



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Matthew 27:51-61

"The Life of Christ: The Burial of Christ"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] ...be on the topic, "The Highlights of the Greatest Life" in the Gospel of Matthew. We have come this morning to the burial of Christ and I want to read the account in Matthew and then also a few verses from the account in John's Gospel also. So will you turn with me to Matthew chapter 27 and I'm going to begin reading at verse 51; although this immediate section 51 through 56 will not be the subject of the exposition that follows. But since I'm going to refer to a couple of incidents in it, I believe that it would be well for us to read this too. So we begin with verse 51 and read through verse 61 of Matthew chapter 27.

Now you'll remember that Jesus has just cried out, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" "And when he had cried with the loud voice, he up yielded his spirit." Now we read of some remarkable things that transpired,

"And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they

feared greatly, saying, 'Truly this was the Son of God.' And many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him: among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children. When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathaea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple: he went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered. And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed. And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre. (Now will you turn to the 19th chapter of the fourth gospel and we read just two or three verses, which give us some additional information regarding this burial. Verse 38 of John chapter 19, I think this is a good illustration of how our gospels do not contradict one another, but supplement one another.) And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus. And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices (that should really be cloths) with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day; for the sepulchre was night at hand."

May God bless this reading of his word. Let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Our gracious God and Heavenly Father, we thank Thee that we are able to come together around the word of God and in the presence of God the Holy Spirit and

have him take of the things of Christ and show them unto us. We thank Thee for the ministry of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for its high points and its low points as well. We know that this is the ministry of the sinless Savior of men. And so, we want to acknowledge that we owe all that we are and have to him who loved us and gave himself for us.

And we think, Lord, of that great cry of desolation, which we mediated upon last Lord's day morning and we remember that when Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" he cried out as our substitute, as the one who was making atonement for the sins of mankind. And we thank Thee for the touch of the Holy Spirit who has brought home to our hearts the things concerning the lovely Savior of men. We thank Thee for the day when Thou didst show us in our need how the Savior met it.

And we pray today, Lord, as we think of this group of people who are gathered in this small auditorium, we pray, O God, that those who may be here not yet having come to know him, whom to know is life eternal, that today may be the day in which they turn to him and acknowledge him as Lord and Savior.

And for those of us, Lord, who do know him as Savior, but who need so desperately a new touch from the Spirit concerning him, may our time together lead us into a new relationship to him that is deeper, and more compelling, and more demanding, and yet more motivating also. We pray for the many Christians who are in this auditorium and ask, O God, that throughout our study together, there may be a deeper surrender of life and heart to him.

We thank Thee for the ministry of the word today wherever it goes forth: in this city of Dallas, in the State of Texas, in the United States of America and to the uttermost part of the earth.

We especially pray, Lord, for those who are laboring in difficult places who often do not see much evidence of fruit for their labor and ask, O God, that the entire church of

Jesus Christ may increase in number today as well as grow in spirituality. May our needs be met.

We know, Lord, of many in this auditorium who have great needs who are looking to Thee for deliverance and we pray, O God, that Thou wilt prove Thyself to be a Savior in our daily life as well as a Savior from the penalty and ultimately the presence of sin. And so, we commit our meeting to Thee and may the hymn that we sing and may the word to which we listen, minister to us to the glory of the triune God. For we ask it in the name of the second person, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

[Message] Our subject for today, as I mentioned in the Scripture reading is, "The Burial of Jesus Christ." Humanly speaking, Golgotha was a very dark day with the cause of Jesus Christ. The curtain seemed to have fallen on unrelieved tragedy. Nothing remains but the burial, the last stage of his humiliation.

This is reflected in the Apostles' Creed with which so many of us are familiar. In which probably most of us have at one time or another repeated the words, "I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth: And in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord: Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary: Suffered unto Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried." That seems to be a kind of low point in the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. As G. Campbell Morgan has put it, "Man's last and worst was done. The King was dead and from now on only tender hands will touch him and loving eyes see him."

When you look at the burial account, you discover that it is stranger than fiction. You would have expected that some of the family of Jesus would have come forward to bury him. I think if you were a Roman Catholic, you would say that surely Mary would have been there to bury her son, but Mary was not there. Or surely, if you were a Protestant you would have thought that one of the apostles would have been there, but none of the apostles were there.

In fact, it's almost a part of the stark tragedy of the event that the two who come forward to bury our Lord Jesus are two who are, if anything, only secret disciples of the Lord Jesus. And so, this burial account is stranger than fiction, which is, I think, a kind of implicit testimony to the inspiration of the word of God, which records these events as true events.

