

Courage and Conviction: Joseph of Arimathea's Bold Request

Verifying Christ's Death and Burial in the Gospels

DR. JOHN S. WALDRIP

Good evening everyone. Welcome to the auditorium on this very warm Southern California afternoon at Calvary Road Baptist Church. Delighted that you're here. Once again, we want to thank the Lord for the work of Mr. Carrier who invented the first air conditioning unit. Yeah. It's where you take heat out of a warm room and you dump the heat into an even warmer place. And it takes an engineer to do that. And he did that. So, praise God. I'm glad that you're here. Let's go to the Lord in prayer, shall we?

Father, we thank you for your goodness. We appreciate so much the opportunity to be here. We appreciate the technology. We appreciate the facilities. We appreciate the infrastructure that makes it possible to get here with relative ease as compared to almost every other place in the world. We're delighted to have the opportunity to express gratitude to you again for so many blessings, not just the convenience but the opportunity that we have together, God's people coming together and studying your word together, that we might in the middle of the week have a refreshing time of fellowship to encourage one another to pray for one another, to study God's word together to be better prepared to take on the day and to get us to the weekend and for our Sunday service opportunities to invite people to encourage them in this most holy faith.

Bless us this evening in this Bible study. We pray also that you might bless those who, some of whom are not here. But though out of sight, they are not out of our minds. We pray for Joe. We pray for Nazarin. We pray for Dan and for Erica and Sarah's pregnancies. We pray for Greg recovering from chemotherapy. We pray for our sick loved ones. We pray for our through the Bible reading program, the schedule, the time that we spend in the word of God each day reading and rereading the word of God, always finding new things that have always been there, but that we didn't recognize and take note of before. And so the Bible is an inexhaustible supply of spiritual resources and nutrition that you have given to us and for that we are thankful. We appreciate the opportunity to approach you and to come to the throne of grace. We look forward to our time of prayer together after the Bible study. And for this we thank you in Jesus name. Amen.

Want you to turn in your Bible if you would please to Luke chapter 23. We find ourselves after the Lord Jesus Christ has given up the ghost on Calvary's cross between two thieves, that the gospel writers are giving to us an account whereby his actual physical

death, the Savior's physical death is verified again and again and again and the manner of death is stressed. No one took his life from him, he gave up the ghost, it was a voluntary very putting down of his own physical life and the involvement of an individual by the name of Joseph who is the human explanation of how the Lord Jesus Christ's body got from the cross to the tomb in which he was buried.

So we are involved in examining that, considering what the historical record of the gospels provides for us and we take up where we left off from last week. So Luke chapter 23, verses 51 and 52 read the same and this is referring to the previous verse which I'll read in a moment. The same had not consented to the council and deed of them being the Sanhedrin, the council. He was of Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who also himself waited for the kingdom of God. This man went unto Pilate and begged the body of Jesus.

I want you to notice, if you would, how Luke's treatment of Joseph of Arimathea is broken down, continuing what he had begun in verse 50. So, let's read again what we looked at last week, verse 50 quickly. And behold, there was a man named Joseph, a counselor. That's indicative that he was a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, and he was a good man and just. So, those are moral qualities about him that Luke takes note of. But let's look at the four things that we are shown in verses 51 and 52 of Luke chapter 23.

And by the way, anybody can find this structure in the Gospels if you look for it. Okay? If you're not looking for it, it'll just seem like it just flows without interruption. But then if you look at it carefully and cautiously and with not a critical spirit, but with a willingness to ask crucial questions, sometimes the structure of the passage almost leaps off the page at you. And here we have first Luke informing his readers what Joseph had not done. Have you ever noticed when you watch a YouTube video or you watch something on the news and the talking head is reading something that's on the prompter behind him. And almost never do these professional script readers almost never do they get it right. They're always adding or taking out a word or part of a phrase that is very. Don't do that with the Bible. Evening news, not a big deal. A YouTube video, not a big deal. Don't do that with the Bible.

Okay, notice Luke informs his readers what Joseph had not done. Notice what it says the beginning of verse 51. The same had not consented to the counsel and deed of them. Luke does not inform his readers what he did. He informed his readers what he did not do. So, be careful when you're trying to in your mind fill in a blank spot and try to suggest in your own thinking what he did do from what we're told he didn't do. Be careful about that. And I'll show you why.

