

# From Fear to Faith: Nicodemus and Joseph's Bold Stand

Honoring Christ Amidst Persecution (John 19:39)

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Good evening everyone. Welcome to the auditorium, the Calvary Road Baptist Church of Monrovia, California. It's been rather warm today. We're glad that you're here. We're once again thankful for Mr. Carrier's development of air conditioning. And I invite you to join with me as we go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, we do thank you for your goodness. We appreciate so much that you do all things well, that you are wise, that you know all, that you are just, that you're good, that you're righteous, that you're holy, that you have a plan and a purpose. And I pray that you might help us in our study of the word of God this evening to more clearly understand what your plan and purpose is, your plan of the ages, the unfolding drama of redemption and the details that we seek to discover so that we can better understand how we fit into your plan. We pray also for Jim and for Nazarin and for Dan and for Erica and Sarah's pregnancies and for Greg as he continues to get chemotherapy. We pray for sick loved ones in our church and for our through the Bible reading program. We pray that you might bless those who live on the island of Zakynthos, which is a flame with brush fires all over the island. And we pray that you might send rain and cooler weather. That you might bless our study of the word of God this evening. And for that we thank and praise you in Jesus name. Amen.

Go ahead, if you would please and either silence your smartphone or put a bullet in it so that it doesn't make any noise. We're willing to tolerate a bang so that we don't hear a ring. I want you to turn in your Bible if you would please this evening to John chapter 19 and verse 39.

The Lord Jesus Christ has been crucified. He has given up the ghost. The Romans have verified again and again and again that his body is lifeless. Joseph of Arimathea has gone to Pontius Pilate's residence, judgment hall, probably the Antonia Fortress, and pleaded for the body of the Lord Jesus Christ because the Jewish religious establishment has complained they don't want any bodies hanging on crosses at the onset of a Sabbath, which would be at sundown. And the Passover Sabbath is on its way. And so once Pilate confirmed that the Lord Jesus Christ was dead, he granted permission to turn over the body, the lifeless body of the Lord Jesus Christ to Joseph of Arimathea.

But we're looking at something this evening which John tells us about and only John tells us about and that's in John chapter 19:39 where we read, "And there came also Nicodemus." Well, we've heard this fellow mentioned before, but he's not mentioned anywhere outside the Gospel of John, which at the first came to Jesus by night. Ah, having read through the Gospel of John. Oh, yeah. This is the guy from John chapter 3. and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes about an

100 pound weight that would translate into about 65 pounds. In other words, this old guy has come along and he's bringing something that is of considerable weight. All right.

So, let's examine this verse one phrase at a time. First phrase, and there came also Nicodemus. Interestingly, as I said before, only John's gospel makes any reference to Nicodemus and he does so on three occasions. Nicodemus is mentioned in John chapter 3, John 7, and in this verse, three verses in John chapter 3, one verse in John chapter 7, and then here in John chapter 19:39. So that's five verses, three occasions. You'll recall from John chapter 3 that Nicodemus, we are informed, was a ruler of the Jews, suggesting that he was a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin and that he is referred to by the Lord Jesus Christ as a master of Israel, suggesting he was the preeminent Bible teacher of his day.

The next phrase, which at the first came to Jesus by night. Okay, let's pause and ponder here. John suggests with subtlety the timidity displayed by Nicodemus at the time of his first meeting with the Savior near the beginning of our Lord's earthly ministry. And we need to consider why Nicodemus at the first came to Jesus by night. Why did he wait until nighttime? Why did he do that? Okay.

On one hand, it must be considered that everyone of that era who was not a priest had a day job. You simply didn't have non-working men unless they were blind or maimed or something like that or had leprosy. And so if they were Bible scholars, Bible students, Pharisees, scribes, things like that, they would pursue their studies of scripture and the associated activities. They would always do that at night because they did not believe that being devoted to the study of scripture alleviated them from any responsibility to work a regular job. So they worked a job just like everybody else. And while everybody else is watching 60 minutes, they're studying the Bible. Okay? And that's one possible explanation for Nicodemus at the first visiting the Savior by night.

