

## Luke 23:50-56

50 Now behold, there was a man named Joseph, a council member, a good and just man.

51 He had not consented to their decision and deed. He was from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who himself was also waiting for the kingdom of God.

52 This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

53 Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a tomb that was hewn out of the rock, where no one had ever lain before.

54 That day was the Preparation, and the Sabbath drew near.

55 And the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid.

56 Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment.

Kids, you wouldn't be afraid to tell someone you were a follower of Jesus would you? That wouldn't be the kind of thing you would think you had to keep secret? Right? *No*, that's something you should want to let people know!

But believe it or not, there are places in the world where believing in Jesus is a very dangerous thing indeed and where being found out can have terrible consequences, for instance I recently heard the story of a young woman who was washing her clothes by the Tumin River in North Korea when a Bible accidentally fell out of her laundry where she had hidden it. For the crime of having a Bible she and her father were arrested, interrogated for three months, tried and then executed. The situation is similar throughout the Middle East, where conversion from Islam to Christianity is often a death penalty offense, and even in places where it isn't the economic and social stigma that comes from leaving Islam and becoming a follower of Jesus is so great that often people who convert will do all they can to avoid making that fact known. The Communist and Muslim world are, to this day, full of these secret disciples of Jesus Christ.

The same was true during the earthly ministry of Jesus, John tells us in John 12:42 ***“Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue;”*** Now for us, that wouldn't seem like a big deal. Oh, I got kicked out of the church? Well, I'll just go to another one. But back then, during the ministry of Christ, to be kicked out of the synagogue was to become a social outcast, and to be shunned. Imagine for instance being a merchant and suddenly not being able to find a single customer willing to buy from you in your entire town. So you can understand a little why it was that men like Nicodemus, who we read came to Jesus secretly in John 3 and Joseph of Arimathea decided to keep their belief in Jesus secret. They were both leaders of the Jews, members of the Sanhedrin, now I say that and most of the time we don't understand what that meant. Think *Senators* or *Members of Parliament*, that should give you an idea of their social status in that society.

Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea both believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but they didn't want that fact to be the reason they and their families lost all their social standing. But then the crisis comes when their love for Jesus overcomes that fear of being exposed. The specific crisis concerned the burial of Jesus.

Now Jesus was Crucified on a Friday, now in the Jewish tradition the next day begins at Sunset, of the preceding day, the next day after Friday is Saturday, which *was* the Sabbath. And that Sabbath was

particularly holy, because it was the Passover Sabbath, so the Jews did not want dying or dead criminals to remain on the crosses at Golgotha and thus defile the Sabbath. That is why they requested of Pilate that their legs be broken so that they would suffocate quickly and be removed from the crosses. Jesus though, was already dead when the soldiers came to do this, he had died at about 3 o'clock. That is why His legs were not broken, John tells us that a soldier instead thrust a spear into side to make absolutely sure He was dead, and He was. There could be no doubt about it at that point.

Under Roman law, executed criminals lost the right to an honorable burial, so its possible that the two thieves were simply dumped without any ceremony in a common grave. Joseph apparently could not bear the idea that that would happen to the body of Jesus. But who could get Pilate to hand over the body of Jesus for proper burial within the three hours between His death at 3:00 and the beginning of the Sabbath at 6:00 PM. Certainly not the women who had been faithfully following Jesus and who still were, even in death. (*It's not for no reason that C.S. Lewis has Susan and Lucy be the only ones with Aslan when he goes to the stone table, and the only ones who stay with him in death*) Certainly not fishermen from Galilee even if they hadn't been scared silly at this point.

No it is going to take someone of Senatorial rank to get that favor requested. So Joseph and Nicodemus can no longer be secret followers of Jesus. Apparently they agree that Nicodemus will go and get the materials necessary to prepare the body of Jesus for burial, the cloth that they wrapped around him and the spices, the 100 lbs of Myrrh and aloes that were wound in to the grave clothes, while Joseph will go and ask Pilate for the body and then probably with his servants take it down and move it to His own unused tomb.