Joseph is a paradoxical figure in connection with the Savior's crucifixion. He stands out. He's kind of weird. He's kind of unusual. He's different than almost everybody that was on Mount Calvary that day. On one hand, he was a member of the Sanhedrin. Ooh, boos hisses. Okay. Because it was the Sanhedrin that conspired to see the Savior crucified. Oh my goodness. They'd been conspiring and they had been manipulating and leveraging and doing everything they could to get this Nazarene dead as quickly as

possible. While on the other hand, we see that he is identified as being a nonconsenting member of that group who had been judged by Luke under inspiration of God as a good man and a just man and now we find out that he had not consented to the council and the deed of them.

In other words, he didn't agree with what they had decided and he didn't participate in what they did. So, please be clear about what Luke might be communicating here. There are two hypothetical possibilities for us to consider. Joseph was in attendance with the Sanhedrin as they met. So, let's say hypothetically he was at Annas's house or perhaps at Caiaphas's house the night before. But he dissented from the majority who were in favor of Christ's crucifixion but he took exception of them and he didn't go along with that or he was not with them at all at Annas's house or at Caiaphas's house either of their houses and he did not in any way participate in their kangaroo court.

Okay, now what do we have presented here. All Luke tells us is what he didn't do. That's all we know. And he could have satisfied Luke's description of his conduct by either being there with the Sanhedrin and saying no or not being there at all and not saying anything. And you know that my inclination is I kind of think he wasn't there at all. That's just my opinion. Most commentators assume Joseph was there with the rest of the Sanhedrin, but did not agree with them. While I am persuaded he might not have been present at all during their illicit proceedings, thereby not consenting, which is not the same thing as dissenting.

Some people say when they say he didn't consent, oh that means he dissented. No, it doesn't. To not consent does not mean to dissent. He would have had to have been there to dissent. What if he wasn't even there? If he wasn't even there, he didn't consent, but neither did he dissent. So, I'm just saying. You say, "Well, it sounds like you're just making fine points from the scripture." I'm one of these people who believes in verbal plenary inspiration. I believe the whole Bible is inspired and it's inspired as to the actual words that are selected. And so yes, I that gives me the liberty to split hairs from time to time. Hopefully not in a way that bores you.

So he didn't dissent, which he could only have done had he been present. So that's my position. So let's look at the second thing that we find. Luke reminds us of Joseph's origins. He was of Arimathea, a city of the Jews. So, we know that Joseph of Arimathea. We know he lived in Jerusalem. You say, "How do you know that?" We know that he lived in Jerusalem at the time of the crucifixion because he had in the city or at the outskirts of the city, he had an already prepared tomb that was ready for a burial. It was his.

And since Jewish custom was then and is to this day to bury a body immediately or on the next day at the latest. Okay. My dad has been dead two and a half years. I don't think his wife has disposed of his body yet. If she has, I don't know about it. Have no idea. In California, there's no requirement. You can as long as you can pay for cold storage, the body doesn't have to be permanently disposed of in California with any in any length of time. In some places in the south, the person has to be buried within 3 days. In the north, of course, they made exceptions because in the winter time, it's hard

to punch a hole in the ground, you know, with just a pick and a shovel because the ground is frozen. But in California, they don't care. They don't care.

And but he had prepared a tomb, a burial tomb in Jerusalem. And since the Jewish custom is to bury a body immediately or on the next day at the latest, he would not have had a tomb prepared except where he lived. Right? Make sense? Arimathea has not yet been identified, has not yet been located with any certainty by archaeologists that I know of. But Luke points out to his predominantly gentile readers that it was a city of the Jews. This strongly suggests that wherever Arimathea was located, it was probably in that region known as Judea. Okay.

Third, we are given some indication of Joseph's spiritual condition. This is not definitive, but it is descriptive. Who also himself waited for the kingdom of God. There is no consensus of opinion among scholars about Joseph's spiritual condition. On one hand, waiting for the kingdom of God was a widespread phenomenon among Jewish people of that era. You know, just like everybody today is interested in prophecy. I have a guy call me up and what about this? What about that? What about this? What about that? Okay. Ever since the days of Hal Lindsay, anybody here remember Dave Clark? No. Doug Clark's amazing prophecies. No. Anybody remember him? Then there was the guy that had the golden staircase in the background with a seven golden Southern California especially has just been absolutely ridiculous about their interest in prophecy.

