

Mark 15:42-47

⁴² Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, ⁴³ Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁴⁴ Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time. ⁴⁵ So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. ⁴⁶ Then he bought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen. And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. ⁴⁷ And Mary Magdalene and Mary *the mother of Joses* observed where He was laid.

You might not believe this. I am going to start with a joke. It is likely one you have heard before.

A religious man is on top of a roof during a great flood. A man comes by in a boat and says "get in, get in!" The religious man replies, "No I have faith in God, he will grant me a miracle."

Later the water is up to his waist and another boat comes by and the guy tells him to get in again. He responds that he has faith in God and God will give him a miracle. With the water at about chest high, another boat comes to rescue him, but he turns down the offer again because "God will grant him a miracle."

With the water at chin high, a helicopter throws down a ladder and they tell him to get in, mumbling with the water in his mouth, he again turns down the request for help because the man has faith in God. He arrives at the gates of heaven with broken faith and says to Peter, "I thought God would grant me a miracle and I have been let down." St. Peter chuckles and responds, "I don't know what you're complaining about, we **sent you** three boats and a helicopter."

What we are going to see this morning is the way God uses the acts of normal humans to accomplish His sovereign will. Maybe you are in distress. Maybe you are praying for an answer, or relief, or something special from God. Well, the way God most often answers those prayers is to send His people. And on **the reverse side**, we can often be part of that divine intrusion on a person's life by going to people as we see that they have needs.

Now before we illustrate our point from the text we have some ground to cover.

⁴² **Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath**

Remember we discussed this previously. The pieces fit so much better now in my mind by recognizing there were two Sabbaths being spoken of. There was the

preparation day, that was the day before the Sabbath. Then there was the day that the Passover was partaken of. That day began in the evening that Christ was put in the grave and ran until the following evening. This day was a Sabbath. And then there was another Sabbath on Saturday.

So this is where Joseph of Arimathea shows up. This man has a mission and he has very little time to accomplish it. As we look further at his position we will see that his life is often like our lives. He has a great deal of pressure from several fronts while he has a job to do that he feels he must accomplish. Sound familiar? OK, let's take a look at this man Joseph.

I am going to read some from MacArthur's account because he covers it so well.

The exact location of Arimathea is unknown, though some scholars associate it with the birthplace of Samuel ([1 Sam. 1:1, 19; 2:11](#)). Luke explains that it was "a city of the Jews" ([Luke 23:51](#)), indicating that it was in Judea.

Incredibly, Joseph was a prominent member of the very Council (namely, the Sanhedrin) that had falsely accused, wrongly convicted, and illegally sentenced Jesus to death earlier that morning. Yet, unlike most of his fellow councilmen, Joseph was "a good and righteous man" ([Luke 23:50](#)), who had been brought to saving faith in the Lord Jesus. Though he was a member of the Sanhedrin, [Luke 23:51](#) clarifies that "he had not consented" to the religious leaders' malevolent treatment of Jesus, likely indicating that he was not present when Jesus' trial occurred (cf. [Mark 14:64-65](#)).

Both Matthew and John describe Joseph as "a disciple of Jesus" ([Matt. 27:57; John 19:38](#)), indicating that he was a true believer who himself was waiting for the kingdom of God. Joseph understood the Old Testament promises of salvation and had come to the conviction that the Lord Jesus was indeed the messianic king. Yet, he kept his opinions about Jesus secret "for fear of the Jews" ([John 19:38](#)). Joseph must have been elated earlier that week when Jesus entered the city to shouts of messianic expectation from the people ([Mark 11:8-10](#)). The following day, when the Lord attacked the corruption of the temple ([11:15-18](#)), the secret disciple would have endorsed that as a righteous act of cleansing. He eagerly hoped Jesus would usher in the Old Testament promises regarding the messianic kingdom. But when Jesus was crucified, those expectations turned to heartbreak.