I hope you see here how beautifully the providence of God works. God called Joseph to faith in Christ, the only man who could have facilitated his purposes. It is no coincidence, that one of Jesus' only followers in the Sanhedrin was a rich man with an unused tomb near enough to Calvary that Christ's body might be taken there before the Sabbath, so that yet another prophecy of Isaiah 53 might be fulfilled - verse 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.***

And so Jesus, the one who had no earthly house of his own, was laid to rest in the unused tomb of a rich man. That too was fitting, Jesus was born of a virgin, rode into Jerusalem on colt that had never had another rider, and now was buried in a tomb that had never held another body.

The women observe the place where Christ's body was put, and owing to the haste of the burial, they determine that after the Sabbath they will come back and properly anoint his body. Because they too, desire just as much as Joseph and Nicodemus to honor their Lord, even in death.

And that brings us to the first of our three applications and I want to go from less important to more important in them:

1) ***These women loved the Lord, why didn't they simply come back the following morning?*** Because as much as they loved Him, they knew that they would not have been honoring Jesus by breaking the Sabbath.

This may seem trivial but it is an important point, because there are many who believe that Jesus abolished the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment entirely, but if He had, then surely these women who had been devotedly following Him throughout His ministry, and had heard all of His teachings, wouldn't have

hesitated to come back as soon as they could. But Jesus did not abolish the Sabbath, He is the Lord of the Sabbath! He purified it from the unbiblical additions of the Pharisees, and let us know we should use it for deeds of piety, necessity, and mercy, but He has not eliminated it. He has changed it though. For from the Creation of the World to this last Sabbath day in which he lay in the tomb, the Sabbath was on Saturday and pointed back as a memorial to God's resting from his works of Recreation. But with His rising again, the Sabbath has now been forever moved from the Seventh Day, to the First day of the Week as a memorial of Christ's rising again, and his completion of His work of recreation. This day, called the LORD'S DAY by the Apostles, remains for us also as a reminder of the eternal Sabbath rest that every one of Christ's saints will someday enter into.

As the Author of Hebrews puts it in Hebrews 4:9-11 ***"So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience."***

***2) Why though did Jesus have to Rest in the Grave at All? We know that He had to die for Our Sins, but why couldn't He have died and then been resurrected immediately from the cross?***

Well Jesus Himself had said that this would be the great sign of His Messiahship. When they Pharisees kept asking for a sign that would validate His claim to be the Messiah the Son of God, He answered: ***Mat. 12:40 "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."***

Again in John, Jesus had said this:

***John 2:18 So the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?"***

***19 Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."***

***20 Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?"***

***21 But He was speaking of the temple of His body.***

***22 Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.***

But most importantly, he was buried in the earth for your sakes, that all fear of death and the grave might be removed from His saints who follow after Him.

***1 Cor. 15:20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.***

***21 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead.***

***22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.***

***23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.***

We follow in the pattern Christ has set. Although believers will die and be buried in the earth, yet someday at Christ's return, those same bodies will be raised incorruptible, just as Christ's was.

[Spurgeon Quote]

Jesus has robbed death of its sting and the grave of its victory for believers.

3) Finally, let me leave you with this last application. There are secret Christians throughout the world who are afraid that if they make themselves known, they will suffer loss, perhaps of freedom, perhaps of life, that's understandable. But America too is full of secret Christians, people who think that if they become open and zealous in their faith that they too will suffer loss. Loss of friends, loss of credibility, loss of the ability to act like an unbeliever and not be called a hypocrite. I've met countless people who are just afraid of what people will think if they find out they are evangelical Christians. To quote DC Talk: *what will people think When they hear that I'm a Jesus freak? What will people do When they find that's it's true?*

Well if that's the case with you, in some sphere of your life, then I hope that like Joseph push will come to shove. That there will be an argument, a debate, a call for a decision that will make it impossible to hide any longer, and you'll have to step out in faith.

Remember this, it was only after their faith was exposed that Joseph and Nicodemus became useful tools in the Master's hands. Until that time, all their potential was locked away. The same is true of you, don't be a secret Christian. Remember Lukewarm is Christ's least favorite temperature. Hot is what he is looking for. *Faith is the one area where being on fire is a good thing.*