But it's always been that people have been somewhat concerned about prophecy. Because you can study prophecy all the day long and still be as immoral as an alleycat. There are no spiritual demands that seem to be placed on people because of their study of prophecy because they don't apply it the way they ought to. If they applied it properly, everything in the word of God calls for personal holiness, right? But people are able to fuss around with and mess with prophetic issues without a great deal of concern.

And so the fact that waiting for the kingdom of God was a pretty widespread phenomenon among Jewish people of that era means that he did not necessarily have to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ to embrace that sentiment. You know people that are in curious about heaven, curious about hell, curious about the second coming, but they're no more saved than the man in the moon. They're just curious about things. As far as being spiritually prepared to deal with those issues, they have not, it seems, the slightest interest.

On the other hand, there are those who suggest that Luke's favorable description of Joseph suggests that he was a disciple of the Lord, though a secret one before his appeal to the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. So at this point, allow me to voice a word of caution. It is not enough to be curious about prophecy. It is not enough to be interested in Bible truth. It is not enough to want to live an upstanding and moral life to have your house in order. That's just not sufficient.

Okay? If anyone would have been described in this way back in the Lord's day, it would have been Nicodemus. Remember this primary Bible teacher of all the Jewish people who I think might very well have been Joseph of Arimathea's brother. That was in

another study. But what did the Savior say to that esteemed Jewish Bible scholar, the ruler of the Jews? He said over the course of a brief conversation that's found in John chapter 3, the Lord Jesus Christ said to that old man that night that he came to visit the Lord, verily I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Marvel not that I said unto thee. In other words, I'm talking to you now, but you must be born again. And the same thing is true of you. The same thing is true of me. We can be interested in all of these varied topics that are unfolded for us in the Bible. But those things, an interest in those things is neither suggestive or indicative that the person is bound for heaven.

Okay? There's an awful lot of people that are hellbound that are interested in those topics. What's required to be prepared for seeing the kingdom and entering the kingdom which by the way comes after heaven. Shall I let the ice cream truck go by before I continue or do I want to compete with drumsticks? Most people think about, oh, I'm looking forward to going to heaven when I die. I'm looking forward to a lot more than that.

Because heaven is going to be a temporary place for a child of God. What's going to be permanent for the child of God is the kingdom with the Savior. Not just throughout the millennium, but eternally. Okay? And so I think heaven is as temporary an abode for the believer as hell is a temporary abode for the damned because the damned are going to go to hell and then they're going to go to the lake of fire. Believers are going to go to heaven, but we're not going to stay there forever. We're then going to go into the kingdom and the kingdom is going to be in place and in force throughout eternity.

The only thing that matters then if you want to see and someday enter the kingdom of God is if you are born again. And by the way, there are characteristics of a person's life associated with the new birth that sometimes others are more discerning of than the individual is. Think about that. Let's see how many of you have been in the military. One, two, three.

In the military for about a hundred years, they have had what's called debriefings. The debrief comes whenever a soldier or a pilot or a sailor is involved in some kind of action. And once the air clears and they come back, they will be debriefed by someone. And the person who debriefs the pilot or the sailor or the ground pounder or the rifleman, the person who debriefs him must of necessity be someone who was not there when the action occurred.

Say, well, why? Because the military has known for more than a hundred years that sometimes and in many situations the worst person to know what's going on in a situation were the guys that were there. They're too caught up in the action. They're too caught up in the frenzy. They're too caught up in the danger. There's too much of an adrenaline rush. And they are among the poorest witnesses to what happened that is humanly possible.

I think there was the great Mariana Turkey shoot when the United States Navy were flying against the Japanese naval airplanes and they got in what was called the great Marianas Turkey shoot. They the Americans by the time they got home they thought they had shot down about 150 Japanese airplanes. I think they shot down 47. And these guys were being honest. They actually thought they had shot down that many. Okay. And they had gun cameras and the whole shot.

But it shows sometimes is the best witness to a baby's birth. The baby. Some of you gals have had babies. Looking back on it, would you say that your baby was the best witness of what happened? I wouldn't. I don't know any doctor who would agree. I don't know any pediatrics nurse that would agree with that. I don't know any mothers that would think, "Oh, my baby knows best because it was my baby who was born."

