

## **Standing Out from the Crowd**

Matthew 27:57-60; John 19:38

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Courage is standing out from the crowd in following Christ when it would be far more comfortable to simply follow the crowd. Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather doing what is right before God even in the very presence of fear. Courage is not allowing fear to control you, but rather courage is controlling fear—not necessarily destroying all fear, but overcoming it.

A coward fears offending people more than offending God. A brave-heart fears offending God more than offending people. Just because your heart is racing, your brow is sweating, and your palms are clammy when you confront a fearful situation and perform your duty before God does not mean you were not courageous. In fact, it is far more courageous to experience these emotional and physiological evidences of fear and yet to do your duty than to have none of these evidences and to do your duty.

Biblical courage is not natural, but supernatural. It grows in proportion to our love for Jesus and our conviction and obedience to walk in His commandments. Where there is little love for the Lord and little concern to walk in obedience to His truth, there will be little courage.

We need not lose heart believing that we will forever be paralyzed by fear of certain people or circumstances, for biblical courage is a grace purchased for every single child of God by Jesus Christ and one in which every Christian will grow. Let us consider today an example of a courageous Christian whom the God used to give His Son an honorable burial. The main points from our text are these: (1) The Courage of Joseph in Acquiring the Body of Jesus (Matthew 27:57-58); (2) The Courage of Joseph in Burying the Body of Jesus (Matthew 27:59-60).

### **I. The Courage of Joseph in Acquiring the Body of Jesus (Matthew 27:57-58).**

A. As we consider the text before us today, our blessed Savior has already borne the wrath of God upon the cross for the sins of His people, and has breathed His last breath upon the cross and yielded up His spirit to the Father (Matthew 27:50).

B. We are first given the time of day when Joseph made his way to Pilate, the governor, to obtain the body of Christ, “When THE EVEN was come” (Matthew 27:57). It was now Friday evening around sunset, the Day of Preparation, the day before the Jewish Sabbath Day (Saturday).

C. We are here introduced for the first time to Joseph. Who was this man that sought from Pilate the body of the Lord?

1. He was from a city in Judea called Arimathea.
2. He was a wealthy man (Matthew 27:57).
3. He is called a “counselor” (Luke 23:50), who sat in the Jewish Sanhedrin and “was a good man and just” (Luke 23:50). He had not consented to the decision and action of the Jewish Sanhedrin in finding Christ guilty of blasphemy or in sending Christ to Pilate that He might be crucified (Luke 23:51).
4. He had been a secret disciple of the Lord until Christ’s death and burial due to his fear of the Jewish leadership (John 19:38).
  - a. Remember that in Jerusalem people were being excommunicated from the

synagogue for following Christ (the blind man in John 9:22). Thus, until the death of Jesus, Joseph was not willing to sacrifice his position and place of authority for Jesus Christ (he was like Nicodemus in John 3 who was a ruler of the Jews and came to Jesus by night—Nicodemites). Joseph was now standing out from the crowd, exposing himself as a believer in Jesus Christ. He was no more in hiding.

b. Joseph came “boldly” to seek the body of the Lord before Pilate (Mark 15:43). Literally, “when he took courage, he went in to Pilate.” Something had recently happened to Joseph to embolden him. What was it that had given Joseph the courage to publicly declare himself to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? Most likely, he had witnessed the death of the Lord. The fact that Joseph now appears before Pilate seeking the body of the Lord would indicate that he knew precisely when Christ had died and when to seek from Pilate the Lord’s body. The courage of Christ in suffering and dying for His people, even for fearful cowering disciples like Joseph, had so gripped the heart of Joseph that he could no longer remain a secret disciple of Christ. He must repent of his cowardly fear and look to Christ for courage, who was crucified upon that cross for him. He must now publicly declare his faith, love, and devotion for Jesus.

5. Here was a man who previously had loved the praise of men more than the praise of God (John 12:42-43). Dear ones, when you leave Lord’s Day worship, are you an undercover Christian who lives in fear of family, friends, and co-workers learning that you are a devoted follower of Jesus Christ and like Joseph and Nicodemus lurk in the shadows for fear of what it will cost you to come out from the crowd? Do you prefer the approval of men upon your life more than the approval of God? Does being a Covenanter make you embarrassed before other Christians because they will view you as some kind of extremist? Beloved, what we have given up to follow Christ and to walk in obedience to His loving commands is a mere drop in the bucket when compared to what Jesus Christ gave up for you and me, and what our faithful forefathers gave up to preserve His Word and to pass along to us a biblical testimony for which they were willing to suffer hardship and the loss of their own lives (like Moses in Hebrews 11:25-26).

