

Joseph of Arimathaea

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon exhorts believers to overcome fear and boldly confess Christ, using Joseph of Arimathaea as a model of faithful courage and timely action in the darkest hour.

Scripture: Mark 15:43-46, Matthew 19:24, Luke 2:25-26, John 12:42, Psalm 96:10

Topics: "Faithfulness", "Courage", "The Cross"

Description

In this powerful sermon, C.H. Spurgeon explores the life and example of Joseph of Arimathaea, a secret disciple who found courage to boldly confess Christ at a critical moment. Spurgeon challenges believers to overcome fear, worldly honor, and riches that hinder open faithfulness. Using Joseph's story, he encourages Christians to stand firm in their confession of Christ, especially in difficult times, trusting that God will always raise up faithful witnesses. This sermon is a stirring call to courage and steadfastness in the Christian walk.

Transcript

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

"Joseph of Arimathaea, an honorable counselor, who also waited for the kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus. And Pilate marveled if He were already dead: and calling unto him the centurion, he asked him whether He had been any while dead. And when he knew it of the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph. And he bought fine linen, and took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen, and laid Him in a sepulcher which was hewn out of a rock, and rolled a stone unto the door of the sepulcher." Mark 15:43-46.

IT was a very dark day with the Church of God and with the cause of Christ, for the Lord Jesus was dead, and so the sun of their souls had set. "All the disciples forsook Him, and fled." "You shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave Me alone," were the sad words of Jesus—and they had come true. He was dead upon the Cross and His enemies hoped that that was the end of Him—while even His friends feared that it was so. A few women who had remained about the Cross, true to the very last, were found faithful unto death, but what could they do to obtain His sacred body and give it honorable burial? That priceless flesh seemed to be in danger of the fate which usually awaited the bodies of malefactors—at any rate, the fear was that it might be hurled into the first grave that could be found to shelter it.

At that perilous moment, Joseph, of Arimathaea, a city of the Jews, of whom we never heard before, and of whom we never hear again, suddenly made his appearance. He was the very man needed for the occasion—a man of influence, a man possessing that kind of influence which was most potent with Pilate—a rich man, a counselor, a member of the Sanhedrim, a person of weight and character. Every Evangelist mentions him and tells us something about him. And from these we learn that he was a disciple, "a good man and just; who also, himself, waited for the kingdom of God." Joseph had been retiring and probably cowardly, before, but now he came to the Cross and saw how matters stood and then went in boldly unto Pilate, craved the body of Jesus and obtained it.

Let us learn from this that God will always have His witnesses. It matters not though the ministry should forsake the Truth of God, though they that should be leaders should become unfaithful, the Truth of God will not fail for lack of friends! It may be with the Church as when a standard-bearer faints and the host is ready to melt with dismay—but there shall be found other standard-bearers and the banner of the Lord shall wave over all! As the Lord lives, so shall His Truth live! As God reigns, so shall the Gospel reign, even though it is from the Cross! "Tell it out among the heathen that the Lord reigns from the tree." Such is a singular version of a verse in the Psalms and it contains a glorious Truth of God! Even while Jesus hangs on the Cross in death, He is still keeping possession of the Throne—and He shall reign forever and ever!

Let this be remembered for your encouragement in the cloudy and dark day. If you live in any place where the faithful fail from among men, do not wring your hands in grief and sit down in despair, as though it were all over with the cause you love! The Lord lives and He will yet keep a faithful seed alive in the earth. Another Joseph of Arimathaea will come forward at the desperate moment—just when we cannot do without him, the man will be found! There was a Joseph for Israel in Egypt and there was a Joseph for Jesus on the Cross. A Joseph acted to Him a father's part at His birth, and another Joseph arranged for His burial. The Lord shall not be left without friends!