That said, because when you read the Bible, you read it critically, not to criticize scripture, but you got your mind engaged as you're reading. You're not just trying to get through the chapter quickly. What does it mean? Why does it mean that? Who's it talking about? Where does this happen? When does this happen? And so you wonder or you ought to wonder why would John indicate three different times. Why would he indicate in John chapter 3 and then indicate again in John chapter 7 and then indicate again in John chapter 19 that Nicodemus came to Jesus by night unless he was suggesting something a bit out of the ordinary.

Three times you mention it. Yeah. Once. Okay. Twice. Three times. Really? There's some point he's trying to make and he's not willing to state it explicitly, but he wants us to think about it. My appraisal, this is my opinion time. My appraisal is that John the gospel writer in this way by mentioning this three different times at different parts of his gospel. I think in this way he is suggesting that Nicodemus was a timid fellow. The reason he came at night is most people where unless you're a cockroach gangbanger slime ball at night where are you? Where are normal people, rational people, reasonable people, responsible people at night? They're at home. Yeah. Yeah.

So if he wants to go visit the Lord Jesus Christ without people seeing him, he would wait until nighttime. Why? Because the vast majority of the population, especially in that day, okay? Because the street lights didn't stay on very late after sundown. Okay? In the first century before

they discovered the use of electricity except on the Turkish peninsula. They already had archaeologists have found a 4,000-year-old battery. Somebody knew how to make a battery, a chemical battery. Okay? And I'm sure they had kids that did that to it.

So I think John is in a way gently suggesting that Nicodemus was a timid man that he was fearful of being associated with the Lord Jesus Christ at that point in his life. Now let me just rehearse something with you. I've been here now 40 years and for 40 years I have rehearsed to Calvary Road Baptist Church that we Americans live in a profoundly anomalous situation when compared to God's people everywhere else throughout human history. Okay.

Life in the United States is different than anywhere else in the world at present. And it has always been different than any place else in the world for the last 250 years. And I think people say, "Sure." But it is. In the 250 years of recent American history, it has been a relatively safe place to profess Christ and to gather for worship without the likelihood of facing danger. Okay.

What's the likelihood of somebody going to a church and causing problems, threatening people, hurting them? It happens from time to time, but for every service, it's like one in a hundred million to one chance. Okay? Not to say that it doesn't happen. It just doesn't happen very often. Not like it does in other countries where it happens all the time. Okay?

So for us, it's been relatively safe to profess Christ, relatively safe to gather for worship in comparison to everywhere else and at other times in human history. Yet even before the Revolutionary War, Baptist preachers frequently found themselves behind bars. Yeah. Go out in our foyer and look at the little tidbits of history that we have back there on the walls. Most people hear of Patrick Henry back in the day when they taught US history instead of propagandizing students. But when I was in school, they taught American history. That was your junior year. You got US history and you heard all about Patrick Henry.

He was the Virginia lawyer who was famous for saying, "Give me liberty or give me death." Yeah. Yeah. And a person that doesn't know that is a terribly educated person. It just to not know that about American history is like that's appalling. You don't know that. Everybody knows that, right? So, but what people typically do not know is that Patrick Henry was an attorney and he routinely defended Baptist pastors who were locked up for preaching. Baptist pastors were very routinely arrested and put into jail for preaching the gospel without a license in the state of Virginia or what do you call it? The Commonwealth of Virginia or preaching without being associated with the official Christian denomination of Virginia, which was the Anglican Church known to us today as Episcopalians. Okay. In Massachusetts. Okay. It was what was the denomination? The congregational denomination.

They drew actually a line and to the east you were congregationalists and to the west you were Presbyterians. And those same Protestants criticized the Catholic Church for dividing up the Western Hemisphere, but they divided up New England. The Baptists paid no attention to geographical boundaries. We're just going to go where we want to go and do what we want to do and are you going to try to stop us? Just arrest us. Go ahead and arrest us. Just get it over with. And so they would arrest these Baptist preachers and Patrick Henry would defend them in court. And so that was semi-dangerous. You look in the back and you'll see the Baptist in Boston was beaten half to death with a bullwhip. And everywhere else in the world and it so it used to be that

way here, but for the last 250 years it's been relatively peaceful, relatively calm, relatively safe in comparison to everywhere else.