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What does this man remind you of? I don't know about you but he reminds me of me. Here is an unlikely candidate for salvation. He was accepted into the very group of men who were guilty of killing Jesus. He was in their fellowship. They had to **select him** to be in their fellowship. But Joseph was an exception. He was ***a good and righteous man***"

This man had been pierced by the truth. God had gotten a hold of him. God had opened his eyes. Joseph had his eyes set on the Lord's promises. He was waiting on the kingdom of God. He was expecting salvation from God. And wonder of all wonders, when he saw Jesus he knew Christ was it. Christ was the salvation he was waiting for. So far so good.

But how did he respond to that new found faith when initially tested? He didn't do so well. He didn't voice his concerns and convictions in the Sanhedrin **for fear of the Jews**. Now we need to remember that these weren't idle concerns. This wasn't Joseph just trying to **impress someone** or not wanting someone to **think less of him** like we often experience. These guys could take away his license to worship at the temple. They could cut him off from the only way he knew how to worship God. So there was a lot at stake. But, none-the-less this man allowed his fear of man to dictate his behavior. Isn't that all of us at some point? Who of us can't look at our histories and see a place where our desire to impress those around us drove us to go against what Christ clearly states? We have God's disapproval and man's disapproval weighing in on a decision, and we choose to have God disapprove because we want what we want in some relationship with a human. We fear to do the thing that might **risk that relationship or the benefits that the relationship can offer us**. We see that Joseph was tempted with what we are tempted with. And he really didn't do all that well at first, just like us many times.

But look what happens.

God escalates the issue. God graciously provides Joseph a situation that **drives him to make a stand**. The **need** he is confronted with, or the **grace of God** that he observes in his life no longer allows him to respond as he has in the past. He must move on it. He must say like tradition says Martin Luther said- "**Here I stand, I can do no other**". Martin Luther is reported to have said this when he was tried for believing the Bible. He had seen all he could take and could no longer be silent, even though he knew the personal price he would pay was severe.

If you are a child of God you can normally expect that Christ will not allow you to continue in a state of wavering. He is very likely to push the issue. He will put you in a spot where you will **need** to make a stand. A true believer will eventually make that stand. And unbeliever will be shown for what they are in spots like that.

Joseph has seen what his Sanhedrin has done to Christ. It is very likely that he was not invited to the festivities. This again, was a positive statement about his character. The leaders probably knew that Joseph was likely to go by the rules, if nothing else. He would be a cog in the wheel, and they wanted everything going smoothly in these proceedings. So they probably did not include him. But he

sees what they did to Christ. And this takes him past the point of compromise and justification. He now has to make his stand public. And he comes, at this point, to the **point of true discipleship**. He does not care what it will cost Him to stand for Christ. He is going to stand for Christ anyway.

I think this is the reason that the churches in persecuted lands are so pure.

Everyone who claims to follow Christ has already **made this stand**. For Christians in America it may take a long time from the time we call on Jesus as Savior to the point that we regard Him properly as Lord, to the point where we are willing to have Him cost us everything. Well that is the point that Joseph is at.

⁴³ **Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.**

The verb *tolmaō* (**gathered up courage**) means “to dare” or “to be bold.” This was a very gutsy thing to do. Joseph is essentially identifying with Christ whose crime was bad enough for Pilate to kill Christ, at least that is probably how Joseph saw it. So Joseph may have thought that going to Pilate for Christ’s body may have been actually **risking his own life**. It is no wonder why he had to work up to it. What are **you** gathering up the courage for? What is the **hard thing** you need to do but you are afraid of doing it. Let Joseph be your example here. The fact that he succeeded resulted in Joseph’ story being read by anyone that reads their Bible. What a wonderful reward he had. When you get your courage up to do the hard thing that Christ wants you to do, it will always be worth your while..... someday.

Now normally the body ended up one of three places. If the Romans had to dispose of the body it would either go into a cheap grave or onto the public dump heap. That was gehenna which is also the symbol used for hell.

But sometimes family or friends would request the body and the Romans normally gave up the body to them. But naturally first the body had to be verified dead.

