

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 22 March 2026. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

Confessing Jesus before Men

Matthew 27:57-61

About ten years ago, my family got together with our friends, Pastor Cary and his family, for an afternoon. During that visit, Pastor Cary told me the story of how a lady named Mary had recently come to know Christ. It all started when Mary's daughter began to attend the weekly children's Bible club at their church. After a few months of attending the club, and hearing the Gospel taught simply and clearly, this girl trusted Christ as her Saviour. Then, not long after her salvation, she began to ask questions about baptism. And so, one day after the Bible club, Pastor Cary and his wife opened the Bible, and showed her what the Bible says about baptism. As she looked at the Scriptures, she began to see that baptism is *not* by sprinkling or pouring, but by *immersion*. She saw that baptism is not to be performed on infants, but is to be *received* by people who have personally placed their faith in Jesus. She already knew that baptism doesn't wash anyone's sins away; however, as Pastor Cary and his wife explained more about baptism, she began to realise that baptism is a very important step for a new believer, because it is a symbol of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. She now wanted to be baptised as soon as possible, so that she could publicly declare to others that she had placed her trust in Christ, and in His death, burial, and resurrection.

Well, when Mary came to collect her daughter from church that day, her little girl bluntly told her mum, "Mum, I'm saved, but I need to be baptised; and *you* need to be saved!" Pastor Cary was afraid that the mum would be offended by her daughter's bluntness, and pull her out of their church services; but she wasn't offended at all. In fact, that frank challenge, "*You* need to be saved," was just what she needed to hear. *Mary* now wanted to know how to be saved from her sin; and before that week was over, Pastor Cary and his wife sat down, opened the Bible, and showed her God's simple plan of salvation. Mary repented of her sin, trusted Christ, and was saved. And guess what? She wasn't afraid to say so! Even though she knew that she might be shunned by family and friends for being a "born again," she not only began to tell others that she was now "saved" and "born again," but she went to the school, and told the teachers that she wanted her daughter to be removed from religion class, because she and her daughter were no longer Catholics, but Bible-believing, born-again Christians. Folks, *that* is evidence of true salvation! *Mary* wasn't *saved* by removing her daughter from religion class and uttering the words "I'm a Christian": she was already saved. She was saved at the very moment when she believed on Christ, and asked Him to save her. However, her *action* of identifying herself with the Lord Jesus Christ was the *product* of her newfound faith in Christ.

And so it was with a man named Joseph, about 2,000 years ago. For quite a while, Joseph had been watching the Lord Jesus from a safe distance, and desiring to be His follower; but there was something that had held him back from publicly identifying with Him. That something was *fear*—fear of being rejected by his colleagues. However, the day came when Joseph stepped forward and committed a very public act, which revealed to everyone that he had placed his faith in Jesus of Nazareth. That is what we will be talking about this morning. The title of this message is *Confessing Jesus before Men*.

Read Matthew 27:57-61.

I. The public profession of faith (vv. 57-58)

It was Wednesday afternoon, the 14th day of Nisan, in A.D. 30. The terrible hours of Christ's suffering on the cross were over; and Jesus, the true Lamb of God, had just yielded up His spirit, and died. It was now just after 3:00 p.m.—which meant that the Passover meal would soon be eaten by the Jews. (The Apostles, of course, had eaten an *early* Passover meal with Jesus just the night before; but now everyone else was eating the Passover.) Soon the Passover lambs would be roasted and eaten in homes all across Jerusalem; and then, at 6:00 p.m., Passover Day would end, and the **Feast of Unleavened Bread** would begin.

Now, what this meant for Jesus' followers is that they had a job to do: and they had to do it quickly. Not only did they need to get back to their homes to eat the Passover meal, but someone had to bury Jesus' body before the Sabbath day began. Now, when I say "the Sabbath," I'm not talking about the Sabbath day that begins at 6:00 p.m. on Friday, and goes to 6:00 p.m. on Saturday). It wasn't the regular, weekly Sabbath day that was approaching; it was a *special* Sabbath day. The first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread was regarded as a Sabbath day of rest, regardless of what day of the week it fell upon. This means that if Jesus' followers wanted to honour their Lord with a proper burial, they had to bury His body before 6:00, lest they be guilty of breaking the Sabbath.

