

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Joseph of Arimathea — Emboldened!

All four gospel accounts of the life of Jesus mention Joseph of Arimathea (Matthew 27:57-60; Mark 15:43-46; Luke 23:50-54; John 19:38-42). Everything we know about Joseph of Arimathea that comes from inspiration is contained in these few verses. Though brief, the information revealed about Joseph is insightful. Most intriguing is how he was emboldened by the death of Jesus and the honor and respect he showed for Jesus on this one day — the day Jesus died and was buried.

Joseph is referred to by John (19:38) and known by most of us today as "Joseph of Arimathea." "Of Arimathea" signifies he was "from Arima-thea" as stated by Matthew (27:57). Luke adds that Arimathea was a city of the Jews (23:51), and according to the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Arimathea was "a place the locality of which is doubtful, but lying probably to the Northwest of Jerusalem."

Luke tells us that Joseph was "a member of the council" (23:50). Mark (15:43) not only declares Joseph to be a member of the council, but reveals he was a "prominent," or "honorable," member of the council. Barnes in his commentary suggests, "the word 'honorable,' here, is not a mere title of 'office,' but is given in reference to his personal character, as being a man of integrity and blameless life;" to this Matthew Henry agrees; after noting that Joseph is called an "honorable council member," he describes Joseph as "a person of character and distinction." Perhaps this is further suggested by Luke who wrote, "a council member, a good and just man" (23:50).

The character of Joseph is substantiated further by other things said of him in the few scriptures that mention him and from the implications that can rightly be drawn from those scriptures. Joseph had "become a disciple" of the Lord (Matthew 27:57; John 19:38) and was "waiting for the kingdom of God" (Mark 15:43; Luke 23:51). He evidently was able to discern the truth about Jesus and overcome the prejudices and intimidations of many of his peers (John 7:45-49). Joseph was a "rich man" (Matthew 27:57), but he did not allow his riches to deter him from choosing to be a disciple as other rich men did (Matthew

19:16-22). The gospel narratives show us Joseph's willingness to surrender his possessions and riches to provide Jesus with a rich man's burial. But even more, this "council" of which Joseph was a member is spoken of numerous times throughout the gospels and the book of Acts. These passages make it evident that "the council" along with the chief priests and elders were the seat of power in Judea and southern Palestine, subject only to the authority of Rome. This group was the one that continually sought fault with Jesus and eventually condemned Jesus to death (John 11:47; Mark 14:55; 15:1). But Joseph "had not consented to their decisions and deed" (Luke 23:51). He would not agree to the condemnation and death of an innocent man — especially the one whom he believed to be the Lord!

I must confess that I am a little baffled, though not doubtful, by what John said about Joseph — "being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews" (19:38). Knowing that Joseph was a "good and just man" and that he had not consented to the decision and deeds of the council, I am surprised that he ever feared the Jews. I seek not to judge him, but to rejoice that he was emboldened through or at the death of Jesus. All four of the gospel accounts inform us that after Jesus was dead, Joseph went and asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Mark said, "coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus" (15:43). Some versions translate the verse, "he went in boldly to Pilate" (KJV, ASV). What courage Joseph showed by going and asking for the body of one who was condemned to death only hours before by Jewish leaders and to face Pilate who had demonstrated his willingness to pacify the Jewish rulers by commanding Jesus' crucifixion. Here, Joseph shows remarkable courage, especially when one remembers that Jesus is not yet risen, He is only dead.

Where does Joseph's newfound courage come from? There is no passage of scripture that gives us a definitive answer; we can only surmise. But, would it not demand courage for one to stand among his colleagues who hate Jesus and refuse to consent to their decision and deeds? Yet, how could Joseph remain true to Jesus and to himself if he did otherwise? Perhaps that is the moment that Joseph began to realize and demonstrate courage; perhaps that courage continued to fill him until he went boldly into Pilate to ask for Jesus' body. Did Joseph witness the love and humility of Jesus while Jesus was hanging on the cross and when Jesus said, "Father forgive them" (Luke 23:34)? Was Joseph a witness to God's testimony of Jesus during the crucifixion: Did Joseph see the darkness midday and feel the earthquake and hear how the temple veil was rent? These happenings caused a centurion to glorify God and say, "Truly this was the Son of God" (Matthew 27:54; Luke 23:47). If these things had such a profound effect upon a centurion, could they not reaffirm the faith of this disciple and bolster his courage? Did Joseph know the prophecies of Isaiah 53 and recognize that Jesus was literally fulfilling them before his eyes? Did he take courage from their fulfillment? Did Joseph know that by burying

Jesus in his tomb that he was fulfilling the prophecy that the Messiah would be buried among the rich (Isaiah 53:9)? Did Joseph hear Jesus tell the thief, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43), remember the promise of the resurrection, and believe? Was Joseph courageous because he was now either assured or reassured that Jesus had power over death and that the gates of Hades would not prevail against Him or His cause (Matthew 16:18)? All things considered, maybe we should not be made to wonder why Joseph gained new courage, but wonder how any can contemplate the death of Jesus and not believe and be courageous in faith.