6. Just as Joseph was given courage to stand for Jesus Christ when he looked upon the love and courage of Jesus in suffering for a sinful like him, we, too, are emboldened to take up the cross of Christ and follow Him when we look in faith at the Lord Jesus suffering upon that cross for undeserving sinners and cowards like you and me. Christ’s death does not make the Christian weak and timid, but to the contrary the death of Jesus makes the Christian strong and courageous. When we meditate upon what our Savior suffered for the likes of you and me (knowing the worst about us, He loved us and died for us). This emboldens us to bear the cross we must in order to be faithful to Him.

7. We do not condone the cowardly fear of Joseph prior to his bold stand for Christ, but we do all understand it. We understand that fear of scorn, that fear of ridicule, that fear of losing friends, that fear of angering family, that fear of losing approval in the eyes of others, and that fear of persecution. Dear ones, has fear of people or circumstances enslaved you and paralyzed you? Joseph faced it, and the apostles faced it. In fact, where are the apostles at this time of Christ’s death and burial? Except for John, they have been in hiding. We can focus our attention upon who Joseph was at one time (a coward), or we can focus our attention upon who Joseph became (a brave-heart). The here is upon Joseph’s present growth in courage rather than upon his past sin of cowardliness. Where sin did abound, grace did much more abound. Just as Joseph grew in courage, just as the apostles later grew in courage, so we all will grow in courage as we look in faith to the death of Christ for undeserving sinners like you and me. It is as we grow in our understanding of the cross of Christ and grow in our love for Him who died for us that we grow in our courage to take up the cross of Christ and follow Him into a furnace that is heated 7 times hotter than normal.

D. Upon hearing the request of Joseph, Pilate sends for the centurion that had overseen the crucifixion of Christ (and who had professed faith in Christ), and he confirms before Pilate that Christ is dead according to Mark 15:44-45. Upon hearing the centurion’s testimony, Pilate grants permission to Joseph to bury the body of Christ.

## II. The Courage of Joseph in Burying the Body of Christ (Matthew 27:59-60).

A. After Joseph received permission to bury the body of the Lord, he begins his trek through the busy streets of Jerusalem to the cross of Christ. But first he must stop at a shop to purchase some linen cloth with which to wrap the body of the Lord (Mark 15:46).

B. Upon arriving at the cross of the Lord with the linen cloth, the body of the Lord must now be removed from the cross to which He has been nailed with spikes. This process was certainly not performed with a hasty disregard or dishonor for the precious body of our Savior. Nobody has ever been handled with greater gentleness, greater love, or greater care than was the body of our Savior as He was removed from that cross.

C. At this point, the body of Jesus was carried from the cross to the tomb of Joseph which was in a garden not far from the cross (John 19:41-42).

D. By this time Nicodemus (another secret disciple of the Lord who also served in the Jewish Sanhedrin with Joseph) appeared with a 100 pounds (literally litras, or 75 pounds according to our standards of weight) of aromatic spices of myrrh and aloes (John 19:39-40—no doubt this was prearranged with Joseph). The same Nicodemus that had come to talk with the Lord under the darkness of night (in John 3) now joins hands with Joseph to demonstrate his love for the Lord in granting Him an honorable burial. The death of Jesus brought courage to both of these men. The bloody body of the Lord was likely washed and then wrapped with strips of linen cloth. Spices were spread in between the strips of linen. This process was repeated many times until the body was tightly bound—not covered with a shroud (per the shroud of Turin). Jesus was wrapped in linen strips and his face was covered with a separate napkin (John 20:7).

E. The body of the Lord was then placed in this newly excavated tomb of Joseph and a very large stone was rolled into place to await the resurrection in the early hours of the first day of the week (Matthew 27:60). It was the ordinary practice of the Romans to allow the bodies of those crucified to literally rot on the cross until they were consumed by vultures and other scavengers. But such was not to be the lot of God's Beloved Son. This was fulfilled prophecy (Isaiah 53:9). It would ordinarily have been someone in the family that would have secured the body of Christ for burial, but since Christ's family was not from Jerusalem, but from Nazareth in Galilee, God called Joseph (a rich disciple of Christ) to give the Lord Jesus an honorable burial in his own new tomb.