And yet, when it comes to the new birth, we automatically assume I know more than you. You don't know anything. It happened to me, so I know, and I'm the authority on this. Yes, I am. Are you really? Are you really? Because remember one of the parables, the parable of the soils, the third one which was yet another example of a person not actually coming to Christ even though they had what appeared to be an affirmative response to the gospel and a non with joy received the word but not saved.

This guy is so happy. He's he runs down the aisle from an old-fashioned altar jumping and leaping and clicking his heels. Glory to God. I'm saved. I'm saved. Only he's not. Only he's not. So what's necessary is for a person to be born again. And over time, a person can gain and gather information that his conversion experience was real and legitimate and not just an emotional event.

And God uses people to bring people to faith in Christ. And that's the reason why pastors I think are very remiss for not employing the means that are available to them by asking gentle questions, listening carefully to answers back and forth, back and forth. Much like a military debriefer would debrief a sailor or a rifleman or a fighter pilot about what actually happened.

So let's look at verse 52. Finally, we're told what commendable and courageous thing Joseph of Arimathea did. This man went unto Pilate and begged the body of Jesus. Now, think about this if you would with me for a moment. To approach a Roman governor, as Joseph did, was no small thing. No small thing.

The Imperial Roman army had just crucified three men in full sight of the public. They wanted everyone in Jerusalem to see those three bodies hanging from the crosses. They wanted people to see what they were capable of doing because they were an empire. And if you're going to run an empire, you have to be mean, wicked, mean, wicked, and nasty. You got to be cruel. And the Romans certainly were cruel enough. Okay?

And they had just crucified three men inside of many people. So begging the body of a crucified criminal as our Lord was in Roman eyes. Well, what that did was that put your relationship with the imperial Roman might at risk. And so people were very careful

about how they went about that. You don't want to make the Romans mad at you because the Roman has the right to just draw and thrust anytime he wants to because it's risky what Joseph of Arimathea did when he approached Pilate. It was risky.

What favored Joseph was his standing as a member of the Sanhedrin. So he's part of a body that while may not have been respected by Pilate, it was known to Pilate. Okay? And Pilate possibly had no knowledge of Joseph's attitude toward the Savior prior to this because remember he's a secret disciple. The Sanhedrin doesn't know his real affections toward the Savior, which causes me to think Pilate also did not know what his real affections toward the Savior.

So, it was unlikely Pilate feared Joseph would use the dead body of the Nazarene to stir up trouble because he was a member of the Sanhedrin. And it might very well put this whole matter in Pilate's mind. This might, you know, disposing of the body, getting it buried, like he wants, it will put this whole matter to rest. If I deliver the body over to this guy and so he could hurriedly bury him, it might be a quick and easy solution to a potential problem that I don't really want to deal with because I hate these Jews and I want to go back to Caesarea as fast as I can.

So what suggests Joseph's courage in appealing to Pilate is the form of the Greek verb that Luke used to give us the phrase in which he begged the body of Jesus. The form of the verb indicates Joseph asked, Joseph requested for himself. In other words, I'm asking you for me to give me the body, not us the body. Me.

And this suggests that Joseph might have bared his soul just a little bit to Pilate and did not hide his appeal as being something personal. Pilate knew this is a personal request by a guy who really wants to do this, no matter the risk to himself. And now we turn to Matthew chapter 27:58 to see what the gospel writers have next for us.

He went to Pilate and begged the body of Jesus. We already know that from Luke. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered. So, Matthew describes Joseph's approach and plea to Pilate using the same form of the Greek verb that Luke used and begged the body of Jesus. We read, "And I'm sure to Joseph's delight, Pilate granted his plea and ordered the body to be turned over to him." Well, that's good. But that's not all. There's more.

Now turn to Mark chapter 15 verses 44 and 45. Remember Matthew is writing to a predominantly Jewish audience. Luke is writing to a predominantly gentile audience. Mark is writing to a predominantly Roman. A particular portion of the gentile community. They were Romans. The Romans had a different attitude than everybody else did. Their whole approach to everything was different.