⁴⁴ **Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time.** ⁴⁵ **So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph.**

We find more about the death confirmation of Christ in John.

John 19:31-42

³¹ **Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and *that* they might be taken away.** Oh how spiritually devoted these leaders were. They did not want God’s word violated while they killed God in the flesh. Be careful of evaluating your spiritual state only based on how you follow rules. We must obey God, for sure. And a

believer will do that. But He will do it based on the priorities given and God's word and according to His will. These guys were the ultimate legalists and at the same time the ultimate hypocrites. That won't do.

The leaders asked for the legs to be broken. This dramatically sped up death. The leaders wanted the bodies removed by sundown. Pilate conformed to their wishes.

³² Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. ³³ But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. ³⁴ But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. ³⁵ And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe. ³⁶ For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, "Not one of His bones shall be broken."

That fulfilled the prophecy in Psalms

Psalm 34:20 ²⁰ He guards all his bones; Not one of them is broken.

Why was this important? Because the Passover lamb could not have any bones broken.

Exodus 12:46

⁴⁶ In one house it shall be eaten; you shall not carry any of the flesh outside the house, nor shall you break one of its bones.

Christ was to be our deliverance. He was to be our Passover lamb, the lamb of God.

Then back to our John text.

³⁷ And again another Scripture says, "They shall look on Him whom they pierced."

That was a quote from Zechariah.

Zechariah 12:10

¹⁰ "And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.

Now, why did blood and water come out of Christ's side when pierced? The following is from a pretty reliable web page- gotquestions.org It is just a theory. **Those who were flogged would often go into hypovolemic shock, a term that refers to low blood volume. In other words, the person would have lost so much blood he would go into shock. The results of this would be**

- 1) The heart would race to pump blood that was not there.**
- 2) The victim would collapse or faint due to low blood pressure.**
- 3) The kidneys would shut down to preserve body fluids.**

4) The person would experience extreme thirst as the body desired to replenish lost fluids.

There is evidence from Scripture that Jesus experienced hypovolemic shock as a result of being flogged. As Jesus carried His own cross to Golgotha ([John 19:17](#)), He collapsed, and a man named Simon was forced to either carry the cross or help Jesus carry the cross the rest of way to the hill ([Matthew 27:32–33](#); [Mark 15:21–22](#); [Luke 23:26](#)). This collapse indicates Jesus had low blood pressure. Another indicator that Jesus suffered from hypovolemic shock was that He declared He was thirsty as He hung on the cross ([John 19:28](#)), indicating His body's desire to replenish fluids.

Prior to death, the sustained rapid heartbeat caused by hypovolemic shock also causes fluid to gather in the sack around the heart and around the lungs. This gathering of fluid in the membrane around the heart is called pericardial effusion, and the fluid gathering around the lungs is called pleural effusion. This explains why, after Jesus died and a Roman soldier thrust a spear through Jesus' side, piercing both the lungs and the heart, blood and water came from His side just as John recorded in his Gospel ([John 19:34](#)).

Now, we have gotten back to the point in our text where Pilate wants to affirm that Jesus is dead. He was very surprised that Christ died so quickly. Pilate would not have been surprised if this was normal. According to study so far, Christ was either on the cross for 6 hours or 3 hours before He died. Crucifixion was the Roman punishment of choice because it was so slow. There are records of it lasting 3 days. With the weight of Christ's suffering, it is so good that He did not have to suffer any longer.

Pilate asked if Christ had been dead for a while. Essentially he was asking, are you sure he is dead. The centurion was no rookie. He knew what a dead person looked like. And he had the confirmation of the spear that pierced Christ.

Then on with our text.

⁴⁶ **Then he bought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen. And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. ⁴⁷ And Mary Magdalene and Mary *the mother* of Joses observed where He was laid.**

We see more in John

John 19: ³⁹ And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. ⁴⁰ Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury. ⁴¹ Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid.