There was a dark day in the Old Testament history when the eyes of Eli, the servant of God, had failed him, and worse still, he was almost as blind mentally as physically, for his sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not. It seemed as if God must forsake His Israel! But who is this little boy who is brought in by his mother? Who is this tiny child who is to be left in the sanctuary to serve his God as long as he lives? Who is this pretty little man who wears the little coat which his mother's hands have lovingly made for him? Look, you that have eyes of faith, for the Prophet Samuel is before you! He is the servant of the Lord, by whose holy example Israel shall be led to better things and delivered from the oppression which chastised the iniquities of Eli's sons!

God has, today, somewhere, I know not where, in yon obscure cottage of an English village, or in a log hut far away in the backwoods of America, or in the slums of our back streets, or in our palaces, a man who in mature life shall deliver Israel, fighting the battles of the Lord! The Lord has His servant making ready and when the time shall come, when the hour shall need the man, the man shall be found for the hour! The Lord's will shall be done, let infidels and doubters think what they please! I see in this advent of Joseph of Arimathaea exactly at the needed time, a well of consolation for all who have the cause of God laid upon their hearts. We need not worry our heads about who is to succeed the pastors and evangelists of today—the Apostolic succession we may safely leave with our God.

Concerning this Joseph of Arimathaea, the honorable counselor, I want to speak this morning, praying that I may speak to your souls all along. As I have already said, we hear no more of Joseph than what is

recorded here. He shines out when he is needed and then he disappears—his record is on high. We need not mention the traditions about him, for I think that even the quotation of legends has an evil tendency and may turn us aside from the pure, unadulterated Word of God. What have you and I to do with tradition? Is not the Scripture enough? There is probably no truth in the silly tales about Joseph and Glastonbury—and if there were, it could be of no consequence to us! If any fact had been worthy of the pen of Inspiration, it would have been written. And because it is not written, we need not desire to know. Let us be satisfied to pause where the Holy Spirit stays His pen.

I shall use Joseph of Arimathaea, this morning, in four ways. First, as our warning—he was a disciple of Jesus, "but secretly, for fear of the Jews." Secondly, for our instruction—he was, at last, brought out by the Cross concerning which holy Simeon had declared that by the death of the Lord Jesus the thoughts of many hearts should be revealed. Thirdly, for our awakening—there was an occasion for Joseph to come forward and there is occasion, now, for all the timid to grow brave. And lastly, for our guidance—that we may, if we have been at all bashful and fearful, come forward in the hour of need and behave ourselves as bravely as Joseph of Arimathaea did on the eve before the Paschal Sabbath.

I. First, then, I desire to look at Joseph of Arimathaea as OUR WARNING. He was a disciple of Christ, but secretly, for fear of the Jews. We do not advise any of you to imitate Joseph in that. Fear which leads us to conceal our faith is an evil thing. Be a disciple, by all means, but not secretly—you miss a great part of your life's purpose if you are. Above all, do not be a disciple secretly because of the fear of man, for the fear of man brings a snare. If you are the slave of such fear it demeans you, belittles you and prevents your giving due glory to God—

"Fear Him, you saints, and you will then Have nothing else to fear." Be careful to give honor to Christ and He will take care of your honor.

Why was it that Joseph of Arimathaea was so backward? Perhaps it was owing to his natural disposition. Many men are, by nature, very bold. Some are a little too much so, for they become intrusive, self-assertive, not to say impudent. I have heard of a certain class of persons who "rush in where angels fear to tread." They are fearless because they are brainless! Let us avoid fault in that direction. Many, on the other hand, are too retiring—they have to screw their courage up even to say a good word for the Savior whom they love. If they can do so, they fall into the rear rank. They hope to be found among the victors when they divide the spoil, but they are not overly ambitious to be among the warriors while they are braving the foe!

