**Uniquely Jesus**  July 30, 17

Mark 16, Part Two

**Coffee/Question:**

What is it about the death and resurrection of Jesus that most troubles you or is difficult for you to understand?

Feedback:

Philip Yancey writes, *“The first Christians staked everything on the Resurrection, so much so that the apostle Paul told the Christians at Corinth, ‘And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.’*

*Those who discount the resurrection of Jesus tend to portray the disciples of Jesus in one of two ways: either as gullible rubes with a weakness for ghost stories, or as shrewd conspirators who conceived a resurrection plot to jump-start their new religion.*

The Jesus I Never Knew, p.211-212.

The Bible paints a distinctively different picture of how those early disciples received, responded to and then lived because of the news of Jesus’ resurrection.

Listen carefully as I read the passage we’re going to study today.

Again, let me say as I did last week, there is remarkable specificity in the details recorded.

**Mark 15:40-16:8**.

Last week I mentioned there were three emphases made by Mark.

1. The repeated mention of the women who had followed Jesus.

2. The actions of Joseph of Arimathea, who asked Pilate’s permission to take Jesus’ body off of the cross and then placed it in a tomb cut out of rock.

3. The message for the women from the young man who was in the empty tomb.

Today we’ll address Mark’s second emphasis; his naming of Joseph of Arimathea as the one who took the body of Jesus off of the cross and then buried him.

There is more here to learn from the testimony and actions of Joseph.

Mark writes, v.43, that Joseph went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

Why did Mark make the emphasis that this was a “bold” act?

It was bold, because Joseph took a great risk, in asking for the body.

By doing so, Joseph identified himself as being in association with Jesus.

Remember:

To the Romans, Jesus was a criminal.

To the religious leaders, Jesus was a blasphemer.

The risk taken by Joseph was significant, especially, when we understand who he was.

Matthew 27:57 - he was rich.

Luke 23:50 - he was a member of the Council; as well as, a good and upright man.

Mark 15:43 - he was not just a member; but a prominent member of the Council.

It isn’t specifically stated, if Joseph was present for the deliberations of the Council that had found Jesus deserving of death.

But the Scriptures hint at the possibility that he was.

Mark 14:53, 55 says: *...all the chief priests, elders and teachers of the law came together... The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus...*

But what Luke does tell us, 23:51, is that Joseph had not consented to the Council’s decision and action.

Why was that?

Because… according to Matthew 27:57, he was a disciple of Jesus.

This is what Mark, as well as Luke meant, when they wrote that Joseph was waiting for the kingdom of God.

However, Joseph had kept his faith in Jesus secret - John 19:38.

He feared the other religious leaders.

He knew their hostile attitude towards Jesus.

And it would seem he didn’t want to lose his position as a prominent member of the Sanhedrin.

How is this detail of Joseph being a secret follower of Jesus, who then boldly identified with Jesus, important to the greater story being told by Mark and the other gospel writers?

It’s important because it speaks to the impact Jesus has on a person who follows him.

I don’t want to jump ahead in the story.

But let me at least say this.

When Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, all of his disciples ran away.

When Peter, in the high priest’s courtyard, was questioned whether he was with Jesus, he said no, three times.

Joseph of Arimathea was not alone in being timid regarding his association with Jesus.

But something happened in Joseph when he watched the one he secretly followed,

die on a Roman cross.

Something similar happened in the rest of the disciples when they saw, spoke to, touched and ate with the risen Jesus.

Former cowards became outspoken advocates, willing to stand with; even to die for the One they followed.

Jesus has that affect on people.

You meet Jesus; you interact with him; and you are never the same.

What do we learn here?

It is not that you and I who follow Jesus would need to be more bold.

Boldness is not something... we... stir up in ourselves.

Boldness is the result; it is what happens when one encounters the person of Jesus.

That’s why when we come together in worship on Sundays, an often-repeated prayer is, “let us see you Lord in all of your beauty and majesty and love...;” “open our eyes that we might perceive you!”