Now, at this point in the book of **Matthew**, a name that we had not seen before suddenly pops up—the name of **Joseph of Arimathaea**. Matthew says that Joseph was a rich man, and that he was a follower of Jesus. Matthew also says that Joseph took it upon himself to bury Jesus' body. After Jesus was dead, Joseph quickly went to Pilate, and asked permission to bury Jesus' body; and Pilate, who was probably eager to get it done, so that he could get Jesus out of sight and out of mind, granted Joseph permission. Joseph wanted to honour the Lord by burying Him in his own tomb; and so, he quickly took Jesus' body down from the cross, and moved it to his family tomb (which happened to be in a garden right next to Golgotha).

Now, this is not the only information that we have about Joseph of Arimathaea. To get the full picture of who he was, let's look at two other passages.

Read Luke 23:50-56.

Read John 19:38-42.

In these passages, we find some more details about Joseph. For one thing, he was a **"counsellor."** This means that he was a member of the Sanhedrin. However, Luke was quick to add that although Joseph was a Sanhedrin member, he had *not* voted to crucify Jesus. (As we saw several weeks ago, it seems that Joseph was not even *called* to that illegal nighttime trial, because the other members knew that he would vote "no.") But that's not all. We also find that another Sanhedrin member named **Nicodemus**, who was also a follower of Jesus, supplied one hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes to embalm Jesus' body. But the most interesting fact of all is that Joseph had, up to this point, been a **"secret"** follower of Jesus.

Now, in a few moments, we will examine the testimonies of both Joseph and Nicodemus. But first, there is a very important question that we need to examine: **is it possible to be a "secret" follower of Jesus?** To answer that question, let's turn to **John 12.**

Read John 12:37-43.

In this passage, John makes an amazing statement. He says that there were, among the chief rulers, some people who actually "believed" on Jesus; yet, they didn't *really* believe, because they did not own Him as Lord, and surrender their *lives* to Him. They believed *intellectually* that Jesus is the Messiah; but because they liked their comfy positions in society, they said nothing. As John put it, they **"loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."**

So, then, here is the million-euro question: "Were these 'closet believers' really saved?" The answer is: No! They were the kind of "believers" that John talked about earlier in his gospel.

Read John 2:23-25.

Many people supposedly "believed" on Jesus; yet, Jesus did not "commit" Himself to them, because *He* knew that they had not truly "committed" their souls to *Him*. They believed in

their *heads*; but there was no true repentance of heart, or surrender of their lives to Jesus Christ. When the tide of public opinion began to turn *against* Jesus, most of these so-called “believers” (who never were true believers), left Him, and walked no more with Him. They were never truly saved.

What, then, of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus? Were *they* true believers? **Not at first.** For a while they had a mere “head belief”; but somewhere along the line, each of them came to believe on Jesus with true, saving faith. The Bible doesn’t reveal when each of them believed on Jesus; but we know that they *did* believe on Him sometime before Jesus’ crucifixion, because they now came out and *identified* themselves as Jesus’ followers. Joseph of Arimathea boldly came forward and gave his tomb to Jesus; and Nicodemus wrapped Jesus’ body in expensive spices. When they did this, they were telling the world that they were Jesus’ followers. They were confessing Jesus before men. It wasn’t their *good work* of giving Jesus a proper burial that saved them: rather, their good work was the *product* of the saving *faith* that they already had.

The Bible makes it clear that when a person truly believes on Jesus Christ, he will have a desire to be *counted* as a follower of Jesus Christ. Many people believe *in their mind* that Jesus died for their sins and rose again; but it’s nothing more than an intellectual agreement. They are not willing to repent of their sin and surrender their life to Christ, because they’re afraid of what their friends or family would say if they were to become one of those crazy “born agains.” And so, they pass up eternal life. “But, Pastor, isn’t it harsh to say that people will end up in Hell just because they are afraid, or embarrassed?” No, it’s not harsh: it’s reality! In **Revelation 21:8**, the Bible says that the “*fearful*” (in other words, those who were afraid to identify with Jesus) will have their part in the lake that “*burneth with fire and brimstone.*” Jesus was not ashamed to die for you: and if you are not willing to own *Him*, He will not own *you*. Jesus said, “*Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.*”

With this in mind, let’s now examine the testimony of Nicodemus and Joseph. We’ll begin with Nicodemus. Nicodemus had first met the Lord early in His ministry; and at that point, Nicodemus was *not* a true believer. Yet, by the latter part of Jesus’ ministry, something had changed in old Nic. Let’s begin by looking at Nicodemus’ first encounter with Jesus.