But some of these are true-hearted, notwithstanding their timidity. It was found in the martyr days that certain of those who endured most bravely at the stake were naturally of a fearful mind. It is noted by Foxe that some who boasted of how well they would bear pain and death for Christ turned tail and recanted, while others, who in prison trembled at the thought of the fire, played the man in death—to the admiration of all that were round about them. Still, dear Friends, it is not a desirable thing if you are troubled with timidity to foster it at all. Fear of man is a plant to be rooted up and not to be nurtured! I would set that plant, if I could, where it would get but little water and no sunshine. And meanwhile I would beg a cutting from a better tree. Would it not be well to often brace ourselves with such a hymn as this—

"Am I a soldier of the Cross,

A follower of the Lamb?

And shall I fear to own His cause, Or blush to speak His name?

Must I be carried to the skies

On flowery beds of ease;

While others fought to win the prize,

And sailed through bloody seas?" If you know that your temptation lies in the direction of fear, watch and strive against it—and always school yourselves to dauntless courage by the help of the Holy Spirit.

I am afraid, too, that what helped to intimidate Joseph of Arimathaea was the fact that he was a rich man. A sad truth lies within our Lord's solemn exclamation, "How difficult shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of God." Riches do not strengthen the heart or make men daring for the good cause. Albeit wealth is a great talent which may be well used by the man who has entered into the Kingdom of Heaven, yet it brings with it snares and temptations. And when a man has not yet entered into the Kingdom, it is, in many ways, a terrible hindrance to his entrance. "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom." The fishermen of the Galilean Lake readily left their bits of boats and their fishing tackle, but Joseph of Arimathaea was a rich man and was, therefore, slow to leave all for Christ's sake.

The tendency of great possessions is seen in the case of the young man who turned away in sorrow from the Lord Jesus when put to the unusual test of selling all he had. Strong swimmers have saved their lives, when the ship has struck a rock, by casting aside every weight. While others have gone straight down to the bottom because they have bound their gold around their waists! Gold sinks men as surely as lead! Take care, any of you that are well to do in this world, that you do not permit the liberality of God to be a cause of disloyalty to Him. Beware of the pride of life, the lust for rank, the desire to hoard—for any of these may prevent your service to your Lord. Riches puff men up and prevent their stooping to find the pearl of great price. A poor man enters a humble village sanctuary where Christ is preached and he finds eternal life. Another man under concern of soul in the same village does not like to go down to the poor conventicle and remains unblessed. He keeps away because he puts to himself the question, "What will the people say if the squire goes to hear the Gospel? What a stir there will be if the son of a lord is converted!"

Joseph of Arimathaea's wealth made him unduly cautious and possibly, without his knowing it, prevented his casting in his lot with the common sort of people who followed the Lord Jesus. His heart was for the prize, but the heavy weight of his substance hindered him in his race. It was an instance of abounding Grace that he was helped to run well at the last. Possibly, too, he may have been checked by the fact that he was in office and that he was honorable in it. It needs great Grace to carry human honor and, truth to tell, it is not particularly much worth carrying when you have it. For what is fame but the breath of men's nostrils? Poor stuff to feed a soul upon! If a man could so live as to gain universal plaudits—if he could write his name across the sky in letters of gold—so what? What is there in the applause of a thoughtless multitude?

The approbation of good men, if it is gained by persevering virtue, is better to be desired than great riches. But even then, it may become a temptation, for the man may begin to question, "What will people say?" rather than, "What will God say?" And the moment he falls into that mood, he has introduced a weakening element into his life. The, "Well done, good and faithful servant," of the Master's own lips is worth 10,000

thunders of applause from senators and princes! Honor among men is, at best, a peril to the best! Joseph was honored in council and this is apt to make a man prudently slow. The tendency of office is towards caution rather than enthusiasm. I would have those placed in high positions remember this and candidly judge themselves as to whether their shrinking from the public acknowledgement of Christ may not be a cowardice unworthy of the position in which the Lord has placed them.

