

A Man on Mission

Mark 15:42-47

Rev. Brian Bill

March 24-25, 2018

Jim Sheese has been hard at work again. Here's his latest rendition of the superheroes at Edgewood. This is truly a team of sold out servants, who love God and love people. The real heroes however, are each of you. We just get the joy of equipping you for ministry! Actually, you're all super servants serving our Holy Hero, Jesus Christ.

It's interesting how popular superheroes are. One website puts it like this:
"Superheroes are everywhere nowadays. From TV to the big screen, they no longer belong to the comic book world. While they used to only be adored by comic book fanatics, it is hard to find someone who doesn't know who Captain America or the Green Lantern is. This is vastly due to the overwhelming success of the superhero film genre that has started a cultural obsession."

Why is that we like superheroes so much?

- Heroic figures provide examples of idealistic behavior.
- We're drawn to their supernatural strength and stunning skill.
- We long for wrongs to be made right, for good to triumph over evil, for justice and righteousness to reign.
- They give us hope when we feel hopeless.

Historically, this is Palm Sunday, the day we remember that Jesus came into Jerusalem and was treated much like a superhero! That didn't last long however.

We're introduced today to a man on mission. Actually he's part of a team of servants living on mission. His name is Joseph. His other team members include Nicodemus, the Centurion and two women named Mary.

In general we tend to focus more on the death and resurrection of Christ and not so much on His burial. According to 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, his burial is significant enough to be included in the best summary statement of the gospel ever written: ***"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures."*** The Apostles'

Creed is based on this passage: “*He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried...the third day he rose again from the dead.*”

We’re wrapping up Mark 15 today. Turn to verse 42: “*And when evening had come, since it was the day of preparation, that is the day before the Sabbath...*” The Jews recognized two *evenings* – the first was from 3:00 pm to sunset and the second was sunset onward. Since it is now about three in the afternoon on Friday, Sabbath (Saturday) was set to begin around 6:00 pm. The “*day of preparation*” is the day when all preparations were to be completed for the Sabbath. According to John 19:31, this Sabbath was also a “*high day*” because of the Passover. This verse establishes a sense of urgency, explaining why quick action has to take place.

Deuteronomy 21:22-23 give us some backstory: “*And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God...*” If Jesus’ body is to be removed, someone must move quickly to make this happen because the day is almost over.

In verse 43 we’re introduced to a man named: “*Joseph of Arimathea...*”

1. Where Joseph was from. Arimathea was located twenty miles northwest of Jerusalem, and was likely the birthplace of Samuel. We’re given his name and hometown so people who were living when Mark wrote his gospel could verify and confirm the details.

2. Who Joseph was. We’re given some clues about Joseph’s character in the next part of verse 43: “*a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate...*”

- **Respected.** Joseph was known as a “*respected member of the council,*” which means that he was a “*noble and well-formed*” member of the Jewish Supreme Court. Luke 23:50 tells us that he was “*good and righteous.*” Matthew 27:57 refers to him as “*rich.*” Luke 23:51 indicates that while he was a member of the Sanhedrin, “*he had not consented to their decision and action.*”
- **Spiritual.** He was looking and longing “*for the kingdom of God,*” which shows that he knew there was more to life than this life. John 19:38

describes him as a “*disciple of Jesus.*” Up until this point we could call him a “closet Christian” because he was quiet about his faith in Jesus.

- **Courageous.** Joseph then gathers up courage and goes in to Pilate. The word means, “*not to dread but to be bold.*” This was bold because he was not related to Jesus and as a member of the Sanhedrin that had forced Pilate to crucify Christ he was likely not real popular with the Governor. In addition, this was risky because he was identifying himself with Jesus, who had just been crucified as a traitor. As a sympathizer, Joseph could have earned the same fate. On top of all that, this meeting with a pagan and the handling of a dead body would have made him ceremonially unclean and therefore disqualified from worship.

By making this request he was also openly confessing his personal loyalty to Jesus and putting his career in jeopardy. When you think about it, there was nothing in it for him. Jesus was now dead and his dream of a kingdom to come was likely dashed. He did what he did out of love and honor for Jesus.