Read John 3:1-16.

When Nicodemus first came to Jesus, he was so ashamed to be seen with Him, that he went to Him at nighttime, under cover of darkness. Also, as he spoke with Jesus, he tried to couch his question in carefully-guarded words. He acknowledged that Jesus is from God, because no one could do the miracles that He did unless God were with him; yet, strangely, he didn't acknowledge that Jesus is the "Messiah." Instead, he merely called Jesus a "rabbi" ("teacher"). However, Jesus saw right through Nicodemus; and while Nicodemus was fumbling around for the right words to say, Jesus cut right to the chase, and told him what he needed to hear. He told Nicodemus that he needed to receive a new birth—a spiritual birth; and He explained that the way to receive this spiritual birth is to *believe on Him*. Soon, Jesus said, He would be "**lifted up**" on a cross, just as Moses lifted up the copper serpent on the pole in the wilderness; and just as the people of Israel had to look at that serpent on the pole in order to be healed of their deadly snake bites, so *Nicodemus* had to look to *Jesus* as the one who could save him from spiritual death, if he would have eternal life.

Now, we aren't told how Nicodemus responded to Jesus's words that evening: all we know is that on another occasion about two years later, Nicodemus was no longer the same man!

Read John 7:28-32, 37-53.

This account is fascinating, on several counts. First, the reaction of the soldiers to Jesus' words is amazing. Folks, Roman soldiers did *not* go around disobeying orders! This was no ordinary thing! The chief priest had been given authority *from Rome* to command the soldiers that were stationed at Antonia fortress, in any matter involving Temple security. This means that if the soldiers disobeyed the chief priests, they were disobeying Rome; and they were putting their lives in jeopardy. Yet, the soldiers disobeyed their orders, and did *not* arrest Jesus. Why? Because they were stunned by Jesus' words! They had never heard anyone speak with the kind of power and authority that Jesus had. Not only were they amazed, but they seemed to be *afraid* to arrest Jesus. Now, remember, these were hardened soldiers. Ordinarily, they would have had no problem with arresting a Jewish troublemaker. But this Man was different. They probably sensed that Jesus is God: therefore, they were afraid to touch Him.

Yet, as fascinated as these soldiers were with Jesus, *they did not commit their souls to Him*; they simply acknowledged that "**No man ever spake as this man.**" They spoke well of Jesus; but they didn't *believe* on Him. And so it still is today. Many people respect Jesus, and speak well of Him; but they stop short of *turning* to Him for salvation, and being counted as His follower. Folks, *respect* for Jesus is not enough. You must *believe* on Him! If you do not believe on Him, you will one day hear the words "**Depart from me, ye that work iniquity: I never knew you.**"

Now, let's see how the Pharisees responded to Jesus. **(Read John 7:47-49.)** As we've already seen, the soldiers were awed by Jesus, but did not commit their souls to Him. They were fascinated with Jesus; but they didn't repentant. Yet, in the Pharisees' eyes, these soldiers *were* Jesus' followers, because they were speaking well of Him. They said, "***Are ye also deceived?***" In other words, "Are you believers in this Jesus of Nazareth now, too?" By the way, this often happens. People who are *listening* to the Scriptures, but are still undecided about Jesus, are often mistaken as being Christians—when, in fact, they aren't. Oftentimes, people who are considering Christ, and who are listening to the Word of God, are ridiculed by others for going to church, and for reading the Bible, and for hanging around those crazy Christians. Christian, don't just assume that someone who is attending church, and getting into the Bible, is a Christian. He may be someone who is *fascinated* by Jesus, but is not saved; and *you* may be the one whom God will use to lead him to Christ.