It seems clear that all the earthly things which men covet may not be so desirable as they appear to be—and that which men would give their eyes to procure, they might, if their eyes were opened, think far less of. I would lovingly enquire of you at this time, (for the sermon is meant to be personal all the way through), if any of you who love my Lord and Master are doing so secretly because of the fear of men? You have never openly confessed your faith and why not? What hinders your taking up a decided position on the Lord's side? Are you wealthy? Are you honorable? Do you occupy

an enviable position in society? And are you such a mean-spirited creature that you have become proud of these glittering surroundings, like a child that is vain of its new frock?

Are you so cowardly that you will not cast in your lot with the followers of the Truth and Righteousness of God because they are persons of low degree? Are you really so base? Is there no holy chivalry in you? Can it be that because God has dealt so well with you and trusted you so generously, you will repay Him by denying His Son, violating your conscience and turning your back on His Truth—and all for the sake of being in fashion? I know it may seem hard to receive the cold shoulder in society, or to have the finger of scorn pointed at you, but to bow before this selfish dread is scarcely worthy of a man and utterly disgraceful of a Christian man! "Oh, but I am so retiring in disposition." Yes, but do not indulge it, I pray you, for, if all were of such a mind, where were the noble advances of Truth, her reformation, her revivals? Where would have been our Luther, or our Calvin, or our Zwingli? Where would have been our Whitefield, or our Wesley if they had thought it to be the main object of desire to walk at ease along the cool sequestered vale of life?

Come forth, my Brothers and Sisters, for the truth and for the Lord! Remember that what is right for you would be right for the rest of us! If you do not join the Christian Church, for instance, every one of us might also neglect that duty, and where would the visible Church of Christ be? And how would the ordinances of our holy faith be kept up as a witness among the sons of men? I charge all concealed Believers to think over the inconsistency of their concealment and to quit that cowardly condition! I feel sure that Joseph of Arimathea was a great loser by his secrecy, for, you see, he did not live with Jesus, as many other disciples did. During that brief but golden period in which men walked and talked—and ate and drank with Jesus—Joseph was not with Him! He was not among the 12 as possibly he might have been if he had possessed more courage and decision.

Joseph lost many of those familiar talks with which the Lord indulged His own after the multitudes had been sent away. He missed that sacred training and strengthening which fitted men for the noble lives of primitive saints. How many opportunities he must have missed, too, of working for the Master and with the Master! Perhaps we hear no more of him because he did no more. Possibly that one grand action which has redeemed his name from forgetfulness, is all that is recorded because it really was all that was worth recording! Joseph must have been a weaker, a sadder, a less useful man for having followed Christ afar off. I would to God that such reflections as these would fetch out our beloved, truly faithful and honorable Christian men who, up to now, have hidden away among the stuff and have not come to the front to stand up for Jesus.

II. Secondly, having viewed Joseph of Arimathea as a warning, I shall go on to speak of him as a lesson for OUR INSTRUCTION. Joseph did come out, after all, and so will you, my Friends. If you are honest and sincere, you will have to acknowledge your Lord sooner or later! Do you not think it would be better to make it sooner rather than later? The day will come when that shame which you are now dreading will be yours. As surely as you are a sincere Believer, you will have to encounter that reproach and derision which now alarm you—why not face them at once and get it over with? You will have to confess Christ before many witnesses—why not begin to do so at once? What is the hardship of it? It will come easier to you and it will bring you a larger blessing—and it will be sweeter in the recollection afterwards— than if you keep on postponing it.

What was it that fetched Joseph of Arimathea out? It was the power of the Cross! Is it not a remarkable thing that all the life of Christ did not draw out an open acknowledge from this man? Our Lord's miracles, His marvelous discourses, His poverty and self-renunciation. His glorious life of holiness and benevolence. All may have helped to build up Joseph in his secret faith, but it did not suffice to develop in him a bold declaration of faith! The shameful death of the Cross had greater power over Joseph than all the beauty of Christ's life! Now let us see, you timid, backward ones, whether the Cross will not have the same influence over you, today! I believe it will if you carefully study it. I am sure it will if the Holy Spirit lays it home to your heart!

