

# From Fear to Faith: Joseph of Arimathea's Courageous Stand

## A Study of Obedience and Consequence in Luke 23 and John 19

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It's a little warmer than a Chamber of Commerce day, but it's still overall for those of us who are getting somewhat acclimatized to Southern California summers, this is a pretty good day. The air was pretty clean. I didn't hear any sirens. I need to turn on the spotlight. I forgot to do that. One second. Trying to avoid shadows under my eyes. I don't want to stand up here with God's word open and have shadows under my eyes so that I look like the devil. So, you have to have a bit of a spotlight on you. Nice to have you here. Want to invite you to join with me as we go to the Lord in prayer this evening.

Father, we do thank you for your goodness. We appreciate so much the opportunity that we have together midweek for a study of your word. We recognize that we dare not approach the Bible as a normal book. We dare not read the Bible for information alone. We dare not read the Bible for interest or investigation alone. That we need to read the Bible for life-changing experience so that the spirit of God using the word of God can work in our lives and reveal your will to us and challenge us how we should respond to the truth that we have come to understand. We recognize that your desire is not for us to know the word of God, but for us to do the word of God and that our love for you is best displayed by our obedience to you. And so we come before you and ask you to bless this evening's Bible study.

And before we conclude this prayer, we pray that you might bless Karen Nolan as she seems to be improving. We pray for Pastor Joe. We pray for Nazarin. We pray for Brian. We pray for Jim Carricker. We pray for Dan and Erica and Sarah's pregnancies. We pray for Greg Dixon. We pray for our sick loved ones and our through the Bible reading program. We pray that you might help us to do what is right and proper and good. That you might bless our discipleship ministry. And for that we thank and praise you in Jesus' name. Amen.

Want you, if you would please, to turn in your Bible to Luke chapter 23. We have for the last several months been looking at the Lord Jesus Christ from the time he instituted the communion of the Lord's supper in the upper room to the time he went for a walk with the 11 remaining apostles after Judas Iscariot apostatized. And John chapter 14, 15, 16, 17, the high priestly intercessory prayer. John chapter 18 finds him at the garden of Gethsemane where he's separated from eight of his apostles, three of them and then

further separated about a stone's throw the final three James, John, and Peter. And then when he was finished praying for a season and after he had it was the physically the most demanding experience of his life prior to the cross. The Roman soldiers, hundreds of them, were led to that spot by Judas Iscariot along with a couple of dozen temple guards and two other civilians. They identified the Lord Jesus Christ and Judas Iscariot pointed him out.

They took him into custody, handled him roughly, took him that, and we're talking probably around midnight maybe, took him to the home of Annas, the former high priest, took him then to the home of Caiaphas, the current high priest, Annas's son-in-law, and where he experienced two more unjust and illegal trials. By the next morning, by dawn of the Friday, he was in the presence of Pontius Pilate, probably in the Antonia fortress. He was tried by Pilate and found innocent. He was then dispatched under guard, I'm sure, to Herod Antipas. He tried him and found him guilty of nothing. Sent him back to Pilate. Pilate found him innocent again though he condemned him to crucifixion under pressure from the chief priests. So the Lord Jesus Christ was probably crucified somewhere around 9:00 in the morning.

For about 3 hours a number of things took place. Then from the sixth to the ninth hour from noon until 3:00 the sun did not shine. Then the Lord Jesus Christ cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And then from the third to the sixth hour, a number of other things occurred. The Jews were very particular about violations of the law so long as they could get away with murder. And they wanted to make sure that no bodies were hanging on crosses by the time the sun set. So the Lord Jesus Christ had dispatched his spirit and he gave up the ghost and died and then the legs of the two thieves were broken so that they would die quickly. And now we're looking at those events that are related to after the Lord's body was taken down from the cross, the events leading up to his burial.