3. What Joseph did.

- **He asked.** The first thing he did is found in verse 43: “*and asked for the body of Jesus.*” The King James Version uses the word, “*craved*” instead of “*asked.*” This shows how eager he was to honor Jesus in this way. According to Roman law only the imperial magistrate could grant the release of a crucified man’s body. Bodies were normally left on the cross for vultures to devour and to serve as a preventative to crime, kind of like the “scared straight” prison programs we have. Other times, bodies were just thrown into the city dump, also known as *Gehenna*.

The word for “*body*” is very tender and respectful in contrast to the word that’s used in verse 45 when we read that Pilate “*granted the corpse to Joseph.*” This can be translated as “*carcass*” and was only used of a dead body. Simply put, the Roman officials would never have released the body without proof that Jesus was dead.

On Tuesday morning I did some Q&A in two classes at Quad Cities Christian School. One student asked how many funerals I have “hosted” as a pastor. I’ve never thought of “hosting” a funeral but I like the word because it’s respectful. I told the class that I’ve “hosted” over 100 funerals

(which is about how many Pastor Ed does in a year!). I've "hosted" a handful of funerals here and have worked with some outstanding funeral directors. I've been struck by what I've seen from the team that works at one of the funeral homes. When they escort the body to the front of the church, after positioning the casket, they bow in honor of the deceased. When the service is over, they come back up front and bow again. One of those guys is Joe, who attends here with his wife Brittney. That's the sense of what Joseph is doing as he gets ready to "host" the funeral and burial of Jesus.

Pilate's Response

This request triggers a process for Pilate as we see in verses 44-45: ***"Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died. And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph."***

- **He's surprised at his death.** This word is also translated as "astonished" and means that he "wondered and marveled" that Jesus was already dead. This shows how brutal the suffering of Jesus was. And this was nothing like the weight of our sins that came crushing down on him. Normally, death can take up to two days for those crucified.
- **He investigated his death.** Pilate wants to make sure that Jesus is dead so he summons the centurion to get the details. BTW, the death of Jesus was not disputed by anyone who witnessed the crucifixion of Christ.
- **He verified his death.** The centurion, as a Roman military officer, who served as both executioner and coroner, verifies that He is dead. How cool that the Centurion, a Gentile and a new believer now gets to meet Joseph, a Jew and a new believer. They make up a microcosm of the church – Jew and Gentile now one in Christ, serving the Savior together!
- **He granted the dead body to Joseph.** The word "**granted**" means that he "gave as a gift," without requiring a fee. It's notable that Pilate did this because those guilty of treason were not normally permitted burial. I wonder if this was Pilate's way of saying he never believed Jesus was guilty. This may also have been a way to get back at the religious leaders, like he did when according to Matthew 27:37 he put the words, ***"This is Jesus, the***

King of the Jews” on the sign hung above Jesus head. Pilate made sure it could be read in multiple languages. John 19:22 tells us that when the religious leaders protested, Pilate said, ***“What I have written I have written.”***

Let’s compile the evidence for the death of Jesus from just a handful of passages.

- Mark 15:37: ***“And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last.”***
- Mark 15:39 says that the centurion saw that ***“he breathed his last.”***
- Mark 15:43 says that Joseph ***“asked for the body of Jesus.”***
- Mark 15:44 uses the phrase, ***“already died”*** and ***“already dead.”***
- Mark 15:45 says that the centurion confirmed that ***“he was dead”*** and Pilate granted the ***“corpse”*** to Joseph.
- John 19:33-34 describes how the professional executioners broke the legs of the two criminals to hasten their death, ***“But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.”*** These professional executioners knew he was dead but they made sure by sticking the razor-sharp spear up through his side into a lung and his heart. Amazingly, this fulfills multiple prophecies from the Old Testament as vividly described in Psalm 34:20: ***“He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken.”*** Actually, this goes back to the first Passover where Exodus 12:46 says this about the Passover lamb, ***“and you shall not break any of its bones.”*** Additionally, Zechariah 12:10 predicts, ***“...When they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child...”***

What Joseph Did

Let’s bounce back to the behavior of Jesus. The first thing we see is that he *asked*. He takes five additional actions...