I suppose that to Joseph of Arimathea, Christ's death on the Cross seemed such a wicked thing that he must come out on behalf of One so evilly treated. He had not consented to the deed of the men of the Sanhedrim when they condemned Jesus to death—probably he and Nicodemus withdrew themselves from the assembly altogether—but when he saw that the crime was actually committed and that the innocent Man had been put to death, then he said, "I cannot be a silent witness of such a murder! I must now side with the Holy and the Just." Therefore he came out and was found the willing

servant of his crucified Master. Come what may of it, he felt that he must declare himself to be on the right side, now that they had maliciously taken away the life of the Lord Jesus. It was late, it was sadly late, but it was not too late.

Oh, secret disciple, will you not quit your hiding? Will you not hasten to do so? You who are quiet and retiring, when you hear the name of Jesus blasphemed, as it is in these evil days, will you not stand up for Him? When you hear His Deity denied; when His Headship in the Church is given to another; when His very Person is, by lewd fellows of the baser sort, set up as the target of their criticism, will you not speak up for Him? Will you not be shocked by such evil conduct into an open acknowledgement? His cause is that of truth and righteousness and mercy and hope for the sons of men, therefore He must not be abused while you sit by in silence! Had others favored Him, you might, perhaps, have been somewhat excused for holding back—but you cannot keep back without grievous sin, now that so many deride Him. Jesus is worthy of all honor and yet they heap scorn upon Him—will you not defend Him? He is your Savior and Lord! Oh, be not slow to admit that you are His! The Cross laid bare the heart of Joseph. He loathed the wickedness which slew the Holy and the Just and, therefore, he girded himself to become the guardian of His sacred body.

But, next, it may have been in part the wonderful patience of the Master's death which made Joseph feel he could not hide any longer. Did he hear Him say, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do"? Did he mark Him when those blessed lips said, "I thirst"? Do you think he observed the ribaldry and scorn which surrounded the dying Lord? And did he feel that the stones would cry out if he did not show

kindness to his best Friend? Since Jesus spoke not for Himself, but was dumb as a sheep before her shearers, Joseph is bound to open his mouth for Him! If Jesus answered not, but only breathed out prayers for His murderers, the honorable counselor must acknowledge Him! The sun has acknowledged Him and veiled his face in sackcloth! The earth has recognized Him and trembled to her very heart at His sufferings! Death has acknowledged Him and yielded up the bodies which the sepulcher had up to now detained! The Temple has acknowledged Him and in its horror has torn its veil, like a woman that is utterly broken in heart by the horrors she has seen! Therefore Joseph must acknowledge Him—he cannot resist the impulse! Oh, Brothers and Sisters, if you have been backward, let some such motive lead you unto the van of the host!

Then there were all the wonders of that death which he saw and to which I have already alluded. They sufficed to convince the centurion that this was a righteous man. They convinced others that He was the Son of God—and he who was already a disciple of Christ must have been greatly confirmed in that conviction by what he saw around the Cross. The time was come when he must boldly act as Christ's disciple. Have there been no wonders of conversion around you? No answers to prayer? No Providential deliverances? Should not these lead the secret ones to declare themselves? I do not suppose he fully understood the design of our Lord's death—he had some knowledge of it, but not such a knowledge as we have, now that the Spirit of God has appeared in all His fullness and taught us the meaning of the Cross.

Oh, listen, Sirs, you that are not upon His side openly; you that have never worn His livery, nor manifestly entered on His service—He died for you! Those wounds were all for you! That bloody sweat, of which you still may see the marks upon the Countenance of the Crucified, was all for you! For you the thirst and fever! For you the bowing of the head and the giving up of the ghost—and can you be ashamed to acknowledge Him? Will you not endure rebuke and scorn for His dear sake who bore all this for you? Now speak from your soul and say, "He loved me and gave Himself for me." If you cannot say that, you cannot be happy! But if you can, then what follows?