But everywhere else in the world, both in our Lord's day 2,000 years ago and today, it was and is dangerous to associate with the Son of God. It is dangerous to associate with the Son of God. And both Nicodemus and Joseph back in the day, they knew that. They knew that. Folks, it is dangerous to go to church. Less dangerous here than in Nepal. How dangerous do you think it is to go to church in Iraq? How dangerous do you think it is to go to church in Syria? How dangerous do you think it is to go to church in Turkey? How dangerous do you think it is to go to church in Nigeria or Niger or in Indonesia or Malaysia or Vietnam or Myanmar sometimes Thailand it's dangerous to go to church.

It has always been dangerous to go to church. It has always been dangerous to go to church. That's the reason the willingness of pastors to shut down their services during the COVID lockdown just infuriated me. Don't these guys know any history at all? They say, "Well, it's dangerous to go to church." It has always been dangerous to go to church. Always.

And because we live in the United States, we get a very, very skewed notion of what normal is. It has never been normal in the United States, ever. It's never been normal here. Now, there is what we get used to, but that's not normal. Okay? So if risk avoidance is more important to someone than glorifying God, avoiding risk, if it's a bigger deal than exalting the Savior, avoiding risk is more important than exalting the Savior, then my advice is to stay home where the only threats to you will come from a burglar or a drive-by shooting or a slip and fall in the kitchen or the bathroom. And the most dangerous place in the United States is home because of accidents. Or and then eventually dying and going to hell. Okay.

So, in John chapter nine, and what I'm camping on is that Nicodemus and Joseph were afraid. That's the reason they were secret disciples. They were afraidy cats. Both of these guys were scared. And my response is, "So what? So what?"

In John chapter nine, the man born blind, and I'm establishing that it's dangerous to be associated with Jesus Christ. It's dangerous to be associated with him. In John chapter nine, the man born blind whose sight was given to him by the Savior was summarily excommunicated from his synagogue and publicly shunned by his mother and his father for what? He did nothing for being healed by the Savior. He just stood there and the Savior healed him. And for that they excommunicate him out of the synagogue and his parents said, "Yeah, he's an adult. You can talk to him. We don't want to have anything to do with him. We're not answerable for him."

The people knew that this guy didn't do anything and he lost everything. And then there is the martyrdom of Stephen in Acts chapter 7. What did Stephen do? He preached the unsearchable riches of Christ. Get the best concise history of Israel you'll find anywhere in the Bible is in Acts chapter 7. But the thing that got him aggravated, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost. Ah, that made them mad and they killed him for it. They stoned him to death. Why? His association with the Lord Jesus Christ, they couldn't stand it.

So, we need to recognize that there is a threat level spectrum for anyone associated with the Lord Jesus Christ. And every one of us is somewhere on that threat level spectrum because of our

association with the Lord Jesus Christ. We're somewhere on the spectrum somewhere. And where you are on the spectrum is going to be related to what people know that you identify with Jesus Christ. The less people know and the less you identify with him, you're at the safer end of the threat level spectrum.

But the more you identify with him and the more you live for him, love him and serve him, the more you are pushed to the other end of the threat level spectrum. And everybody is somewhere on that spectrum. At one end of the threat level spectrum is the social discomfort of disapproval. You're a Christian and somebody really that's it. That's it. So you will not identify with and for Christ because somebody at work does this for a furrowed brow. You will hide your Christianity. There are some people who will for a furrowed brow from somebody who is unimportant. They will deny the Savior because they don't want that furrowed brow. They don't want that wrinkled frown because they're afraid of it.

