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Joseph Craved the Body of Jesus

By Pastor Reimar A. C. Schultze

“Joseph of Arimathaea, an honourable counselor, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus”—Mark 15:43.

This story of Joseph is recorded in all four gospels. We have a Joseph at the beginning of the life of Jesus (Joseph the husband of Mary), and we have a Joseph at the end of the life of Jesus, before His Resurrection. These Josephs had some things in common. They both had an unusual perception of what was going on and neither appeared to have been much of a talker. We remember them not so much for what they said, but rather for what they did. Both knew to do the right thing, at the right time.

Now, one of the remarkable things about Jesus' death on the cross is that none of His disciples were there. Only John showed up briefly to receive a commission from Jesus to take care of His mother Mary. Had any of the apostles been there they certainly would have taken care of His burial arrangements. You have to understand that Jesus had to be buried on the same day He died. It was the law that anybody who died of capital punishment had to be buried on the same day that he died.

In this case, there were only about 4 hours, from 3 PM till sunset, during which His body would have to be buried. As it turned out, none of the inner circle, those who had traveled with Jesus, had made any arrangements for this burial. None of them expected Him to die, although He often spoke of His death. If Joseph had not stepped up, Jesus would have been put into a mass grave, so the scholars say. We conclude that probably Joseph was the only intimate male disciple present at Jesus' death.

Now you say, “Pastor Schultze, how do we know Joseph was a disciple?” We know this because Matthew tells us so, saying: *“When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathaea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple” (27:57).* There it is, loud and clear.

Now let us look at five characteristics of Joseph that we all need to copy:

1. The ministry of presence.
2. A hunger for the kingdom of God.
3. Boldness.
4. A craving for Jesus.
5. Giving Jesus our best.

The ministry of presence stands at the beginning of true discipleship and it continues throughout. Being “there” is more important than I can possibly tell you. Going back to verse 40 of Mark 15 it says, *“There were also women”*. Hallelujah! The Greek here tells us more precisely that *“There were there certain women.”* Oh, I tell you my friend,

how powerful is the ministry of “there-ness”! Throughout Jesus’ entire ministry the women captured the importance of this “there-ness” more than the men. They were there when Jesus died, they were the first ones there after He arose from the dead, and they were in the Upper Room when the Spirit fell, even without being specifically invited. Because they were there they were baptized in the Holy Ghost. God rewards “there-ness.”

Oh, how few there are who stay at the place God sent them. How few there are who are not drawn away by quick-action programs elsewhere, or fancy preaching and noisy music in another place. How few there are who stay where God wants them to be. It is they, my friend, who have been “there”, who have stood with God’s servants throughout the ages, through whom God has worked the things of eternity. It is they who, like Joseph, step in quietly and humbly when there’s a gap to be filled, a relationship to be mended or a forgotten task to be attended to. And it is they who receive the blessings.

And pity those shallow Christians who are drawn away by self-interests when it looks like the boat is sinking! They run off with the rest of the crowd, missing the baptism of the Spirit of the Lord. Joseph was there. The disciples had run off, but Joseph and the women were there. Be there when your pastor steps on the platform. Don’t be late. Be there from the beginning. Don’t skip and miss. If Jesus would be there in person, would you be late for His meetings? Friend, if you are late for the servant, you are late for the Master. Be there when there is a call to prayer. Be faithful. God rewards the ministry of presence.

True disciples have a hunger for the kingdom of God. Joseph waited for the kingdom of God. The eleven gave up on the kingdom of God, even though they had heard Jesus speak of it often for three years. But a newcomer appears, new to the rest yet not new to God. He comes out of nowhere, a man who still believed and hoped for the kingdom of God, although Jesus’ body was hanging dead on a tree. Oh, Glory to God! When all the physical signs said, “It is over,” this one man said, “It is not over.” “I see,” he could have said, “beyond the physical. I see the kingdom of God still ahead.” Friend, can you look beyond the physical? Oh, doesn’t Joseph help us? Doesn’t he become bigger and bigger as we study him?

Disciples are bold. Joseph boldly went to Pilate. The one of whom the twelve were afraid, the one from whom they ran away, is the one **to whom** Joseph went. This disciple, my friend, was bold **before** Pentecost. Others only became bold **after** Pentecost. Every church ought to have a bunch of Josephs and Josephines! And although Joseph did not speak to us with words, he speaks to the entire world even today, through his example of incredible courage and self-abandonment.

Disciples have a craving for Jesus. Joseph risked his life to get Jesus’ body, to hold this wonderful Savior in his arms, to carry Him, dead or alive. Oh, my friend, what a service of love, what honor. He, being wealthy, could easily have had his servants carry the body. But no, this body was too dear to him to be borne by anyone else if he could help it. He wrapped Jesus in fresh linen and carried Him while the still drying

blood stains of his Lord left their marks upon him forever. Do you show the marks of Jesus? Do they show in your conversation, your conduct and in your attitude? Oh, Peter, you swore you would never leave your master. What did you miss by not being there to carry Him in your arms? What about you, James and John, also of the inner circle? Joseph craved the body of Jesus. What are you craving? Tell me and I can tell you all about yourself. There is evidence about all of us as to what we crave the most: our checkbook can tell of it. How we spend our spare time will talk about it. What we have in our homes advertises it. How and with whom we spend our vacations reveals a lot. Our prayer life, what comes out of our mouths, what we do for the poor, the widows and missionaries tells us about where our cravings are.

So, instead of being there the apostles locked themselves in the Upper Room for fear of the Jews. They were in a battle for self-preservation. They had no desire to suffer, to be caught by the Romans and be ill-treated. Jesus, it seems, had now dropped to the back of their minds. No burial plans, no funeral plans or arrangements, came from these eleven who now tried to save themselves. Joseph was there.

Joseph gave his best. It says that Joseph (not his servants), laid Jesus into a sepulcher which was hewn out of rock (v 46). It was a sepulcher he had hewn out for himself at great expense, but he gave it to Jesus. Jesus was born poor, but He was buried in a rich man's grave because one of His disciples was "there". One of His disciples had a hunger for the kingdom of God, one of His disciples was bold. And because one of His disciples craved Him more than anything else, that disciple was giving his best. Oh how beautiful the succession of verbs in Mark's passage: he *bought*, he *took*, he *wrapped*, he *laid*, and he *rolled* (v. 46). That is the way Joseph went down into history.

How will history remember you?

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