And so in Luke 23 and verse 50, we take up where we left off last time. It reads, "And behold, there was a man named Joseph, a counselor, and he was a good man and just." Consequences are unavoidable. One of the challenges of parenting is to communicate to your children that there are consequences for obedience and consequences for disobedience. And you say, "Well, that's just obvious." Well, it's not obvious to a lot of people because socialism, Marxism denies that there are consequences. In his book titled Socialism written by the Austrian economist and I can't remember his name. I get them confused. Anyway, he writes an introduction. It was in 1925. He writes an introduction about socialism, about what they believe. One of the things that a socialist believes is that there are no such things as necessary consequences for actions.

Well, we know that in the physical realm that every action has an equal and opposite reaction. That's what makes rockets go. Okay. And yet there are vast numbers a large percentage of the human race does not believe that there is an effect related to a cause. And so it's something that has to be learned and that's one of the lessons that parents teach their kids. They teach them whether they realize it or not they have to

teach their kid that consequences are unavoidable. And every decision you make and every action you take produces corresponding consequences. Sometimes those consequences are intended and sometimes those consequences maybe often times those consequences are unintended.

One of the consequences of harmonizing the four gospels is the tendency when we harmonize when we bring Matthew and Mark and Luke and John and try to figure out what is the precise sequence of the events that are recorded in these verses. One of the consequences of harmonizing the gospels is the tendency to overlook certain things that if you were studying the gospel according to Matthew all by itself, you wouldn't overlook. If you were studying Mark all by itself, you wouldn't overlook. If you were studying Luke or John all by itself, there are things you would not overlook that when you are harmonizing, it's possible to overlook if you are not careful. So let's try not to make that mistake this evening, shall we? Or overlook something important that might be lost in the mix of the four gospel accounts as we try to harmonize them. Perhaps we will see success by carefully noting the first two words of the verse.

Notice what Luke 23 and verse 50 says. And behold. And behold, the word and translates the very common Greek conjunction kai which is very frequently translated and but not always. Most of the time, probably 90% of the time. And what that word kai does is it connects the thoughts of this verse to what has come before. Very consciously connects it. Now we know there's a connection between verse 10 and verse 11. We know there's a connection between verse 21 and verse 22. But when the author uses the word kai, he wants to make wants us to take note in our mind that there's a connection here. Okay? Take note of the connection here. While the word behold is pronounced edu, it has the force of something like but look at this. Where in English we would say look at this. A Greek would just say edu.

What would they say in Spanish? Say it louder. Louder. What is it? You're closer. Can you? Ma. Did I get it right? Yeah. So, depending on the language, sometimes it's a brief phrase, sometimes it's a single word, sometimes we translate it literally, sometimes we paraphrase it. And so, what we have here is a phrase but so we've read verse 47, 48, 49, but look at this. But look at this. That's what Luke is trying to communicate to us. If we were to paraphrase it into English, Luke is pointing out that there is something connected to what he has already related to his readers while at the same time what he is connecting is contrasting. Okay. He's not connecting what's before with something just like it afterward. He's connecting something to before with something that is related but is a contrast to what he has written down before.

There are the wicked members of the Jewish Sanhedrin, that council of 70, religious guys that are supposed to be godly but actually are just a bunch of legalistic corrupt old men. There is the brutality of the Roman execution squads. There's the bleak tragedy of the two thieves, the one on either side being crucified. Though with one graciously ministered to by the savior, obviously sometime between 9:00 and noon, the Lord Jesus Christ said to one of the thieves, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." And then there's the heart-rending sorrow of our Lord's mother standing there, not real close

because everything about crucifixion is offensive, but she was observing the crucifixion, the agony and then the death of her first son.

And the Apostle John who was almost certainly the youngest of the apostles in by my guesstimation is he's 16 17 years of age and the reason I say that is because he was permitted into the home of Caiaphas to observe the illegal and improper things they were doing and they didn't care whether this guy saw them or not. Now, he was related to them in some way. So, he got in because of a family connection, but they let him witness it. Why would they do that? Because if you're a minor, if you're underage under Mosaic law, you cannot give testimony about anything. Not only will they not listen to what you say, they're not going to give you a chance to say it because you're underage.