Must you not love Him and give yourself for Him? The Cross is a wondrous magnet, drawing to Jesus every man of the true metal. It is as a banner lifted on high to which all who are loyal must rally. This fiery Cross, carried through all lands, will awaken the valiant and speed them to the field! Can you see your Lord suffering to the death for you and then turn your backs? I pray you may no longer hesitate, but may at once cry, "Set down my name among His followers; for I will fight it out even to the end, till I hear Him say—

'Come in, come in! Eternal glory you shall win.'"

Thus much by way of instruction taken from the life of Joseph of Arimathea. If the Cross does not bring a man out, what will? If the spectacle of dying love does not quicken us into courageous affection for Him, what can?

III. So I have to mention, in the third place, something for OUR AWAKENING. Perhaps you are saying in your heart that the season in which Joseph lived was one which imperatively demanded that he should leave his hiding place and should go to Pilate, but that you are under no such demand. Listen, Friends, many people are not true to their occa-

sions, whatever they may be. They do not consider that they have come to the Kingdom of God for such a time as this. The Lord Jesus is not hanging on a Cross, today, needing to be buried. But other stern necessities exist and call for your exertions. This hour's necessities imperiously demand that every man

who is right at heart should acknowledge his Lord and do Him service! Every man that loves Christ should, at this hour, prove it by his actions!

A buoy off the Mumbles in South Wales bears a bell which is meant to warn mariners of a dangerous rock. This bell is quiet enough in ordinary weather, but when the winds are out and the great waves rush in towards the shore, its solemn tones are heard for miles around as it swings to and fro in the hands of the sea. I believe there are true men who are silent when everything is calm, who will be forced to speak when the wild winds are out. Permit me to assure you that a storm is raging right now and it is growing worse and worse. If I rightly read the signs of the times, it is meet that every bell should ring out its warning note lest souls be lost upon the rocks of error. You that have fallen behind because the fight did not seem to require you, must quit your positions of ease. I summon you in the Master's name to the war! The Lord has need of you! If you come not to His help against the mighty, a curse will light upon you. You must either be written across the back as cowards, or else you will, today, solemnly espouse the cause of Jesus!

Shall I tell you why? I will tell you why Joseph was needed, and that was just because Christ's enemies had at last gone too far. When they hunted Him about and took up stones to stone Him, they went a very long way. When they said He had a devil and was mad, they went much too far. When they asserted that He cast out devils by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils, that was a piece of blasphemy. But now, now they have overstepped the line most fatally—they have actually taken the King of Israel and nailed Him up to a Cross and He is dead! And therefore Joseph cannot stand it any longer. He quits their company and joins himself to the Lord Jesus.

Look how far men are going in these days. In the outside world we have infidelity of so gross, so brutish a character, that it is unworthy of the civilization, much less of the Christianity, of our age! Now, you fearful ones, come out and refuse to be numbered with the unbelieving world! Besides, in the outward Christian Church we see men who, having already taken away every doctrine that we hold dear, are now assailing the Inspiration of God's own Word! They tell us plainly that they do not believe what the Scriptures say further than they choose to do. The Bible to them is a fine book, but rather out of date. Now, if you can be quiet, I cannot! The citadel of Christendom is now attacked. Let no brave man shrink from its defense. If you can hold your tongues and see the faith torn to pieces, I cannot! Why, it is enough to make every man gird on his weapon and rush to the fight!

Years ago, when they talked of the French invading England, an old lady grew very indignant and threatened deadly resistance. When she was asked what the women of England could do, she said they would rise to a man. I have no doubt whatever that they would do their best in any such emergency. Every iron in the fireplace, whether it is a poker or shovel, would be grasped to defend our hearths and homes! And just so, now, when error knows no bounds, we must stand up for the defense of the Truth of God! Since they push error to extremes, it becomes us to hold to every particle of the faith. I will not, for my own part, give up a corner of my creed for any man! Even if we might have been prepared to modify expressions had the age been different, we are not in that mood, now. A generation of vipers shall have a naked file to bite at. We will modify nothing!