Like the coward who once told me when I asked him that if he turned to Christ, what would you lose? And he said to me, he's not a believer to this day. He said, if I became a believer in Christ, I would lose my father and I would lose my uncle and I would lose my grandparents. And there is no other word for such fear as than cowardice. He's a coward. You're going to tend to the safety and security of your own soul. You're going to forfeit that for fear of what? A couple of people, two of whom will shortly be dead, one who's worthless, and you're going to let that affect your decision. That's just that's just cowardly. That's all that is. That's cowardly.

And at the other extreme of this threat level spectrum, there is martyrdom. I mean, it is so dangerous for some Christians that they die. They are killed for the cause of Christ. And in Nigeria, if you're a young woman in a church youth group, the likelihood in some parts of that country of your worship services being attacked by Boko Haram and they carrying you, carry you off, they kidnap you, they rape you, they kill you and what these groups will always do with a young girl is they will rape her before killing her because that guarantees she goes to hell instead of paradise. And they are determined that she go to hell.

So yeah, it's dangerous to be associated with the Lord Jesus Christ. Okay. So we Americans have a decidedly warped view of reality about such things because it has been so relatively safe here for so very very long a time in the UK. As I was preparing for this evening, my mind just went to two situations in the United Kingdom.

In the United Kingdom, a woman, I think she's about 45 years old, she is presently in prison for praying silently and without disturbing anyone across the street from an abortion clinic. She wasn't even moving her lips. She's standing there across the street from an abortion clinic and she's standing there. A London cop, a Bobby, walks up to her and asked her, "Are you praying in your mind?" "Yes, sir. You're under arrest." And she's now in prison for answering yes to the question, "Are you praying in your thoughts?" That's against the law. That's against the law in the United Kingdom. Okay. They are bending over backwards to protect mosques while turning a blind eye to attacks on churches, church buildings.

And then there's an acquaintance of mine in Northern Ireland by the name of Enoch Burke. Enoch Burke is a public school teacher. I think he teaches what we would call middle school kids. And he was about a week or so ago released from 18 months in prison. And why was he

sent to prison? He was sent to prison because as a school teacher, he refused to address one child by that child's preferred pronouns because of his commitment to Christ. I am not going to refer to a boy as a girl. I am not going to refer to a girl as a boy. That's a violation of my conscience as a Christian. They arrested him and put him in prison. He was in prison for 18 months.

So it is dangerous to identify with Christ. Always has been. It always has been and will continue to be. Somewhere you will be somewhere on that threat level spectrum. So what do you advise, pastor? Deal with it. Deal with it. Suck it up.

So what does the behavior of Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea before that fateful day of our Lord's crucifixion? What does it establish for us? These guys, these are older men. They are wealthy men. They are respected men. They are men of position and influence and they were afraid. They didn't want to be publicly identified with him.

So what does that show us? It establishes does it not the courage of the twelve apostles because they were willing come what may? Come what may? And they knew people were against their Lord. They knew that. Doesn't it establish for us the bravery of the 70 disciples later on where they went everywhere preaching the gospel two by two in a hostile environment? And does it not establish for us or imply to us the guts of the women who followed the Lord Jesus Christ?

It does because they were men of substance, men of position, and with a great deal to lose. They thought whether it be financial loss or social loss, physical harm might come to them. All these kinds of things. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea for those kinds of reasons were secret disciples.

The night after I came to Christ, I was asked in front of 105 engineers in my design laboratory by my then best friend. He asked me, "John, are you one of them now?" And he pointed to a Christian. I indicated him that I was. And I lost every friend I had that moment. That moment I lost every friend I had. And you know what? It didn't hurt. I didn't cry. I felt no pain.

So people get all scared and they get all bothered and they get all worried. What'll happen if, what'll happen if, well it's in compared to Christ it's not a big deal. It's not a big deal. So this is the way Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were up through Thursday. Then came Friday. Friday for these guys was the day of clarity when they realized that you associate with the Lord Jesus Christ despite the cost. Amen.

Despite the cost, you associate with the Lord Jesus Christ fully aware of the dangers and over time you will become more aware of the dangers. But you follow him anyway. Why should I? Why shouldn't you?