And that just shows how far the United Kingdom has strayed away from the word of God that the Labor Party in the UK is considering now giving the right to vote to 16 year olds. I was insane when I was 16 years of age. I was out of my mind when I was 16. And as I look around the guys in this room, I know several people when they were 16 were absolutely nuts like me. And so it's no wonder that under the law of Moses under a certain age, you're not a threat to anyone who's committing the law because you cannot give testimony. You cannot serve as a witness. That's the reason I think John was young.

So picture if you would in your mind this brutality. Picture this torture, this wickedness, this family sorrow. And then Luke writes something that I might paraphrase as meaning, but hey everyone, take note of this man. You got the Romans, you got the chief priests. You got all of this nastiness going on. You got this terrible suffering. And then Kaidoo, okay. Hey everyone, take note of this guy. So, it's connected to what he's just written, but there's a great contrast here. Okay, take note of this man named Joseph, a counselor, and he was a good man and a just.

So, if you recall, we know from Matthew, Matthew tells us Joseph was rich. Mark informs us Joseph was a counselor and honorable. But Luke adds that Joseph in addition to being a counselor was also a good man and a just man with just being the same Greek word used by the Roman centurion to describe our Lord in verse 47 of this chapter where he described him as a righteous man. The word righteous translates the same word as the word just here. So what a contrast this is to the Romans inflicting what they can on our Lord. What a contrast this is to the chief priests, supposed men of God, religious men, spiritual leaders so-called and supposedly, but they're just clamoring for the Lord's death.

And what a contrast this is to Mary and John who are bystanders who are onlookers who can say and do nothing about what they are witnessed to. There's absolutely nothing they can say nothing they can do. And of all of the people on the crown of that hill that day, there was this woman, his mother Mary, she knew better than any human being who had ever lived that my son who they are crucifying has done nothing wrong. She has known him since he was born. She can bear witness to the fact that she has never seen him ever say or do anything wrong. And yet he's just given up the ghost and his lifeless body now hangs on the cross.

No wonder Luke almost orders his readers to take note of someone who stands out in such stark contrast to what has unfolded over the last 12 to 16 hours when he uses this word *idou*. One scholar says the word just means behold but frequently it was used by Greeks as a command. In other words, I insist that you notice this. I insist that you pay attention to this. I am commanding you to pay attention to what I'm about to what I'm bringing to your attention. And so this good and just man named Joseph. He steps into the horror of a situation that he could have and up to now has completely avoided. Completely avoided. That's astonishing.

He's almost like somebody that comes upon the scene of a crime being committed and instead of saying or doing anything about it, he whips out his cell phone and starts recording it. Well, thankfully he put his cell phone down and he puts himself into the situation now, a situation that he had not previously put himself into. So let's turn now to John chapter 19:38 and we'll see what the Apostle John, he of course is writing some 60 years later. Okay, he's writing in the early 90s about an event that took place in the early 30s, right? Matthew, Mark, and Luke wrote probably within 30 years of these events occurring. John writes about 60 years after those events occurred.

And it's not like they would forget because remember these guys have been rehearsing what they saw on a daily basis for the rest of their lives. So he's not going to forget details. Plus of course he's inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. John 19:38. And after this, Joseph of Arimathea being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus. And Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore and took the body of Jesus. Now, I want you to take note of the opening phrase of the verse. And after this.

After And after this a after what? After what? Be careful not to make an assumption that you automatically know after this is after what. Okay. It's a good question that needs to be asked. Well, you what question is that? After what? Because when you read the Bible, you read it with a mind that's engaged and you ask yourself questions. After this is after what is John referring to verse 37 and the piercing of our Lord's body's side? That's in the previous verse. Is that what he's talking about after this? Is John referring to the Romans breaking the legs of the two thieves on either side of the Lord in verse 31? Is that what he's talking? Is it after that? Is John referring to verse 30 and the Lord giving up the ghost and dying after this? Does that mean does it mean after he died?

Or is John referring to the incident of the chief priests complaining to Pilate about what he had written to be displayed on the cross that Christ was crucified with Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews? Is it after that? Well, it's after one of them. But which one of them? To what does this refer pronouns? You got to decide what noun is referred to by the pronouns. Okay, we now we can't be certain but there is a range of possibilities in front of us here. What we are about to read could have transpired just after the chief priests complained to Pilate. And they may have complained to Pilate as early as 3:00 in the afternoon.