If the Truth of God bears a stern aspect, we will not veil it. If there is an offense in the Cross, we will not conceal it. This shall be my answer to those who would have us attune ourselves to the spirit of the age—I know no Spirit but one, and He is unchanging in every age! Your extravagance of doubt shall have no influence over us except to make us bind the Gospel more closely to our hearts! If we gave you an inch, you would take a mile and so no inch shall be given you! Our resolve is to live for the Book as we read it,

for the Gospel as we rest in it, for the Lord as He made Atonement, for the Kingdom as it rules over all. I beg every trembling Christian to take heart, put on his Lord's livery, and advance to the fray. Come out, now, if you never have before! Come out, if there is any manliness in you, in these days of blasphemy and rebuke—

"You that are men, now serve Him, Against unnumbered foes; Your courage rise with danger And strength to strength oppose." When Joseph of Arimathaea revealed himself as our Lord's disciple, our Lord's friends had mostly fled—we might almost say they had all departed. Then Joseph said, "I will go in and beg for the body." When everybody else runs away,

then the timid man grows brave! And I have often noticed, that when there has been a wide desertion from the faith, then the feeble have become strong. Those poor souls who had said, "You hardly know whether we are the people of God at all, we are so unworthy," have crept out of their dens and have waxed valiant in fight, putting to flight the armies of the aliens! A Sister was asked to tell her experience before the Church and she could not do it. But, as she went away, she turned round and said, "I cannot speak for Christ, but I could die for Him." "Come back," said the minister, you are welcome here!" They do gloriously, those hidden ones, in days of which we are apt to fear that no witness for the Truth of God will remain alive! Oh, that you who live where religion is declining may be all the more resolved to serve the Lord Jesus faithfully!

And then, you know, in Joseph's time the people that were true to the Lord Jesus were such a feeble company. Those that were not absolutely poor—the women that could minister to Him of their substance—were, nevertheless, unable to go in unto Pilate and beg for the Lord's body. He would not have received them and if he would, they were too timid to have sought an interview. But Joseph is rich and a counselor and, therefore, he seemed to say, "These dear good women need a friend. They cannot get that precious body down from the Cross alone. I will go to the Roman governor. Together with Nicodemus, I will provide the linen and the spices—and the women shall help us take Jesus down from the tree and lay Him in my new tomb and swathe His limbs in linen and spices, so as to embalm Him honorably."

Some of you live in country towns where those who are faithful to God are very poor and have not much ability among them. If anything should move you to be the more decided, it should be that fact. It is a brave thing to help a feeble company—any common people will follow at the heels of success—but the true man is not ashamed of a despised cause when it is the cause of truth! You who have talent and substance should say, "I will go and help them. I cannot leave the Master's cause to this feeble folk. I know they do their best and, as that is little, I will join them and lay myself out to aid them for my great Master's sake."

Can you not see my drift? My only desire this morning is to induce any of you who have, for a moment, faltered to "stand up, stand up for Jesus," and everywhere—in every place as wisdom may suggest—avow His dear and sacred name. Perhaps you are flowers that cannot bloom till the light is darkened, like the night-blooming cereus or the evening primrose. Now is your hour! The evening is already come! Bloom, my dear Friends, and fill the air with the delightful fragrance of your love! When other flowers are closed, take care to open to the dew. In these dark hours, shine out, you stars! The sun has gone, otherwise might you lie hidden, but now let us see you! Joseph and Nicodemus had never been seen in the daylight when Jesus was alive—but when the sun was set through His death—then their radiance beamed at its fullest. Oh, my hesitating Brother, now is your time and your hour—boldly avail yourself of it, for our great Master's sake!