Now, look at the next phrase of John 19:39. And brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes about an 100 pound weight. This is what Nicodemus brings to the party. Nicodemus was old and according to John Gill very wealthy man. John Gill in his studies has come to the conclusion that Nicodemus was quite a wealthy man. The mixture of myrrh and aloes of that weight, roughly 65 pounds, suggests wealth because of the expense of that much myrrh and aloe. It cost a lot of money. So this guy had money as well.

We have been explicitly informed that Joseph of Arimathea was a man of considerable wealth. In light of these two facts, I want you to look back to verse 38 of John chapter 19 where it reads, "And after this, Joseph of Arimathea being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, ooh, they might hurt me." 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.

Joseph took the body of Jesus. Joseph took his body. Joseph took his body as well. In Mark 15:45, we are told Pilate gave the body to Joseph. So he gives his body to Joseph. So Joseph takes the body because the body was given to him.

So, let me ask you a question. Because when you read the Bible, you're supposed to have your thinking cap on, right? You're supposed to read the Bible with your mind engaged. Are we to seriously entertain the notion that a rich man like Joseph actually handled the mutilated body of the Lord Jesus Christ? You honestly believe he did that or that old Nicodemus, old Nicodemus, this rich old scholar and he's walking through town like, you know, like old men do. That he's lugging 65 or 70 pounds of myrrh and aloe himself. You seriously believe that? Are you out of your mind?

An old rich man does not touch the body of a dead person. A rich old man does not lug a bag that weighs 65 70 pounds. He doesn't do that. Say, "Well, the verse says he brought it, doesn't it?" Turn to Matthew chapter 8, if you would, please. Matthew chapter 8, beginning with verse 5. Let me show you something.

You need to stop reading the Bible as if you are an American. You say, "Well, I am an American." Yeah, but try not to be so hard. Okay. Matthew chapter 8 beginning with verse five. The Bible is not a western book and the people in the Bible are not western people.

Matthew chapter 8 verse 5. And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, that's a Roman officer, beseeching him. That's what Matthew tells us. And saying, "Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented." And Jesus saith unto him, "I will come and heal him." The centurion answered and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof, but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me, and I say to this man, go," and he goeth, and to another, "Come," and he cometh, and to my servant, do this, and he doeth it.

When Jesus heard it and marveled, he said to them that followed, "Verily, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel, and I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven."

So, keep one of your fingers there and go now to Luke chapter 7, beginning with verse one. Aren't you glad you have an actual Bible so you can have two passages at once? Hard to do with an app, huh?

Luke 7:1. Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum. And a certain centurion's servant who was dear unto him was sick and ready to die. And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant. By the way, this is Luke's account of exactly the same event

that we just read about in Matthew 8. And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying that he was worthy for whom he should do this, for he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.

Then Jesus went with them and when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him. The centurion didn't go. The centurion sent friends to go instead, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself, for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof. Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee, but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, go, and he goeth, unto another, come, and he cometh, unto my servant, do this, and he doeth it.

When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him and turned him about and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And they that were sent returning to the house found the servant whole that had been sick.

So in Matthew chapter 8, the centurion went, Matthew tells us. And in Luke chapter 7, the centurion sent friends, Luke tells us, and it's two different gospel writers' account of the same event. So from these two passages, Matthew recounting the centurion beseeching the Savior personally and Luke definitively showing that the centurion dispatched friends to beseech the Savior.

We discover that culture allowed that someone doing something for you at your behest is the same thing exactly as you doing it. So I'm not lying to people when I walk up to them and we have a potluck and I tell them I prepared that for you because women of the church were asked to prepare it because I asked them to or I asked someone to then ask them to and it got done so I did it. If we're in the Middle East that counts. In California it doesn't count.

So, here's my point in digressing and what you might have thought was chasing a rabbit. My point is that we have two old rich Jewish men. No matter how much their love finally prompted them to set aside their fears, because they were afraid, they were, excuse me, they were cowards. Let's be merciless about it. They were chicken littles, Freddy cats.