Pilate granted Joseph the body of Jesus; Joseph did not just "take possession" of the body from Pilate or his soldiers. Luke said "he took it down" (23:53). Joseph removed Jesus' body from the cross! And after removing the bloody, limp body from the cross, Joseph prepared the body for burial. He wrapped the body of Jesus in fine, clean linen cloth (Matthew 27:58; Mark 15:46). He then placed the body in "his new tomb which he had hewn out of rock; and rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb" (Matthew 27:60). Joseph was not only showing courage, he was expending his time, effort, and riches for Christ; Joseph was doing what he could for His Lord.

May we be a disciple of the Lord and be courageous in our faith and do what we can for the Lord just as Joseph did at the burial of Christ.

- Harold Hancock

Peter and John: Best Friends?

Evidently, Peter and John were friends from an early age. They had been partners in a fishing business on the Sea of Galilee before Jesus called them to become fishers of men (Luke 5:1-11; Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20). These two friends, who had been specially chosen from among many disciples of Jesus to be among His twelve chosen apostles (Luke 6:13), were two of the three who were chosen by the Lord to accompany Him into the house where the Lord raised Jairus' daughter from the dead (Mark 5:37; Luke 8:51), up into the mountain where He was transfigured before them (Matthew 17:1; Mark 9:2), and into the area of the garden of Gethsemane where the Lord agonized in prayer (Matthew 26:37; Mark 14:33).

The Lord had sent Peter and John into Jerusalem to prepare the Passover lamb so that He could observe this Passover with His disciples on the night in which He gave them the memorial "Lord's Supper" (Luke 22:8). Not long after the arrest of Jesus, John, who was known to the high priest, was allowed to enter the area where the Lord was being examined and spoke to the doorkeeper, which allowed entrance for Peter (John 18:15-16).

On the day of Christ's resurrection, these two disciples raced to the tomb to verify the report they had received from Mary Magdalene concerning the empty tomb (John 20:2-5). Peter and John were again fishing together when the resurrected Lord appeared for the third time after He was raised from the dead (John 21:1-14).

As the infant church was thriving in the city of Jerusalem following the day in which God poured out his Spirit upon the specially chosen apostles of Christ, Peter and John were going to the temple to pray at the hour of prayer when they had the opportunity to restore a lame man to good health in the name of Christ. The public nature of this miracle allowed for an occasion of great boldness in their preaching to those leaders who were responsible for the crucifixion (Acts 3, 4).

As the record continues showing conflicts and opposition to the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, those persecuted fled to areas of Judea and Samaria, preaching the word (Acts 8:1, 4). Then, for the last recorded time of their being together, Peter and John were sent by the apostles in Jerusalem to Samaria upon hearing that they had received the word of God. They arrived, imparted the Holy Spirit to them, and returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel as they went (Acts 8:14-25). There is no record of their ever being so closely associated on this earth again.

What a wonderful and enduring friendship these two men enjoyed! They were both looking for the redemption of Israel, and certainly encouraged one another in the work the Lord planned for them to accomplish. They worked together in a fishing business, and together became fishers of men!

Are you blessed with such good friends as these?

- Gary Smalley

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- * "If we had no failings ourselves, we should not take so much pleasure in finding out those of others!"
 - * "Every tomorrow has two handles. We can take hold of it with the handle of anxiety or the handle of faith!"
 - * "The man with but one idea in his head is sure to exaggerate that to top heaviness, and thus he loses his equilibrium!"
 - * "The selfish man suffers more from his selfishness than he from whom that selfishness withholds some important benefit!"
 - * With regard to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, remember this: "Nothing escapes the Lord's notice, and no one operates outside of the Lord's jurisdiction!"
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What Must I Do To Be Saved?

HEAR THE GOSPEL

(Romans 10:14-17; John 20:30-31; Romans 1:15-17)

BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST

(Acts 8:37; John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6)

REPENT OF PAST SINS

(Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30)

CONFESS CHRIST

(Romans 10:9-10; Acts 8:37)

BE BAPTIZED

(Romans 6:3-4; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36-39; 1 Peter 3:21)

LIVE A FAITHFUL LIFE

(Revelation 2:10; 2 Peter 1:5-11; John 15:1-8; Hebrews 10:23-25)