- **He bought.** We see this in verse 46: ***“And Joseph bought a linen shroud...”*** Joseph had been blessed financially and was generous with what he had so he went to the market to buy the necessary cloth to bury Jesus. BTW, this makes me think of the swaddling cloths used to wrap Jesus when He was born. Joseph didn’t want to use something that cost him nothing. I’m reminded of what David did when he had the opportunity to get

something for free as found in 2 Samuel 24:24: “***No, but I will buy it from you for a price. I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God that cost me nothing.’ So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.***”

- **He removed.** We read next, “***and taking him down...***” It was no doubt difficult to lift the cross out of its socket and it must have been emotionally excruciating for Joseph as he pulled the 5-inch spikes out of the wrists and feet of Jesus and removed the sharp crown of thorns from his head.
- **He wrapped.** Joseph then “***wrapped him in the linen shroud...***” He would have first washed the body like we see in Acts 9:37 and then taken strips of linen and wrapped them around his body. It’s at this point according to John 19:39 that another closet Christian steps up: “***Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh [it’s interesting that the magi brought myrrh, a spice used for burial, to celebrate the birth of Jesus] and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight.***” I’m reminded of what Jesus said to Mary of Bethany after she poured expensive ointment all over Him in Mark 14:8: “***She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial.***”

So Joseph bought the shroud and Nicodemus bought the spices. These aromatic spices were designed to offset the smell of decomposition and would have been placed between the wraps. The body of Jesus would have been wrapped like a mummy, with a separate cloth laid over his head. Because of the time crunch, this was a quick job. The women were planning to come back after the Sabbath and complete the task as we see in Mark 16:1: “***When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him.***”

- **He laid.** After carefully preparing his body, they “***laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock.***” The body would have been placed on a stone shelf. Being cut out of the rock, this tomb would not have had a secret back exit like some caves did, which shows that no one could have snuck in to steal his body. A tomb cut out of rock was also more expensive. We know from Matthew 27:60 that this was Joseph’s own tomb and that it was new: “***and laid it in his own new tomb.***” This reveals again how generous Joseph was. This is significant because this too fulfills a prophecy with pinpoint precision from Isaiah 53:9: “***And they made his grave with the wicked and***

with a rich man in his death...” He was crucified on the cross alongside two criminals but was buried in a righteous rich man’s tomb.

- **He rolled.** After doing all this, we read at the end of verse 46: “***And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.***” Matthew 27:60 adds that this was a “***great stone,***” which is the word *megas*, meaning large. Archaeologists estimate that this could have weighed a couple tons and would have been rolled down an incline in front of the entrance. To roll that stone back up again would require the strength of several men. We read in Matthew 27:66 that Pilate put his official seal on this stone and stationed soldiers to guard the tomb. We’ll talk more about the significance of this on Easter weekend!

The Bible is clear that Jesus actually died and was buried. Verse 47 addresses the charge that some skeptics have made that the women must have gone to the wrong tomb on Sunday. There’s no way that happened: “***Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid.***” Once again we see these worshipping women being faithful to what God called them to do. The word “***saw***” literally means, “*were observing.*” Matthew 27:61 tells us that they were “***sitting opposite the tomb.***”

Action Steps

I see at least two ways we can apply this passage.

1. Go public with your private faith. What is it that turned Joseph and Nicodemus from closet Christians to confessional Christians? Simply put, it was Calvary that transformed them from cowards to men of courage. The same Jesus they were initially afraid to go public about is the One who freely pardoned them. The cross changes people, doesn’t it?

If you have not yet publicly identified yourself as a follower of Christ, it’s time to do so. To flesh this out some more, our next series after Easter will be called *Now is the Time* from the Old Testament Book of Haggai.

If you’re born again and you’ve not yet been baptized by immersion, it’s critical that you take this step of obedience like four people are doing this weekend. Our next baptism opportunity will be on April 28 and 29.