Furthermore, if you know anything about Jewish customs, this burial of the Lord Jesus is contrary to them too, for it was not customary to bury a blasphemer in the manner in which Jesus was buried. In fact, it is specifically stated in Jewish tradition that a blasphemer should be buried in an ignominious and obscure manner. But Jesus was not buried in an ignominious and obscure manner.

A rich man comes forward, a member of the Grand Council of the Sanhedrin, together with THE teacher in Israel, the man who came to Jesus by night, and these two give our Lord Jesus Christ a royal burial. So while man proposes, God disposes. And I'm sure that the Jews never wished that Jesus should be buried as he was.

In fact, in the Isaiah account, it's very startling to read in the Hebrew text of chapter 53 and verse 9 that they appointed him a grave with the wicked, yet he was with the rich in his death as if to suggest God himself has reversed the processes whereby men wish to further insult our Lord Jesus Christ.

Looking at our burial account in the Gospel of Matthew, you notice that only one of these men is singled out and that is why I read in our Scripture reading the passage from John's Gospel, because in that gospel, Nicodemus is also pointed out as one who came forward to bury Jesus.

Let's for a moment take a look at these two men and, first of all, Joseph of Arimathea. Arimathea was a little village north of the city of Jerusalem, almost to the borders of Samaria. And so, Joseph apparently had grown up in that neighborhood, but had recently moved to the city of Jerusalem. Perhaps he had become so prosperous in his business that now he had two homes. At least he had a rather lavish home in the city

of Jerusalem for in his home there was a new tomb in the midst of a garden, and this tomb was a new tomb, which had been hewn out. And the evidences that we have of the man are to the effect that he was a very well to do man. In fact, Matthew calls him a rich man and he's not the only one who does.

Other gospel records say that he was also a good and righteous man. And Luke specifically states that he was part of the minority when Jesus was tried. Apparently, when the vote came in the Sanhedrin, Joseph was man enough to stand up and vote against the action to crucify our Lord Jesus Christ. Some have suggested that perhaps he just wasn't there and that is what Luke means, and that may well be true, but at any rate, the Scriptures are very careful to point out that he did not consent to the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is said to have been a counsellor. That means that he was one of the rulers in jury, one of the outstanding men, one of the council of the seventy that ruled Judaism and the Jews. And so, he is not a man who was not well known, but just the opposite, a man for whom it would have been a very costly thing to come forward and ask for the body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But most of all, the accounts say that he was a disciple of the Lord Jesus, he was one who waited for the kingdom of God. That is, he knew that there was going to come a time when Jesus or the Messiah would come and establish his kingdom upon the earth and his hopes were the legitimate hopes of a member of Judaism who had the biblical hope of the kingdom of God upon the earth. He was a man who waited then for the kingdom of God and specifically, in the Johannine account, the addition was made that while he was a disciple of the Lord Jesus, he was a disciple who was a disciple secretly for fear of the Jews.

Now I want you to remember that because that's going to have a great deal of bearing on what I'm going to say later on. Later tradition is remarkable concerning this man Joseph in the tradition that has attached to his name, most of which I'm sure is just embroidery of the gospel accounts and is not true. It is stated that Joseph was one who

came with the cup, which had been used at the Last Supper of the Lord Jesus and that he had stood at the cross and there he had caught the blood that came from the side of the Lord Jesus and that this cup became the Holy Grail.

Another tradition is to the effect that he went and preached the gospel in Britain and while he was in Britain, one day he sank down, spent with his labors, and exclaimed, "We be weary all" and as a result of that, the name "Wearyall Hill" is the name of a community in Britain. Another tradition is that one day he took his staff and he struck his staff into the ground and there sprang up a hawthorn tree that bloomed on Christmas day. All of this, of course, is not in the biblical record. It is not supported by the biblical record. It simply testifies, perhaps to the fact that we want to know what happened to Joseph of Arimathaea. A man who had a vital moment in the ministry of Jesus stood forward and asked for the body of the one whom he loved.

The other man who came with Joseph to bury him was a man whose name is Nicodemus. He's a well known man because of the incident in the 3rd chapter of the Gospel of John, the clearest passage in all of the Bible on the necessity of the new birth. By the way, have you been born again? Do you know what Nicodemus and Jesus were discussing? Do you know the truth of that? Has there really been a time in your life in which you have come to know him and you have received new life from God? Nicodemus, you'll remember, is the one who came to him by night and he discussed the new birth with the Lord Jesus. He was a man, I think, who was a companion in spirit with Joseph of Arimathaea and that's probably why they knew each other. They were like so many Christians that I know.