F. Again I would submit that Joseph was exhibiting courage in burying Christ in his own tomb (as was Nicodemus in helping). The Jewish leaders knew where Christ was buried. They were the very ones who placed soldiers around this very tomb in order to keep the body of the Lord within it. There was a cost to pay by Joseph in standing with the Lord in His death and burial. How could he continue to serve on the Sanhedrin? We hear nothing of him (or Nicodemus) when the apostles are brought before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4 and Acts 5). It had to cost him much. But that is true of us all if we would follow Christ faithfully. The Lord did not die to make us comfortable. He died that we might die to all of our comforts and pleasures that prevent us from following Christ with our whole heart. He died for us that we might be willing (if He calls us) to forsake all to follow Him. There are no negotiations or bargains—it's all of us or it is nothing. Jesus didn't die to save part of you, but all of you.

G. It was necessary that Christ not only die, but that He also be buried. Why? Let's consider several reasons.

1. To provide further proof of His death and to give greater testimony to His glorious resurrection three days later. Christ was raised from the dead. How do I know? He died and was buried. And His enemies (the Jews and the Romans) knew He was dead.

2. To demonstrate that as He died and was buried so the corrupt nature of Adam in us legally died and was buried with Christ. Our union with Christ does not stop with our dying with Him, but continues with our being buried with Him. The old man within cannot have mastery over the Christian. Why? Because the Christian has been buried with Christ! The Lord encourages you to look to Christ by faith and to confess you were buried with Him (especially when your sin so discourages you).

3. To remove the tears of sorrow and grief at the grave of Christian loved ones and at our own grave. Christ was buried and arose to become the first fruits of all those who would be buried and who would rise with Him. As we stand over the grave of a Christian loved one, we do not grieve as those who are without hope. Why? Because the grave of Christ is empty and so shall our graves be empty on that Last Day.

4. To teach us how we are to honor the righteous who stand for the truth even after they have died. We honor the faithful witnesses of the Lord in their lives, in their deaths, and in our testimony. We do not pray to them. We do not idolize them and bow before their statues or graves. But we do honor them by speaking of their faithful testimony and in following their faithful testimony. Unlike the dishonor given by enemies of God upon the death of that faithful Covenanter minister, Richard Cameron, whose head and hands were severed from his body and brought to his aged father, who was imprisoned at the Edinburgh Tolbooth. His enemies paraded the head and hands of Cameron through the streets of Edinburgh to bring shame upon the name of Richard Cameron, but when the head and hands of his dear faithful son were displayed to him, his father kissed them and declared:

They are my son's, my dear son's. It is the Lord. Good is the will of the Lord, who cannot wrong me nor mine, but has made goodness and mercy to follow us all our days.

5. To show us how we should prepare for death. Joseph prepared this tomb for himself. He was making preparation for his own death. Are you preparing for your death? Are you ready to meet your God right now? Many husbands and wives have watched their spouses walk out the door never to see them again (as have many parents or children). Many within a church have never seen another member, pastor, or elder the following week. Will words of bitterness and resentment be the last words we spoke to someone near to us? Now is the day to prepare for your death. Now is the day of salvation. Now is the day to seek forgiveness. Now is the day to be reconciled. Do not delay.

a. Dear ones, death and the grave is one appointment none of you will miss or one for which you will be late. It is certain to come. You make all kinds of plans for trips and vacations, for your marriage or career, for your education and training (which will all pass away). But do you daily prepare yourself for the grave and for the glory of heaven to come thereafter? You can only do so by trusting in Christ alone for your eternal salvation, and seeking His kingdom and His righteousness above your own comfort, success, and ambitions in this life.

b. For the Christian and non-Christian alike, the grave is a certainty. But for the Christian, the everlasting glories of heaven await him/her. For the non-Christian, the everlasting torments of hell await him/her. Dear ones, that is why there is not a more important matter as you make plans about the future. All within the sound of my voice, come out boldly from the crowd and prepare now to meet your Maker. Wait not until it is too late. Amen.

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