Easter Through the Eyes of the Ordinary

Week 3: Joseph of Arimathea

Boldly Proclaim Your Faith

Review

Last week, we learned about the Centurion at the cross. This man was a Roman soldier and part of his job was to execute criminals. This man would have been loyal to the Roman leadership and would have no reason to do anything but kill Jesus. As a soldier, he gave the orders to kill and had watched many people die by the means of crucifixion. Jesus’ death felt different, the circumstances were different, and the outcome of the whole event had to have been quite different. So, how he responded in Jesus’ case proves that it could be quite significant. While the executions were occurring, the Centurion made a bold statement sharing, “Surely He was the Son of God”. While we don’t know exactly what the Centurion witnessed that day, what he experienced changed him (at least for the time). Through this moment, who Jesus truly is, is proclaimed. The story of this man begs us to ask the question of “Whom are you Serving?” We cannot serve God and other masters in our own lives. How can we be people who serve God fully? How does God call us to be authentic in our convictions of faith?

Introduction

Today, we move forward to another person in the story of Holy Week, Joseph of Arimathea. Joseph of Arimathea was a significant member of society at the time of Jesus. While we do not have a lot of information about who Joseph was from the text, there are some things we can gather from it. We learn that Joseph was a man who was a part of the Council, otherwise known as the Sanhedrin. These are people who were appointed as judges to make sure political and judicial functions occurred. Their main focus was to make sure the religious laws were being kept. The head of the Sanhedrin was the High Priest. The Sanhedrin was the place Jesus was brought in front of and they would have the power to decide his fate. When this occurred, Joseph was opposed to the decision of crucifying Jesus. Scripture alludes to the fact that Joseph was a secret follower of Jesus.

The Bible also points out a few characteristics of Joseph. First, he is called Joseph of Arimathea due to the region that he was from. Much like other characters in the Bible, this helps to distinguish between people with the same name. Arimathea is a town noted to be in Judea and not much else is known about it. It is only mentioned in relation to Joseph of Arimathea. Next, the Bible says that Joseph was a wealthy man. Where
Joseph’s wealth comes from is unknown, but the mentioning of his wealth may mean that he had a lot to lose when he decided to abstain from voting to crucify Jesus. Third, Scripture points to the fact that Joseph was a good man. In Luke it states that he is a “good and upright man”. While Joseph kept his faith in Jesus a secret because of his fear for the Jews, he decided that he was not going to vote to condemn Jesus to death and did not attend the meeting (or vote) to kill Jesus. This shows that he did not want to go against what he believed.

Joseph is also known for being the man who took Jesus’ body and buried it in the tomb after he had died. The actions Joseph took to give Jesus a proper burial continue to add to his good character that the Bible speaks of. Finally, Scripture also said that Joseph was waiting for the kingdom of God. Through the actions that we see of Joseph, they follow this conviction. While Joseph did not speak out in faith during the Sanhedrian vote, his beliefs compelled him to give Jesus a proper burial after his death.

It seems that between the time of conviction and Jesus’ death, God worked in the heart of Joseph of Arimathea. From a silent follower to a man bold in his convictions, Joseph showed that his faith moved him to take action in one way or another. Joseph changed that Friday when Jesus died.

While the Bible does not speak to how Joseph responds after the Resurrection, Joseph plays a big role in Jesus’ story, just as Jesus does in the life of Joseph.

Readings

Please read the following verses and answer these questions for each: What happens? What stands out to you? What role does Joseph play?

**Matthew 27:57-61**
- Why do you think it would mention that Joseph was rich?
- Who sits at a distance watching what happens?

**Mark 15:42-47**
- What is the response of Pilate like to the request of Joseph?
- What day of the week was it? What happens on this day?

**Luke 23:50-56**
- How did Joseph feel about Jesus’ crucifixion?
- How does Joseph treat Jesus’ body?
- After the women see what Joseph does, what do they do?

**John 19:38-42**
- Why does Joseph go and take the body of Jesus according to John?
- Who goes with Joseph? Do any of the other passages mention this person?
- What is the reasoning they lay Jesus in the certain tomb? Is it important that they follow Jewish burial customs?

“On the Road to the Cross”

Citation: Burkhart, Rob. *On the Road to the Cross*. Abingdon, 2017.