⁴² **So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews' Preparation *Day*, for the tomb was nearby.**

One of the Gospels also tells us that Joseph was rich. Because of that we see that another prophesy was fulfilled.

Isaiah 53:9

⁹ And they made His grave with the wicked-- But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor *was any* deceit in His mouth.

I had never considered what John MacArthur explains next. This is another quote from him.

In ancient Israel as elsewhere, it was common for tombs to be reused. The body would decompose until only the bones were left; then the bones would be collected in an ossuary and the tomb would become available again. But Joseph placed Jesus in a tomb in which no one had ever been buried

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One of the facts that slide by us easily in our text is the **weight and type** of the spices that Nicodemus brought. Angie and Diane may have noticed this. Those of you who buy herbs know that what Nicodemus brought was extremely expensive. The value was likely about \$150,000 in our day. It was an extravagant gift. And it was way more than what was needed to embalm a single body.

It is interesting to see what elaborate gifts were given to Christ. He began his life with a gift of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Then he had precious perfume poured on Him. Now he is given 100 pounds of expensive spices. And the women followers are about to purchase even more. It looks to me like the Father wanted people to understand the value of His son so he inspired people to give very expensive gifts. There is no virtue in being poor or rich, but both can be useful. We see here that wealth can be very useful in the service of God. Joseph provided his own tomb, which only rich people had. And Nicodemus provided the spices, that only rich people had.

That brings us to Nicodemus. Christ had talked to Nicodemus earlier about salvation. Christ essentially told Nicodemus he was ignorant about true spirituality. He went on to teach Nicodemus some very important things. Now this could have been hard on Nicodemus's pride, but we see in the end **his pride did not win out**. We find in John that Nicodemus was doing the same thing as Joseph. He was making a stand by tending to Christ's body that was going to cost him severely. His life would never be the same after this. He was going to be on the Sanhedrin's blacklist, along with Joseph. He was going to be regarded as a follower of Christ.

Back to our text.

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stone against the door of the tomb.⁴⁷ **And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses observed where He was laid**

We see that Joseph and Nicodemus treated Christ's dead body with great honor. They took the criminal who had just been crucified and treated his body like royalty. This is another indication that they no longer cared what anyone else thought. They had convictions and they were going to live by them.

The fine linen used for this task was usually torn in thin strips and then the spices were poured on it. Then they would be wrapped around the body.

The tomb had probably been recently carved by Joseph for Joseph. This too would have been a "grave expense". That was intended to be a pun.

Then a stone was rolled against the grave to protect from looters and to stop anyone from messing with the body.

Then as we saw from last week, Mary Magdalene and the mother of Joses watched where Christ was laid.

Now Mark misses something between when Christ was laid in the tomb and when the women came to visit Christ on Sunday morning.

Matt 27:62-66 Now on the next day, the day after the preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate, and said, "Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I am to rise again.' Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, otherwise His disciples may come and steal Him away and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go, make it as secure as you know how." And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone.

It is very interesting that these leaders are meeting with Pilate on a high Sabbath. I guess their concern for God's law only goes so far. I cannot think of a more severe profaning of the Sabbath than this.

We see here that the **enemies of Christ** remembered what **Christ's friends** did not. It is interesting that remembering God's word, here, is also **not an indication of their spirituality**. Not everyone who **remembers God's word** is a friend to it, and not everyone who **forgets it** is an enemy of it.

Now, have you ever heard of the psychological term "projection"? Projection is the process of assuming what **others would do in their** situation based on what **we would do** if **we** were in that situation. We all read into other people's situation with our own treachery. So if I am lazy and I see someone not performing a task I may berate that person for being lazy, when in reality they might have a hundred reasons for doing what they do.

Well I think our text displays the projection of the leaders. They assume that if **they** were in a movement where **they** got status and influence, they would do **whatever it took** to keep that movement alive. They would quickly resort to immoral behavior. So they expect the disciples will do the same. They would have never assumed that the disciples were just **innocent sincere seekers**. They could not envision such a thing because that is not what **they** would do.