Remember, Joseph was a member of the Sanhedrin and he might have been with them at Pilate's judgment hall when they make the case to Pilate. We want these bodies

taken down from the cross. We want you to make sure these guys are dead before sundown because it violates our law for bodies to be hanging on a tree on a Sabbath and at night. I don't know of any commentators who specifically point out the fact, but it strikes me as kind of interesting. We know that Joseph of Arimathea was a member of the Sanhedrin. And while I suspect that they did not invite him and Nicodemus because they kind of knew what their sentiments were, they did not invite them to Annas's house the night before. They did not invite them to Caiaphas's house the night before. So they probably were not at Pilate's judgment hall first thing in the morning.

It's very possible that by the time these guys have come back to Pontius Pilate to demand that these three guys be dealt with so that they're dead by sundown. It's very possible that by then Joseph of Arimathea is standing there right in the middle of them because he was a member of that group. Or he could have gone to Pilate's judgment hall from Mount Calvary by himself later after the Lord gave up the ghost. I'm inclined to think opinion, okay, I'm inclined to think Joseph approached Pilate earlier rather than later. And the reason he did that is because they weren't Swiss. Neither were they English.

See, what does that mean? We think in terms of seconds and minutes and hours. No one in human history ever thought like that. Okay? And most people alive today, even in this country, don't think like that. Okay, the starting time of something means nothing to most people. Okay, and so I think that Joseph of Arimathea is thinking in terms of what quarter of the day do things need to happen in the morning, in the early morning, in the late morning, in the early afternoon, in the late afternoon. So the 12-hour day will be divided up into roughly three-hour segments. And one of the things that Joseph knows is going to happen, he knows there's a Sabbath coming and the Sabbath is coming with sun down. And once the sun goes down, nobody does anything.

Nobody does anything under penalty of death. So whatever needs to be done with the body of the Lord Jesus Christ has to be accomplished before sundown. Is he going to wait till 5:45 to go and appeal to Pilate? No. He's going to get there as soon as he realizes, yeah, this is going to happen. They're going to do this and I need to make an arrangement for him to be properly buried. And so, I'm thinking that he probably made his way to Pilate if he wasn't there with the Sanhedrin already when they're making their appeal for these three on the cross to be dead before sundown. And then as soon as they're finished, then he approaches Pilate or they do that and he comes back sometime later. But earlier rather than later, if you understand what I mean, because in the world in which we live, if you don't wear one of these and pay attention to it even while you're wearing it, people don't slice off time in fine points in they're not precise with it.

Okay. And so he would know that it's going to take hours. He's a rich guy. He hires people. He doesn't do stuff himself. He hires people. Okay. But he's still going to have to arrange for things to be done for the body to be transported to his newly carved out tomb that has never been used. And that's not going to happen like that. That's going to

take time. Okay. And it has to be done before sundown because once the sun sets you're done and there's no wiggle room in that culture once the sun goes down.

So what we know is that Joseph was a secret disciple of Christ. What we know is that he was a fearful disciple of Christ like Nicodemus who I mentioned last time. There are some people who think it is possible that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus are actually brothers. I don't know. There's no proof that they are, but there's some suspicions that they might be. So, we know that he is a secret disciple. We know that he is a fearful secret disciple like Nicodemus. We know that he overcame his fear and pleaded with Pilate for the Lord's body. And the Romans were not known for granting those kinds of requests. They might have acceded to the chief priest's wishes that they make sure those guys are dead before the sun goes down and take the bodies down. But to give the body for a burial, the Romans they could not be counted on to do that.

Because they were empire and in order to be empire you have to have a certain attitude and take a certain approach for the people that you rule. It has to be cruel. It has to be brutal. And when Pilate granted his request it was unusual for him to grant permission and Joseph of Arimathea acted on the permission that Pilate gave him to dispose of the body. Now we ask the question because we always ask questions when you read the Bible. You always ask questions when you read the Bible. If you don't ask questions, you're not really reading the Bible in my opinion. Why did Pilate grant his appeal? Why did he say yes? Romans typically said no. Why did he say yes?