When we come together, we fellowship with one another and the risen Lord Jesus.

What else stands out about Joseph’s bold request to Pilate?

Read **John 19:31-36.**

The religious leaders had already asked Pilate that the bodies of the two criminals and Jesus **NOT** be left hanging during the special Sabbath.

Pilate had already given the order to the centurion and the soldiers to break the legs of the condemned men, in order to speed up their death, so that what was **NOT** normally done, could be done - their dead bodies would be taken off of the crosses on which they hung.

Typically, crucified bodies would be left to rot on the cross, to serve as a warning.

And then, maybe, some might eventually be thrown into some unmarked grave.

But giving back the body for burial was not the norm.

The fact that Pilate did, in itself, raises questions. Why????????

Remember...

Pilate had point blank asked Jesus*, “Are you the king of the Jews?”*

And Jesus had clearly answered him, *“Yes, it is as you say.”* Mark 15:2

Pilate had been warned by his wife: *“Don’t have anything to do with that innocent man,”* (Matthew 27:19).

After his own investigation of Jesus, Pilate had told the religious leaders: *“I find no basis for a charge against this man.”* (Luke 23:4)

John tells us, 19:7-8, that when Pilate was then told by the religious leaders that Jesus had claimed to be the Son of God, *“he was even more afraid...”*

In spite of what he had learned and what he had been told, and in spite of what he had tried to do - release Jesus, Pilate eventually caved.

However, he may have tried to rationalize that the decision made wasn’t his, but was that of the crowd, he nonetheless, agreed to Jesus’ crucifixion.

I think the statement made by the centurion who had overseen the crucifixion, *“Surely this man was the Son of God,”* only added to Pilate’s guilt; confirming he had not been alone in believing Jesus to be innocent.

I think this is why Pilate agreed to do what normally was never done - release Jesus’ body for proper burial.

The testimony of many was that Jesus died.

The testimony of many was also that Jesus was buried.

Mark 15:46.

Matthew 27:59-60

Luke 23:53

John 19:41

What do these details about the burial of Jesus… say to us?

\*\* The proximity of the tomb to the cross explains how Joseph was able, after the death of Jesus, sometime after 3pm, to secure permission from Pilate, who sent word and then waited for the centurion to confirm Jesus was dead, and how Joseph then proceeded to buy linen, take down the body, wrap it, carry it and place it in a tomb - all before sundown, which at that time of year happened around 7pm.

\*\* The tomb belonged to Joseph.

Because it was his tomb, Joseph didn’t have to secure permission from anyone in order to place Jesus’ body in it.

Think about it: if Joseph had not earlier purchased the property, and then proceeded to cut out a tomb, which, “just happened to be” close by to where Jesus was crucified, Jesus would not have been buried that day in a “never before used” tomb.

This is just one of the details which is more than serendipitous, and which evidences, God’s guiding hand, and his ability to act in this world.

Sometimes, as was the case with Joseph, we too are not aware of how God is leading us to do certain things, that at a future moment, will have been exactly what is needed.

But as we learn the discipline of being led by the Lord, both in the little and big things, and even in the things that seem inconsequential, we then make our lives available to the Lord, for his will to be realized in and through us.

\*\* The tomb was cut out of rock, its entrance was blocked by a large stone.

The body of Jesus was not placed in the ground, where it could have easily been dug up. Nor was it put in a place where it would have been possible for animals to somehow scavenge and drag off the body. It was secure in a rock tomb.

These details make the suggestion, that the body was stolen, a hard one to defend.

\*\* The tomb was not “gently used;” it had never been used.

Unlike other family tombs, which often had in them multiple dead bodies, or multiple ossuaries containing the bones of those whose bodies had completely decomposed, Joseph’s tomb was empty.

Only the body of Jesus was in Joseph’s tomb.

I say it again.