Now, I don't know what the soldiers ultimately decided to do with Christ; but the Pharisees clearly had made up their minds. Their hearts were filled with pride; and they didn't think they needed an upstart prophet from Galilee. Their proud attitude oozed from every ounce of their being. They said, "***Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?***" In other words, "We're the high class of society. We're educated and powerful. *We* don't need this Jesus." Furthermore, they said, "***This people who knoweth not the law are cursed.***" The Pharisees thought of the poor, uneducated masses as trash. They *really* thought highly of themselves. These men who claimed to know the Scriptures better than everyone else were so blinded by their jealousy of Jesus, that they were making statements that they *knew* were not true! Let's read **verse 52** again. **(Read John 7:52.)** Folks, make no mistake about it: these men were scholars of the Scriptures; and they knew very well that Isaiah had prophesied that the Messiah would begin His ministry in Galilee. They also knew that there *had* been great prophets in the past who were from Galilee—men such as **Nahum**, and **Jonah**. In the pride of their hearts, these men who *claimed* to know the Law better than anyone else were ignoring the very Word they claimed to uphold. Christ desired to save even these proud men; but they considered earthly wealth and power to be more important than salvation.

Most of the people in the crowd that day didn't truly believe on Jesus Christ. Many respected Jesus, but didn't understand His message. Some were sympathetic of Jesus, but weren't willing to turn to Him. Many, including the Pharisees, were hardened by their pride, and were vehemently against Jesus. But there was at least one man (other than the eleven saved Apostles) who truly believed on Christ, and who wasn't afraid to be counted with Him. His name was Nicodemus. Let's look again at **verses 50-53** again. **(Read John 7:50-53.)**

This doesn't sound like the same man who approached Jesus by night two years earlier, does it? Nicodemus had changed! He wasn't hiding in the shadows anymore: instead, he boldly stood up for Jesus. And don't forget: he had everything in this world to lose by doing so. He stood to lose his position in the Sanhedrin by defending Jesus. He stood to lose his career, his wealth, and his good name in society. (If you were put out of the synagogue, you were *out!*) But Nicodemus didn't care. What, then, made the difference between the fearful Nicodemus in **John 3**, and the bold Nicodemus in **John 7**? The difference was that somewhere along the line he had humbled himself, and truly believed on Jesus Christ; and Christ had made all the difference. Those who have truly believed on Jesus are not ashamed to be counted with Him. The Apostle Paul said, ***“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”***

What, then, of Joseph of Arimathaea? How long had *he* been a true believer? Well, it appears that Joseph had not been “in the faith” for as long as Nicodemus had. In fact, it seems that Joseph had been a believer for only a short time, because John says that he had been a disciple ***“secretly, for fear of the Jews.”*** Joseph *was* a true believer; however, he was such a new convert, that few people knew of his faith in Jesus yet.

Now, the truly amazing thing about Joseph's conversion is that he came out as a follower of Jesus *immediately after Jesus' death*—right at the very moment when all seemed hopeless and lost! While **Jesus' own Apostles** were hiding in the shadows for fear of their lives, and were thinking that all their hopes were crushed, Joseph was publicly giving up his own tomb to bury Jesus! While **Cleopas** was concluding that Jesus must not have been their Deliverer after all, and while **Thomas** was refusing to believe that Jesus would ever live again, this baby Christian named **Joseph** was boldly identifying with his Lord. This shows that Joseph's faith was real. It also shows that brand-new believers sometimes show a lot more courage and faith than believers who have known the Lord for much longer do. They may not know all the doctrine, and all the “whys” and “wherefores” yet: but they *do* know that they love Jesus! While the “mature” Christian is afraid to share the gospel with that seven-foot-tall guy with the green mohawk haircut, and the five hundred “skull and bones” tattoos, and the fifty body piercings, who looks as though he's ready to rip the face off anyone who utters the name “Jesus,” the new Christian goes right up to the guy and gives him a “Jesus Loves You” tract. Nobody has yet sat down with him, and explained that there are some people that you'd best stay away from, because if you talk to them, there might be an ugly scene. (And besides, those people will never listen to the Gospel, anyway!) Christian, if you are still new in the faith, don't let anyone rob you of your love for Jesus, and of your trust in His power! Don't let anyone make you ashamed or afraid. As Paul said, ***“Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”***

II. The preparation of the body (vv. 59-61)

(Read Matthew 27:59-61.) The tomb that Joseph gave to Jesus was somewhat like what we would call a “mausoleum” today. A “sepulchre” was a walk-in tomb, hewn out of rock, in which multiple family members were usually buried; and a heavy, disc-shaped rock (weighing one to two tons) was rolled in front of the doorway. At the very least, it would have taken half a dozen strong men to move it. (Remember that! We’ll talk more about this on Resurrection Sunday!) Only rich men could afford this kind of burial; and Joseph wanted his Saviour to have the very best burial that he could offer. And guess what? All this was the fulfilment of prophecy!