Let’s look at Rob Burkhart’s book, *On the Road to the Cross*. He provides a fictional story of what the people could have been experiencing or feeling in the moments of Holy Week and then talks about some of the history behind their part in Holy Week. I am going to share part of it for your consideration:

***This fictional conversation occurs when Joseph and presumably Nicodemus in a trial setting after they have taken Jesus’ body and it is now gone***
“We wanted to follow him. But we wanted to keep what we had—our power, wealth, positions, and the respect of others. So we pretended. But in the end we had to decide who we were,” explained Joseph. The advocate was intrigued. These rich, powerful men with so much to lose had, since Jesus’ death, thrown it all away to follow a penniless, itinerant Rabbi and his rag-tag bunch of ignorant disciples. He knew he could never explain it to the council, but maybe the men could explain it to him. “What happened? What changed?” “They killed him,” answered Joseph. “We spoke against his arrest but we failed and they arrested, tortured, and executed him anyway. I’d told myself that if I kept my faith secret I could use my influence to protect him. I was wrong,” said Nicodemus. Joseph said, “After he was crucified I went to Pilate and asked for the body so we could bury him before the Sabbath. My servants brought spices and Nicodemus brought the shroud.” “We took him from the cross, cleaned him up as well as we could. We wanted to bury him with a little dignity. It was the least we could do,” said Nicodemus. “We took him to my new tomb in a garden not far from Golgotha,” Joseph continued. “When the women came back on the first day of the week to finish the burial preparations his body was gone—the tomb was open and empty. It still is,” said Nicodemus. “The women thought someone stole his body. Peter and John went to the tomb and couldn’t find him either. That’s when Mary from Magdala said she saw Jesus alive.” Stop right there!” said the advocate. ….

Though this is a fictional account of Joseph speaking with leadership after he had claimed that Jesus was the Son of God, there are some interesting points to consider. Before Jesus was killed, Joseph advocated not to kill him while they were in the council, but did not share his faith in God. Yet, after the death of Jesus, his heart changed and he got permission (from Pilate) to bury the body of Jesus. This account shares that the change in his heart was that Jesus had died. When Joseph truly saw that Jesus was the Son of God through this act, he realized that he couldn’t stay silent any longer. He did not want to hide his faith and now felt he must stand behind his actions. Jesus is the Son of God and the Messiah.

What questions does this fictional account bring up for you? Do you feel that it has validity? What does it make you think about in relation to the Holy Week story?

**Questions to Consider**

After what Joseph of Arimathea saw and experienced, he could not be a silent follower anymore. Because of this, Joseph went to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body. This was a risky move because the body proclaimed that Jesus is real and that He is the Son of God. At this time, followers of Jesus were in hiding because they were fearful of what could happen to them if people found out they believed in Jesus. Yet, at this time, instead of staying silent, Joseph moved and took action to honor Jesus. By giving him a proper burial, Joseph validated the importance of Jesus.

The following are questions to answer in relationship to the story of Joseph of Arimathea:

- Why do you think seeing Jesus die compelled Joseph of Arimathea to speak out and take care of Jesus’ body?
- How did his taking care of Jesus’ body show that Joseph believed in the Messiah?
- Why do people pretend to be what they are not and deny their own beliefs?

Some may have seen the faith that Joseph had at the beginning (when he was hiding his faith) as lukewarm. The Bible talks about having a lukewarm faith in multiple instances. Look up these verses to see what Scripture says:

**Matthew 12:30, Matthew 5:13, and Revelation 3:15.**

- What do these verses say about being lukewarm?
- How can we be tempted to have lukewarm faith?
- Do you think that Joseph had lukewarm faith in front of the Council?
Here are some questions for you to consider about your own life:

1. What do your actions portray about your faith in Jesus?
2. Is it okay to pretend to be less genuine about our faith than we are? Why or why not?
3. What fears hold you back from sharing your faith more openly?
4. Has there been an event where God has changed you and you couldn’t help but share what He has done?
5. What are ways you can live out your faith through the words you speak and the actions that you show?

After the Sanhedrin had voted to convict Jesus, he was crucified and died. Yet, Joseph now could not stay silent anymore. Jesus’ death compelled him to take Jesus’ body and show it honor through a proper burial. The stark contrast from Joseph’s actions when he was in the Sanhedrin to when he boldly asked Pilate for Jesus’ body are an example of how Jesus changes everything. Jesus’ death would confirm for Joseph that Jesus was the true Son of God. Joseph’s life was changed and he wanted to show honor to His Savior.

Joseph can teach us many things about being a Christian, but these stand out as significant:

1. **Don’t follow the belief of others**-While the others in the Sanhedrin wanted Jesus dead, Joseph decided not to vote for this to happen. While it is hard to say if Joseph spoke up during the trial, we know that Joseph took a risk by coming to Pilate. We too can be bold in our convictions of faith because we know that God is with us through these moments.

2. **Trust in Jesus**- Joseph did not know how God would use him but when he felt the conviction to honor Jesus’ body, he did it. We are also able to trust that Jesus has things planned for us to show honor and glory to Him, who died and rose so that we too, could have a new life!!