If you want to learn a lot about yourself, watch what **you accuse others of**. You may think you have another person perfectly pegged. But odds are very good that you are simply displaying your own weaknesses. When you are unjustly accused of some motive by another person, that person has just taught you something else about them. It is likely that they struggle with the flaw they are accusing you of.

So these Jews set up a guard on the tomb and put a seal of Pilate's authority on it. So anyone who messed with that seal would know they would have Pilate to deal with because of it.

What is most interesting here is that what the evil rulers did provided just **one more verification** that Christ truly did rise from the dead. The guards who were there were never punished after Christ rose from the dead. Why? Because they weren't guilty of anything. What this shows us is that in the end, all of the plans of our enemies will only result in causing God to get even more glory.

Now back to the topic of the joke at the beginning of the sermon.

I want to start again with something John MacArthur said. I think he did a really good job on this passage. He says this.

Though God has rarely intervened in history through miracles (like the twelve plagues in Egypt or the parting of the Red Sea), He always works by providentially orchestrating natural processes and ordinary events to accomplish His purposes. Miracles are rare and involve a temporary suspension of the laws of nature, but providence is constant (cf. [John 5:17](#)) and incalculably more complex. Because He is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-wise, God has predetermined everything and is able to direct every part of His creation (including seemingly random events, cf. [Ps. 103:19](#); [Prov. 16:33](#)) to accomplish exactly and completely all that He has planned and promised to do. He sovereignly coordinates a near infinite number of contingencies and superintends the behaviors of all His creatures, so that all things, including people's choices and actions, ultimately align with His perfect purposes (cf. [Rom. 8:28](#)). Still, He is not the source of any sin ([James 1:13](#)), nor is human responsibility lessened or removed.

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Mr. MacArthur was making a point about what happened in our text. Look at it again.

We have Joseph who has a newly cut out tomb and a desire to honor Christ. We have the Jewish leaders who want to have bodies in the tomb before sundown.

We have a Roman soldier who knows how to test a dead body.

We have Pilate who wants a confirmation of death.

We have another Roman soldier who can tell whose bones need broken and whose don't.

And we have the Jewish leaders who want to verify that Christ's body is not stolen.

And what does it all result in? The Old Testament prophecies are completely fulfilled. There isn't a miracle in the lot.

All of us want a miracle. We all want God to show up on our doorstep and perfectly give us what we ask for. We want a sign that it is God that is moving in our lives. Our hearts long for Gideon's fleece or we want water from the rock or the burning bush. We want thousands to come to Christ when we preach. We want to touch someone and heal them.

Maybe even more we want a God-zap. We want God to give us an electrifying impulse and have all of our pride and lust and greed and gluttony fixed right now.

We all want a miracle. We want a supernatural move of God that meets all our needs, takes away all of our suffering, and fixes all our personal ugliness.

But by far most of what God accomplishes in our world for Himself **happens through people**. And often it happens through people who have no idea that they are doing something important.

The rescue we need often comes in the motorboat and the helicopter. It often comes by human faces that God leads to be at the right place at the right time.

They are the miracle of his sovereign actions. Joseph probably had no idea how important what he was doing **really was**. He just knew he had to do it. He felt compelled. He had a conviction. And he fulfilled something that God had said needed done hundreds of years earlier. But Joseph was just doing something he probably regarded as unpleasant, necessary, and vain. Jesus was dead, after all. I guess the application is this. Look for God to answer your prayers through the lives of the people around you. Sometimes you think they are **the problem** but you will often find that they are **the answer** as well. Sometimes God may show you the direct miracle. But that is not his normal method of ministry, even in scripture.

God in His Sovereignty is working out everything for the believer's good. He is fulfilling His promises daily through our circumstances and through those people around us. We need to count on Him for this. And look for ways that He is

already answering your prayers. We need to start seeing the boats and helicopters for what they are. They are the grace of God in our lives.