

2000 Advent Week 1 - Joseph of Arimathea

by John Piper

The sermon explores the journey of Joseph of Arimathea from fear to boldness through his faith in Jesus, emphasizing the transformative power of trusting God.

Duration: 13:56

Scripture: Matthew 6:26-32, Matthew 6:34, Matthew 10:29-31, Luke 12:6-7, Luke 12:22-23

Topics: "Faith And Courage", "Kingdom Righteousness"

Description

In this sermon transcript, the speaker reflects on the lack of courage and faith among the people of Jerusalem, particularly those who had been with Jesus. The focus then shifts to Joseph, a man who defies societal expectations and risks his life to honor Jesus. Joseph's transformation from a fearful and pampered child to a devoted follower of Christ is highlighted. The sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking God's kingdom and righteousness above worldly concerns, and concludes with Joseph's secret allegiance to Jesus.

Transcript

The last Advent poem last year, in fact the last two, were about Mary Magdalene. And Mary wound up in Britannia, 3,000 miles from Jerusalem, and it was 30 years after the death of Jesus, and she was ministering to the Queen of Isoni, named Boadicea, and helping her die. And in that moment of death, the Queen of Isoni asked Mary Magdalene if she'd ever been married, and she said yes, and that she'd had three children.

And so I promised you that we would return to that, and the Advent poem this morning and next Sunday are to fill in the gaps with what probably did not happen, but may have happened. That's my goal as far as historical reliability is concerned. Nothing that would contradict known reality, but everything else out of my head, except that when you tell a story out of your own head, and you do it as a Christian from a world view, you mean it to be true.

So, this is part one of Joseph of Arimathea. The evening sky behind the cross was crimson as if all the loss of blood from Jesus' veins had spread across the heavens like a red stain lifted from the earth. The Lord hung limp and cast a shadow toward Jerusalem.

Joanna and Salome and the little band, who had the stomach and the strength to bear the sight and stay the length of eight long, bloody hours, stood and wondered what to do. And would it be permitted if a

friend or family should make an end of this grim spectacle before the Holy Sabbath hid the gore with evening gloom? A soldier kept his watch to see that no one crept in secret to the cross to pay some final tribute or to play the fool with corpses and pretend to worship him whom God condemned. But Mary Magdalene could not endure another hour of what she saw as cowardice.

This was the Lord, she thought. And just because of fear would they ignore His shame? Where were the men, the blind, the lame, the deaf that He had healed? And where this rock who would not run or spare his own sweet life but die with Him? Where now this boast, this fair sky whim? Was there no man with courage in Jerusalem or who had been with Jesus long enough to know His worth? Just then, against the glow of crimson skies, she saw a man. He came along the path that ran up from the garden where the rich have tombs, as if a costly niche of stone or clay might cool the heat of hell or make our heaven more sweet.

He dragged a ladder with his hand behind him on the path. A band of linen, beautiful and fine, hung folded on his back with twine bound fast to keep it off the ground. The soldier gripped his spear and frowned.

And what are you about to do? I have my orders and will run you through if you but touch the crucified. The women held their breath and tried to see if there was any dread in this man's face. You could be dead with one more step, the soldier said, and pressed the sharp and pointed head of his long spear against the chest of Joseph.

Slowly, Joseph pressed a parchment in the soldier's hand to read. He stared. You took your stand in Pilate's court for this? Man, you're a fool.

You think you'll be secure to walk the streets of Zion if you treat him like a king? One whiff of this before the Jewish court and they will make more vicious sport of you than him, he pointed to the middle cross, perhaps. And you? He asked the guard. How will you fare when Caesar, nor his realm is there, nor Pilate, nor the council of the Jews, but only Christ above the earth and sovereign over all the courts, both great and small? As Joseph climbed the final mound to reach the cross, the daring sound of his bold words pierced Mary's heart as nothing ever had.

The start of something that would last for ten short, happy years. No other men had ever wakened what she felt when Joseph knelt before the cross and wept. How could a man, the loss of his whole life in peril by courageous words, then kneel and cry like this? It hadn't always been this way with Joseph.

Once, the sin of fear had almost total sway in Joseph's life. From children's play through teenage years to high respect on the Sanhedrin ruled unchecked the heart of fear. He was a rich and pampered child.

The rod and switch were never used. His parents bought him everything he liked and sought to make him safe with what their wealth could buy. They were convinced that health and everything their son would need could be supplied with riches.

Freed from poverty, he would be free indeed. But it was not to be. No toys, no trips, no clothes, no horse, no privileged schools could be the source of peace, much less of bravery.

He dreamed of exploits on the sea when he was young and in the isles, untamed, unclaimed, three thousand miles away. But then the fears would rise, the way a nightmare terrifies, and he would settle back to known and common ways. When he was grown, the bondage was complete.

He dared not marry, lest it fail. And scared of every craft and trade, he leaned instead on wealth and lived unweaned from all the worries of the world. And yet, with childish fingers, curled around the dream that someday he might have a lion heart set free.

Then one day, when Joseph, near to forty years of age, began to hear that Christ had come, he paid a friend to take him to a meadow's end where he could hear the Lord, but not be seen. And there, the stubborn blot of bondage to a life of dread was washed away, as Jesus said, Look at the birds, they neither sow, nor plow, nor reap, nor make a stow of wealth in barns, and yet God feeds them all. Are not your simple needs well known to Him, before you ask? And is it not your toil and task on earth to trust your Father's care? Does He not number every hair? And don't you sell two sparrows for a cent, yet God does not ignore their life? Nor one falls, except He wills.

And shall you not be kept because you are more precious than the birds? Does worry pay, or can you add a cubit to your length of life? Does fear increase your strength? Consider how the lilies grow. They neither toil nor spin, but oh, how beautiful their brilliant dress in spring. Nor did God ever bless a king in all his wealth like this.

Oh, do not ruin childlike bliss by fretting over what you wear, or eat, or drink. These are a snare, and all the world who turn away from God seek these. But you, I say, seek first His kingdom.

Seek His rule, and sway, and righteousness, and you'll be given all the rest. The strife appointed for tomorrow's life, put safely in tomorrow's place, then bear it with tomorrow's grace. And as the sun set on the field where Jesus spoke, a rich man kneeled and put his faith in God.

Three years went by, and all of Joseph's fears began to fall away, except for one. The secret that he kept from the Sanhedrin, that he was a follower of Christ. Because it was His glory, and renown, and known in every Jewish town that Joseph ranked among the one and seventy.

There was none more highly honored in the hall than he. But now, the horrid call was ringing in his ears, the voice of Caiaphas. It is your choice, Sanhedrin.

Is this blasphemy or not? This Jesus that you see on trial says He's the Christ, the Son of God. We need no witness. Done.

What say you? All the voices cried aloud, let Him be crucified. But one, his eyes were fixed on Christ, and Christ's on His. And that sufficed.

The final chain was broken. He was free. He rose for all to see, a hush fell on the council room, and everyone turned from the doom that they had spoken over the accused, and looked to see what Joseph's rise and silence meant.

He spoke. My brothers, I descend. And now, as Mary watches there, this man, beneath the cross in prayer, this wealthy, weeping, fearless man, come, join this woman, if you can, and stand in awe of what you see, a man, enslaved to fear, set free.

Let candle one now softly speak of birds and lilies, fragile, weak, like us, and Jesus hanging there, and of the Father's costly care. Be done with all anxiety. And in its place now let there be a death to him.

No faithless fear, but broken-hearted boldness here.

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