Joseph was an eyewitness to the fact that Jesus had died on a Roman cross.

There were others (the women, the centurion) who saw Jesus’ breathe his last.

There were still others, including the apostle John, who after Jesus breathed his last, saw one of the soldiers, pierce Jesus’ side with a spear - John 19:34.

But only Joseph (and Nicodemus - John 19:39-40) handled the dead body of Jesus.

There was no doubt in their mind - it was not a badly injured body; nor a barely alive body; but a dead body they took down off of the cross.

The point is not just that Jesus died, but why he died.

His death served a greater purpose.

Jesus himself explained what that purpose was.

Mark 10:45: *“For the Son of Man did not come to be served,*

*but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

What does that phrase mean - “to give his life as a ransom?”

In Mark 10, Jesus was on the road going up to Jerusalem.

All of his disciples, who travelled with him, were gripped by this mixture of fear

and amazement... all of them had this sense that something catastrophic

was going to happen.

Jesus told them what that something was.

He said, v.33-34: *We are going up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.*

Jesus understood that these things which would happen to him…. was how his life would be given as a ransom.

John Piper says:

“The Greek word for ransom, (lutron), means — a payment which is made to release someone from some kind of bondage: whether as a prisoner of war, or someone sold into slavery, or someone in crippling debt.

Jesus gave his life as a ransom to pay what “the many” could not pay... in order that they may go free.

What do “the many” need to be ransomed from?

Jesus said in [John 8:34](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%208.34): *...everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.*

Jesus did not see [humanity] as occasionally committing acts of sin, but as [being] slaves of sin.

This is the bondage we need to be ransomed from.

It is a bondage from which we cannot free ourselves.

But there is more bad news.

The Bible says: *The wages of sin is death...*

The ultimate consequence of our sin is eternal death.

However, the rest of that verse, Romans 6:23, speaks of good news: *...but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*.

Romans 6:23 tells us there is hope of another destiny other than death.

What **we couldn’t do, Jesus did for us.**

**He gave his life as a ransom.**

**The** Bible speaks of this again and again.

*While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* ([Romans 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%205.8)).

*"He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross..."* ([1 Peter 2:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Pet%202.24)).

http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-son-of-man-came-to-give-his-life-a-ransom-for-many

**Joseph of Arimathea was an eyewitness, that indeed, on a Roman cross, Jesus died.**

But was Jesus successful?

Did his death ransom the fallen sons and daughters of Adam and Eve from the enslaving power of and bondage to sin; and free us death?

There are a number of historical incidents which happened that say yes.

We’ll explore this next week in much greater detail.

But for today, let me close with these.

To one of the thieves who hung beside him; who asked Jesus to remember him when he came into his kingdom; Jesus said this: *I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise*. Luke 23:43

As he gave his life in sacrifice, Jesus ransomed this thief.

That’s why the thief’s destiny was changed as he trusted in Jesus.

What happened in the temple, after Jesus breathed his last, when the curtain between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place, was torn in two, lets us know that what had kept humanity from God had been decisively dealt with for all time.

There is a way home to God.

Because he lives…is a phrase full of hope.

You and I live in an in-between time - between the promise made and the yet-to-be realized fulfillment.

When we respond to God’s pursuit of us, when we turn our lives towards him, God’s Spirit births in us a new nature.

And what God has begun; God will finish.

Because Jesus walked out of the tomb, so will we.

This is the rock solid hope we have because…Jesus died, was buried and rose again.

**The Blessing**

Ephesians 5:8 says, “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.”

What a blessing!

In light of that blessing, the Scripture goes on to say,

“Live as children of light.”

What does that look like?

The Scripture says, “...for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth.”

This is why as Jesus’ followers we engage in acts of goodness; why we speak the truth and live by the truth.

We don’t do so in order to earn God’s forgiveness.

We do so to express to him our gratitude.

Living to please God is how we say thank you to him.