Well, it might be that Pilate granted Joseph's request because he knew the Lord was innocent. We know that Pilate knew he was innocent. He said he was. I find no fault in him. He washed his hands of the whole affair. This is on you, not on me. I don't think he's done anything wrong. So, he knew the Lord was innocent, thereby sparing our Lord the final indignity of an unburied body. Also, thereby setting the stage for fulfilled prophecy. Right? All fits together in God's plan, doesn't it? Isaiah 53:9. And he made his grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death, as he was buried in the tomb of a rich man, because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Fulfillment of a prophecy that was made seven centuries before.

It might also be that Pilate granted the request and allowed the burial of our Lord's body to spite the despised chief priests. Oh, how he hated them. You see, how do you know he hated them? He's a Roman and they're Jews. Okay, Romans hated Jews, right? Plus, he knew that they hated him. You're going to hate people who hate you. All right. Unless you're a Christian, right? But if you're a lost person, you're going to hate the haters, right? And he knew that they hated him and they knew that he knew that they hated him and he hated him back and he's going to out hate them. And so he had he couldn't do anything about crucifying him because they were holding this leverage. You're no friend of Caesars if you let this man live, right? And so he had he held that against them.

And he well knew that they had conspired against an innocent man and he would not have endorsed they would not have endorsed our Lord's body being buried properly. They wanted his body down from a cross. They didn't want him buried. They wanted

him to lay there on the ground so that the vultures could start picking at him and the ravens. So these things we know. So we asked another question, a derivative question because when you read the Bible, you ask questions. What prompted the Freddy cat named Joseph? Do you guys ever use that phrase when you were kids? Freddy cat. He was a Freddy cat.

What prompted him to set aside his cowardly timidity? It was cowardly timidity. And speak up to Pilate and very possibly to do so in front of the other members of the Sanhedrin that he had previously been so afraid of. What prompted him to just I'm just going to do this. I'm just going to do right. Most people don't just do right. Maybe he was experiencing some personal shame. He could have become properly disgusted with himself and regretted his role in saying nothing and doing nothing on behalf of the Lord leading up to his crucifixion.

For days and weeks and months, he said nothing. And he knew he should have said something. He knew he should have said something. And even if he wasn't in Annas's house the night before and Caiaphas's house the night before, Joseph was certainly privy to comments and plans made by the Sanhedrin in the days leading up to our Lord's seizure in the Garden of Gethsemane. He knew what they were going to do because he was a member of the Sanhedrin and they were discussing these things in the Sanhedrin. So whatever prompted him, and I'm glad it did finally.

You know what's the saying? Cowards die a thousand deaths and the brave only once. How many times had he died just a little bit at the end of each day realizing I could have, I should have, but I didn't say anything. And then the next day I could have I should have but I didn't say anything. And then the next day I could have and I should have but I didn't say anything. And finally finally finally he speaks up and says something. Whatever prompted him, Joseph stood in stark contrast to those who worked to bring about the Lord's crucifixion. A secret disciple for a while, but he became a courageous one. And for that, we thank God. Amen.

It's God that gives us not the spirit of fear, but of power and love and a sound mind. Because we're all cowards by nature, are we not? Aren't we all? Aren't we all Freddy? Yeah. By nature. Yes. Yes. And sometimes the biggest Freddy cats are the ones that are so overbearingly demonstrative that they're not afraid. Actually, they're the most afraid maybe. But finally, finally, finally, he did the right thing at the right time.

Father, we thank you for your goodness. And we pray that you might help us, that you might use Joseph of Arimathea as an example to us of what we could do, what we should do, and sometimes why we don't. Please bless this study as you give to us oversight and the opportunity to witness the events unfolding in the life of a man who came to love the Savior and came to discount the opinions and the ill will of his peer group. Bless us we pray in Jesus name. Amen.