IV. Lastly, there is something in this subject for OUR GUIDANCE. Somebody says, "Well, what do you mean by my coming out? I can see what Joseph did, but what am I to do? I do not live at Arimathaea and there is no Pilate in these days." Joseph, in acknowledging His Lord, put himself under personal risk. A Christian slave, whose master was executed for being a Christian, went to the judge and begged the body of his master that he might bury it. The judge replied, "Why do you wish for your master's body?" "Because he was a Christian and I am one." Upon this confession he was, himself, condemned to die. It might have been so with Pilate, for the Jewish rulers must have hated Joseph and longed for his death. He had been backward a long time, but now he put his life in his hand and went in boldly to Pilate. We read, "He craved the body of Jesus," but, as a commentator well says, he was not a craven, though he craved the body. He simply asked for it, begged for it, implored to have it and the procurator yielded to his wish.

Now, do you think that if it were necessary for you to jeopardize your best earthly interests for Christ, you could do it? Could you lose your character for culture and courage by avowing the old faith in these apostate days? Can you leave all for Jesus? Should it separate the fondest connection, should it break up the brightest prospects—could you take up the Cross and follow your Lord? It is due to Him who died for you that you should count the cost and reckon it little enough for His dear sake if you may but do Him honor!

Remember, again, that this good man, Joseph of Arimathaea, when he took the body of Jesus, brought upon himself ceremonial pollution. It may seem little enough to you, but to a Jew it was a great deal, especially during the Passover week. He handled that blessed body and defiled himself in the judgment of the Jews. But, oh, I guarantee you he did not think it any defilement to touch the blessed Person of his Lord, even when the life was gone out of that matchless frame!

Nor was it any pollution. It was an honor to touch that Holy Thing, that body prepared of God. Yet they will say to you, if you come out for Christ and unite with His people that you lower yourself. They will point at you, give you some opprobrious name and charge you with fanaticism! Take upon yourself this blessed shame and say, as David did, "I will be yet more vile." Dishonor for Christ is honor—and shame for Him is the very top of all glory! You will not stand back, I trust, but you will come forward and declare your faith, though you thus become as the offscouring of all things.

And then, this man, having risked his life and given up his honor, was content to be at great cost for the burial of Christ. He went and bought the fine linen and that rock-hewn sepulcher which it was the ambition of every Israelite to possess, he cheerfully resigned, that the Lord might lie there. Now, whenever you do own Christ, own Him practically. Do not keep back your purse from Him, or think that you are to say, "I am His," and do nothing for Him! I was reading the story of a good old deacon in Maine, in America, who came in to a meeting after there had been a missionary collection. The minister then and there asked "our good Brother Sewell" to pray.

Sewell did not pray, but thrust his hand in his pocket and stood fumbling about. "Bring the box," he said. And when the box came and he had put his money into it, the minister said, "Brother Sewell? I did not ask you to give anything, I only wished you to pray." "Oh," he said, "I could not pray till I had first given something." He felt obliged, first, to do something for the great mission work—and having done that—he could pray for it. Oh, that all Christ's people felt the justice of that course of conduct! Is it not most natural and proper? Joseph could not, when the Savior needed burying, have been true to Him without burying Him! And now that the Savior does not need burying, but wants, in all His living power, to be preached among the sons of men—if we love Him we must do all that lies in us to spread the knowledge of His

name!

Come out then, come out then, you that are hidden among the stuff! Some of you strangers from the country who have lived in the village and attended the services, but never joined the Church—do not let another Sunday dawn till you have sent in your name to be classed with the people of God! And any of you that have come often to the Tabernacle and say that nobody has spoken to you, you speak to somebody and acknowledge what the Lord has done for you! Joseph of Arimathaea, where are you? Come forward, man! Come forth! Your time has come! Come forth now! If you have followed Christ secretly, throw secrecy to the winds! From now on, be the bravest of the brave among the bodyguards of Christ who follow Him wherever He goes! Have no fear nor thought of fear, but count it all joy if you fall into manifold trials for His name's sake, who is King of kings and Lord of lords, to whom be glory forever and ever! Amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ch-spurgeon/joseph-of-arimathaea/>

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