 23:52** it says he "asked for the body of Jesus" the Greek word is (aitao) and be translated "begged." The implication here is that Pilate made Joseph beg and plead for the body of Jesus.
- **The price to his social status.** How can he as a member of the group who demanded Jesus' death, now justify wanting to give him a decent burial without admitting that he was follower of Jesus. Joseph would have known that the news that he gone to Pilate would soon reach the Sanhedrin. He every reason to expect that as soon as this was known, he could lose his social standing, his status, in fact he could lose everything he had. It not hard to imagine they voted

Joseph out of the Council, excluded him from any position of religious or social influence, and did everything they could to ruin his reputation in Jerusalem. What a price to pay!

- **The price to his personal finances.** He has given up his personal tomb, an expensive thing to do. Remember, he is not expecting it to be vacated in a mere three days. He could have provided a cheaper tomb outside of the city, but he gave Jesus his best. He also bought the linens and spices to care for the body of Jesus in the best way possible.
- Are you giving to Jesus your best or out of your leftovers?
- What I think is even more amazing about this story is that he is making all these sacrifices for a man who is dead and as far as he knows will stay that way. What a remarkable commitment!

### III. You Will Not Be Alone.

- **Read Luke 23:53; then John 19:39-42**

- I want to suggest to you that two hesitant followers of Jesus come together, and the result is that gain the courage to go public with their faith.
- Joseph and Nicodemus took the body of Jesus from the cross and prepared it for burial. **John** tells us in his account (**19:39**), brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes weighting about 100 lbs. and then the two men wrapped the body of Jesus in strips of linen, in accordance with Jewish customs. The only time that anyone got anointed with 100 lbs. of this stuff was when they were royalty. These two dear men were saying to the world, you may not accept Him as king, but He is!
- Why did Joseph (and Nicodemus) step forward now? Why did they finally come “out of the closet” after keeping their beliefs to themselves for so long? Why, now, after Jesus is already dead? The answer, at least to me, is that faith required it of them in these circumstances.
- Is Jesus asking for more of you?

### IV. You Will Have to Sacrifice Your Religion for A Relationship.

- Joseph was a good man, a religious man, a man involved in the work of his religion. But, to bury the body of Jesus, he will defile himself ceremonially by touching a dead body (**Numbers 9:6, 19:11-12**). On the very eve of the most important religious celebration of the year, this act will make it impossible for him to participate.
- Both Joseph and Nicodemus felt that it was more important to give Jesus a proper burial than to remain ceremonially clean so that they could participate in the Passover. They let go of their rituals and laid hold on Christ who was and is the true Passover Lamb.
- I wonder this morning if your religion sits between you and a real relationship with Jesus Christ.
- By religion I mean anything you do or don't do that you think makes you right with God.
- Religious people take pride in what they do and don't do, but they often ignore the sins of the heart such as pride. They put on a good front at church, but frankly their actions stink. At home they are angry and hard to get along with, at work they are judgmental and harsh.
- Is it Time give up on Religious Ritual and to Step out and up to A Relationship?

## Conclusion

If in the past you have been a secret disciple let me encourage you today to step out and make yourself known.

### **1. Come now and receive Jesus as your personal savior.**

**Matthew 10:32 –33 says "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. (33) "But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven."**

### **3. Step Up and be Counted**

"The Prussian king Frederick the Great was widely known as an agnostic. By contrast, General Von Zealand, one of his most trusted officers, was a devout Christian. Thus, it was that during a festive gathering the king began making crude jokes about Christ until everyone was rocking with laughter—all but Von Zealand, that is. Finally, he arose and addressed the king:

"Sire, you know I have not feared death. I have fought and won 38 battles for you. I am an old man; I shall soon have to go into the presence of One greater than you, the mighty God who saved me from my sin, the Lord Jesus Christ whom you are blaspheming. I salute you, sire, as an old man who loves his Savior, on the edge of eternity."

The place went silent, and with a trembling voice the king replied, "General Von Zealand—I beg your pardon! I beg your pardon!" And with that the party quietly ended."

Are there areas in your life you have been holding back?

**James 2:19, "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!"**

"To say you believe in Jesus and not fully surrender is a demon faith." J.D. Greer