Maybe you've been baptized but you're keeping your Christianity quiet in the workplace or on campus. Would your coworkers or classmates be shocked to find out you're a Christian? It's time to align your life with the Lord. Jesus said it like this in Matthew 10:32-33: ***“So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.”***

If you're not yet saved, it's time to openly confess Christ as your Lord and Savior as Romans 10:9-10 says: ***“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.”***

2. Do what you can with all that you have. Joseph had a new tomb he let Jesus borrow for a short time and had the financial means to purchase fine linen. Nicodemus leveraged his resources to purchase 75 pounds of expensive spices. My guess is that this wasn't a spontaneous decision but involved some forethought and preparation. God raised up these two guys at this exact time for His exact purposes.

The two Mary's took the time to make sure they knew what tomb Jesus was in. Joseph and Nicodemus did something pretty *remarkable* while the Mary's did something more *routine*. Joseph jumped in at the last minute while the women ministered faithfully to Jesus for over three years, day-by-day. They all did it as onto the Lord. Whether the Lord prompts you to do something remarkable or to be faithful in the routine, do all you can with all that you have for His glory alone. Actually, most of what God asks us to do is routine but there are other times He calls us to do the remarkable. You'll be most ready for the remarkable when you're redeeming the routine.

So here's a question. Are you doing what you can with all that you have? Are you giving generously and are you willing to give sacrificially in response to the sacrifice of Jesus on your behalf?

Are you serving the One who came not to be served but to serve? I love how so many of you have invited people to one of our five Easter services next weekend! That's really good news. And I know you want to be able to sit with your guests, and you should. But we've run into a challenge. We're in need of additional superhero servants to “travel” with groups of kids during the CSI Jerusalem

program, to be helpers in the preschool area, and to play with and hold babies in the nursery. We're also in need of more people to serve at our check-in desk and on the First Impressions team. One way to look at this is that your serving will actually benefit our guests and allow the gospel to be communicated in a creative way to their kids. No special training needed. We just need extra hands and feet. One idea would be to attend one service and serve at another.

I want to circle back before landing the message so that we're certain that Jesus was dead before he was put in the tomb. This will actually lay the groundwork for the evidence for the resurrection that we'll unpack in our *Case for Easter* services next weekend.

J. Warner Wallace, a cold-case detective and author of *Cold Case Christianity* gives four reasons why we can be confident that Jesus actually died on the cross.

- 1. Extended contact.** Joseph removed the nails, took down the body, carried it and then wrapped it with spices and placed it in the tomb. In the midst of his grief, don't you think he would have made sure that Jesus was in fact, dead? When a heart stops beating, the body begins to cool, rigor mortis sets in and discoloration appears. Joseph would have seen all these signs.
- 2. Unexpected corroboration.** When water and blood came gushing out when the soldier's spear was pulled out, there was no doubt Jesus was dead.
- 3. External confirmation.** There was a severe penalty in place for soldiers who failed in their duties to make sure the crucified was killed. That's why they were so brutal and meticulous. According to the soldiers on the scene, Jesus was dead on the cross – that's why they didn't break his legs.
- 4. Eyewitness connection.** It's likely that Joseph was still alive when Mark wrote his gospel. Early readers could track him down and interview him. They could head to Arimathea and even interview his family.

Some very generous Edgewood members purchased 200 copies of Lee Strobel's book, *The Case for Easter* that we will be giving out to our guests next weekend. Strobel used to be an investigative reporter for the *Chicago Tribune* and was formerly a spiritual skeptic and avowed atheist. After his wife became a Christian, he started to see some changes in her life. In an attempt to disprove her faith, he began an investigation of the central truths of Christianity. He determined to answer three questions:

1. Was Jesus really dead after his ordeal on the cross?
2. Was his tomb really empty on that first Easter morning?
3. Did credible people really encounter him and did their lives really change?

Next week we'll focus on the last two questions and today we've been examining the evidence for the actual death and burial of Jesus Christ. After all, if he really wasn't killed when he was crucified, then he couldn't rise from the dead, right? If His death didn't happen as a fact of history, then the resurrection is a hoax.