Read Isaiah 53:9.

In this verse, Isaiah is once again giving us a prophecy of the Messiah. First, Isaiah prophesied that the LORD’s righteous Servant would make His grave with **“the wicked.”** This was a prophecy of how Jesus would die alongside two criminals. Secondly, Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would make His grave with **“the rich.”** **“The rich”** with whom Jesus made His grave was, of course, the family of Joseph of Arimathaea, in whose family tomb He was buried. Thirdly, Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would receive this honourable burial **“because he had done no violence,”** and because there was no **“deceit in his mouth.”** Even when Christ was arrested and taken away to His mock trial, He did no violence against the officers; nor did He tell lies in order to avoid being put to death. This shows that the “Servant” of **Isaiah 53** cannot possibly be the nation of Israel (as unbelieving Jewish rabbis claim). Israel *has* done violence against their oppressors in the past, and *has* told many lies. In fact, in **Isaiah 28**, the LORD said that the people of Israel have made lies their **“refuge,”** and have hidden themselves in **“falsehood,”** and have made a covenant with death, and an agreement with hell! In stark contrast, Christ did no violence, and told no lies. Men dishonoured Christ with a criminal’s death; and therefore, the Father saw to it that He was honoured with the burial of a rich and honourable man.

Now, before we close this morning, there is one more thing that I’d like to point out. Let’s read **Isaiah 53:9** one more time. **(Read Isaiah 53:9.)** Folks, there are some statements in Hebrew that don’t really “compute” when translated into English; and for that reason, a look at the original Hebrew (or Greek) is sometimes helpful. This is one of those cases. You see, when you translate this verse straight from the Hebrew, with no smoothing out, it literally reads, **“and with the rich in his deaths.”** Now, what does this mean? Plenty! In English, this statement may not make grammatical sense; but it does make *theological* sense! How so? For one thing, the plural word “deaths” shows **the intensity of Jesus’ death.** In Hebrew, it is common to make a word “intense” by making it plural, instead of singular; and this is one of those cases. You see, no other death in history was more intense than Christ’s death was, because during those six hours on the cross, Jesus was paying the price of man’s redemption.

However, the plural word “deaths” has even deeper meaning. The plurality of the word “deaths” also shows that **Jesus died *many spiritual deaths!*** He literally experienced the spiritual death of *every single soul* in the human race! It was as though Jesus died *billions* of spiritual “deaths.” As our sin was laid upon Jesus, He was separated from His Father (in His *humanity*); and He paid the sin debt of every single person who will ever live. As the God-Man, His life is infinitely valuable, and is far more than enough to atone for *all* our lives!

Joseph of Arimathaea gave the best tomb that he could afford to the King of Kings; but no gift that Joseph of Arimathaea, or Nicodemus, or even the richest king on earth, could afford to give to Jesus, could possibly atone for his sin. The only Man who can atone for our sins is the Lord Jesus Christ; and the atonement that He provided will never be in short supply. The only condition to receive the gift of salvation is that you humble yourself; admit that Christ's death on your behalf is all you need; and, by faith, receive it as a free gift!

Conclusion: As we close this morning, I would ask: “Have *you* received the gift of salvation?” If you haven't, God is offering it to you this morning. Now is the time! Now is the day of salvation! Just talk directly to God, and say, “Lord, I know I'm a dirty, rotten sinner, and that I deserve hell. But I believe that your Son died on the cross for me, and paid for *all* my sin, and rose again to conquer death for *me*. By faith, I ask that you give me the gift of forgiveness of sins, and eternal life. Please come into my heart today, and be my personal Lord and Saviour.” If you will come to Him on these simple terms, He will give you His wonderful gift! If you are saved already, I would challenge you not to be ashamed of your Lord. He gave His life for you, as your ransom: and now, it is only reasonable that you live your life for Him, as a living sacrifice, out of a heart of love and thankfulness. Let Him have His way in your life!