Okay. In Mark 15:44 and 45 we read and Pilate marveled if he were already dead. He being of course the Lord Jesus Christ. And calling unto him the centurion, he asked him whether he had been any while dead. He wanted the centurion to ascertain if he was dead and for how long. And when he knew it of the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph.

Now, how long Joseph had to stand there tapping his toe while the centurion dispatched somebody or the centurion went himself to verify that this Galilean was dead. We don't know. May have been five minutes, may have been 10 minutes. It is at this point that we learn Joseph's arrival to Pilate occurred before Pilate had been informed of the Savior's death. I think it was a surprise to Pilate to find out that one of these guys on the cross on the crosses was dead before one of his guys told him.

Any of you who have people working for you, you want to find out from your people before you find out from anybody else. Whatever it is, whatever it is, one of the best ways you can serve your boss is to make sure that you are the one that tells him about it before a client or before a customer or before a passerby notifies him. Because sometimes the guy in charge feels like he's being blindsided by hearing something from somebody who's not one of his own. Okay? Husbands should hear from their wives before they hear from their best friend about something about their family.

Okay? So, you see where I'm going with this? So, he dispatched the centurion to confirm the Lord's death. This Roman officer being summoned to provide assurance that he was dead. So, Pilate is not about to take any Jewish guy's say so about anything. And this suggests the possibility of the Lord's death being confirmed three separate times.

Think about this with me. When the second execution squad arrived, you remember Pilate had decided, we want to go ahead and shatter their legs so that they'll die quickly. So he sends off for another squad of men to come with the big 10 lb iron mallet so they can whack the shins and shatter the bones. Okay. So when that second execution squad arrived with the heavy mallet to crush legs and hasten death, they, if you'll recall because they went to one thief and then the other thief and then they verified he was already dead, right? So smashing his legs served no purpose but did fulfill scripture, a prophecy.

And then after that, so that squad of men, yeah, this guy's dead. And then some Roman soldier with a spear thrust into his side and water and blood coming out indicated that he had not just died, he had been dead a while because the blood was beginning to separate the plasma from the red corpuscles. So that was the second time the Lord Jesus Christ's death had been verified by Romans.

And it may very well have been that this centurion summoned by Pilate for fear of the consequences of not getting it right in his report to the Roman governor dispatched someone to quickly verify his death or he went himself. And so we have been provided an account of the details of both Christ's death and how it came to be that his body was placed into the care of the man responsible who asked for and was given responsibility to bury his body.

And we are given what appears to be three different times that his death was specifically verified by someone independent of someone else. Independent of someone else. He was dead. There is no doubt. And it's important that he be dead

because unless he's dead, there's no resurrection. It's important to us. Our entire faith rests upon several things and one of them is that he died.

We have nothing in common with those of the Muslim faith because Islam teaches that he did not die. They teach that he did not die. Okay. It is absolutely crucial to a Bible-believing Christian that we accept and embrace what the Bible teaches and shows and verifies that Jesus actually died. And the details surrounding his death and the verification of his death are meticulous.

Pilate was convinced he was dead. Joseph was convinced he was dead. And the Roman soldiers who crucified him were convinced he was dead as well. Think about this. Who was on that hill with those three men hanging from the cross? There were Roman soldiers. First one execution squad and then later a second execution squad. Okay, we know there was at least one Roman centurion.

We know there were members of his family. We know that several Marys were there, including his mother Mary, and the Apostle John was there, we know. And then there were the chief priests. And you think there wasn't a bunch of goons in the peanut gallery that liked to see the gruesome details of a person dying. There's always people like that in a culture of some kind. There's every culture has those kind of people. There had to be somebody like that on the hill. Okay. And then of course there were the chief priests.

Do you honestly imagine they would have allowed the body to be taken away unless they were absolutely positive beyond any shadow of doubt. He's dead. If they thought there was life still in that body, they would have screamed bloody murder for a Roman soldier to come here and finish this guy off. But they didn't. They didn't.

So, the Lord Jesus Christ died. Lord willing, next time we'll look at the fact that he was buried. Died according to the scriptures. Then he was buried. And what comes after that? He was raised from the dead. Okay, that'll be good stuff. Father, we thank you for your goodness. Pray that you might bless our study of your word and that you might use it to reinforce afresh and anew our convictions regarding what the Bible teaches. Bless us. We pray in Jesus name. Amen. I'm wondering if you have