The so-called *Swoon Theory* denies that Jesus was resurrected from the dead but rather that He was resuscitated after fainting from exhaustion. The idea is that the coldness of the tomb somehow caused him to wake up. The Quran holds that Jesus wasn't crucified at all and some Muslims believe that another man died in his place. As part of his investigation Strobel interviewed Alexander Metherell, M.D., PH.D. There's a detailed discussion of this investigation in the book but I want to share some of it.

The Roman soldiers used spikes that were 5 to 7 inches long to nail him through the wrists and feet. The nails in the wrists would have crushed the median nerve, causing excruciating pain, like taking a pair of pliers and squeezing and crushing that nerve. The pain was so unbearable it was literally beyond words to describe. They had to invent a new word – “excruciating” [to describe the pain], which means, “out of the cross.”

Dr. Metherell continued, *‘His arms would have been stretched and both shoulders dislocated. I ran this by Edgewood member Dr. Wayne Gallups, who is an ER doctor, to get his perspective. This is what he said: “His shoulder muscles became fatigued from hanging on the cross and His shoulders could have spontaneously dislocated. Once this occurred, the pain associated with movement of His shoulders would have been beyond imaginable. This would have made it nearly impossible to use His shoulders to help take the weight off his chest/trunk to aid in breathing.”*

Dr. Metherell continued, *“This fulfills Psalm 22 which says, ‘My bones are out of joint.’ Crucifixion is an agonizingly slow death by asphyxiation. In order to get a breath, the crucified had to push up on his feet, scraping his raw back against the rough cross. This would go on and on until complete exhaustion took over and the person would no longer be able to push up and breathe anymore. He would then go into ‘respiratory acidosis,’ with carbon dioxide dissolving in the blood as*

carbonic acid, leading to an irregular heartbeat. Dr. Gallups added, “When this happens, we become “narcotized” and lose consciousness. No question, acidosis causes the heart to become irritable and prone to dysrhythmias.”

He would have had a sustained rapid heart rate that would have contributed to heart failure, resulting in the collection of fluid around the heart, called a ‘pericardial effusion,’ as well as around the lungs, which is called a ‘pleural effusion.’ This is significant because when the Roman soldier thrust a spear into the side of Jesus, it went through his lung and into the heart. When the spear was pulled out, clear fluid, like water, came out, followed by a large volume of blood. Dr. Gallups agreed: “To have both blood and water gush forth would suggest, if not truly indicate, both the pleural cavity (source of “water”) and the heart (source of “blood”) were punctured. That being said, people don’t survive a lacerated/punctured heart. It is incompatible with life.”

After hearing all this, Strobel asked the doctor: *‘At this juncture, what would Jesus’ condition have been?’* Dr. Metherell locked his gaze on Strobel and answered with authority, *‘There was absolutely no doubt that Jesus was dead.’*

Metherell concluded, *‘The soldiers were experts in killing people – that was their job and they did it very well. They knew without a doubt when a person was dead.’*

I also asked Edgewood member and deacon Chris Rogers, who is a lieutenant with the Rock Island Fire Department and the EMS coordinator, for his insight into the death of Jesus. He helped confirm what I was learning and then told me he played a video about the crucifixion when he was teaching our high school students about all this. He said they were silent when it was over. That’s how we’re going to end today. When it’s over we’ll sit in silence for a bit as well.

Closing Video

As horrible as the death of Jesus was, it helps us see the beauty of the empty tomb. The burial sets the stage for the resurrection as Jesus demolishes the power of death and confirms that He alone is the Holy Superhero! And because He lives, we can face tomorrow.

In this final week before Easter, let’s pick up more invites and yard signs and make the “Easter Ask” because opportunities are everywhere. I was working late on Thursday and saw a young mom with her son on a bike in our church parking lot. I

quickly grabbed an invite and went outside and introduced myself by saying, “*I love meeting our neighbors.*” After learning a bit about each other I asked if she and her family had a church to go to on Easter weekend. She said they didn’t so I handed her a card and told her that they wouldn’t need to worry about parking. She studied the invite for a bit and then thanked me and off they went. I hope they come.

Welcome of New Members

5:00

Richard Bucher
Kathleen Bucher
Kaysie Byles
MaryAnn Barnett
Ray Love

10:45

Steve Deaton