But at some point, their love for him finally prompted them to set aside their fears of becoming publicly associated with him. They were no longer afraid to be publicly associated with this one who died for them. It was the least they could do.

But these two men, no matter how much they loved him, they would not have taken the body of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. In the case of Joseph, he wouldn't have done that. The Romans didn't care whether anybody was on the cross, but they gave permission for the bodies to be taken down. Yeah, you can have the body, Pilate says. So you honestly believe Joseph walks up and he takes him down? No, that did not happen, folks. That did not happen. That did not happen.

It would be inconceivable for a rich old Jew to do that himself. So, how did it get done? He's not going to do that himself. It wouldn't enter into his mind to do that himself. Men that age, that position, that standing, that level of wealth would never do that themselves.



So, how did it get done? Because it got done. So, how did it get done? What do rich old men do if there's something of a manual labor chore to be done? What do they do? Do they do it themselves? Here, give me that wrench. Here, give me that hammer. No. Rich old rich old men don't do that.

Skilled old men may do that, but not rich old men. So, what do you do? You hire somebody. You think you think rich old Joseph, we know he was a very wealthy guy. He had a couple of guys. So what did they do? Whatever he asked them to do, whatever he told them to do, whatever he wanted them to do. They did the strong stuff.

He didn't climb a ladder. Climb the ladder. Change the light bulb. He didn't do that. Okay. And what about Nicodemus? While Joseph is tending to the legalities of the body, Nicodemus comes along with 65 or 70 pounds of spices and ointments in a bag. You think he's carrying that himself? No. He folks, he was he No.

You're thinking western egalitarianism and that's not the culture of that that's not the culture there. There's no such thing as egalitarianism. No one of his position, stature, status, influence would ever think of picking up a 65 pound bag of anything.

So who would? His guy because a rich old man has a guy and he's probably had the guy since he was 10 years old. Pick that up. You say, "Well, what are you trying to point out?"

There is absolutely no doubt in the mind of a reasonable, rational Bible student that even though the Bible does not explicitly say it could not be otherwise, then Joseph of Arimathea had one or two guys who tended to the body on his behalf and them tending to the body on his behalf was him tending to the body. And then Nicodemus had a guy lugging around a bag full of stuff that weighed 65 70 pounds. And that guy lugging it at his direction was him lugging it even though he didn't break a sweat because in that culture at that time it could not possibly be otherwise.

So they no doubt had in their employ younger, stronger men to do physical things without their use of stronger young men in any way detracting from their personal ownership of the deeds that were done at their direction to show love and honor for the Lord Jesus Christ by properly tending to his body's burial. They too did that.

See, neither one of them broke a sweat. Neither one of them got a smudge. Neither one of them ever actually touched the body or touched the ointments, but they were the ones that directed it. They were the ones that did it. They were the ones that tended to it. And that's the reason the Bible records only them doing it.

And there are things like that that we look for in the Bible. An old man does not pick up a dead body. Anybody here ever pick up somebody who's unconscious or dead? I have. You ever pick up somebody who's unconscious? Daniel knows about hoisting guys that can't help you. Wow. It's hard. Okay. So, no. No. Joseph of Arimathea didn't do that. He had guys do that. Okay.

So, let's pray. Father, thank you for your goodness. Help us to become better students of the word of God by avoiding the temptation to project our culture and our assumptions onto the passage.

Help us to read it and do our best to walk in their shoes and to sit where they sat and understand the culture to some degree.

Help us to recognize that there came a day in the life of two men who were cowardly. They were Freddy cats. They thought they had a lot to lose. And then they realized that in comparison to the Savior dying on the cross for their sins, they had nothing to lose and everything to gain. And it changed their behavior radically.

They didn't do what they couldn't do. They didn't physically accomplish what they could not have physically accomplished themselves, but they did publicly identify with the Savior because they became men who feared God rather than men. I pray that you might work in each of our lives that we would be the same kind of person and that you would bless us. In Jesus name we pray. Amen. I'm wondering if anyone has a question related to this verse in scripture.