By the way, if I am waving my hand this morning, you'll understand it's not because I'm hot, it's just that there are some sand flies up at the front of the auditorium and I'm not referring to you who are up here [Laughter] and I'm not blaming any of you who are up here. But they are here and if I'm waving my hand, it's just for that reason, I assure you. I can hardly wait for the day when we can get in an auditorium and we can

keep the flies and fleas out and mosquitoes. I've heard one mosquito this morning too. I hope he's not that deadly kind. So that's why I'm waving my hand. It's not because I'm happy or I'm trying to wave to you in the audience [Laughter] or anything like that and it's surely not because I'm like that man, you know, who's snapping his fingers to keep the tigers away [Laughter].

Nicodemus was like many Christians, you know, he was the kind of Christian who went around looking for a person who had the same weakness that he had. I have a good friend in Houston who likes to talk about Christians who have fellowship with one another in the area of their weakness. That is, if there is a brother who likes to gossip, he generally sooner or later will discover in the congregation someone else who likes to gossip and together they will gossip. They will have "Christian fellowship" [Laughter], which my friend calls, "Alexander Graham Bell-itis."

But here are two men apparently who had the same difficulty, the same weakness. They neither one could make a real outstanding confession of the Lord Jesus and probably we should have sympathy with them, because they were important men in Judaism and for them to make a testimony, it probably cost them a great deal more than many of the others who did make a forthright testimony for him.

Nicodemus appears three times in the Gospel of John, you'll remember. He appears in the 3rd chapter and there he expresses a desire to know something about the kingdom of God. And Jesus speaks to him about that kingdom and says, "If we have not been born again, we cannot see that kingdom of God." Then in the 7th chapter of the Gospel of John, Nicodemus stands up in the midst of the Sanhedrin and says, "Does our law condemn a man before it hears him?" He insists on a legal kind of recognition of our Lord's rights, but no indication is given that he has really come to faith in the Lord Jesus.

But now, at the time when Jesus has died, Nicodemus, at great cost to himself, comes forward out of devotion to him. So here is a man who has moved from desire for



him through defense of him, to devotion to him. In other words, Nicodemus saw ultimately the brazen serpent that Jesus had spoken about.

Jesus had said, "Nicodemus, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him (as Israel looked to that brazen serpent) should not perish, but have everlasting life." And as Joseph and Nicodemus stood around that cross, Nicodemus looking at the cross and reflecting upon the things that Jesus had said to him, saw the parallel between the brazen serpent and our Lord Jesus and came ultimately to such a faith in him that he expressed it in this action in John chapter 19.

Now I've often said this and I still say it, that Nicodemus is one of my favorite characters in the New Testament. He becomes more of a favorite character as the days go by because apparently he was an old man and I'm getting to be an old man. And I rather like this man because it's difficult for an old man to be open-minded. And I want you, as the years go by, if our fellowship is maintained, I want you now to remember that and if I can't change my mind to be easy on me and recognize that I'm just becoming, you know, so set in my ways because I'm getting old. That it's difficult to change me. And so, will you just pray and treat me nice as I reach these latter years of my life? Nicodemus, I love this man, because you see, bred in the stuffy atmosphere of academics in the schools in which he had been reared, and now having become an important man in Judaism, still he believes that God has not become dead, but he is still speaking to men and he's willing to go even to this outcast Rabbi and sit and listen to what he has to say. I think the conversions of men that thrill me more than anything else are the conversions of elderly men or older men. These conversions have always thrilled me more because it seems to me; it's a kind of testimony of the power of God in a way in which it is not a testimony when a younger person comes. And I've seen a number of older men come to know Jesus Christ as personal Savior and have their lives just turned inside out for him. And that always is a tremendous testimony to me. Well, Nicodemus was a man like that.

These two must have been at the cross of the Lord Jesus, because you see, the Jews had a kind of law that the body that was upon the cross must be in the grave before sun down or else that Sabbath would be defiled. And we know that Jesus was on the cross from the third hour in the morning, which was 9 o'clock, until the ninth hour in the afternoon, which was 6 o'clock in the afternoon [transcriber's note: the time was actually 3 o'clock, which Dr. Johnson corrects in the next lesson in this series]. So they would have had very little time to go and request the body of the Lord Jesus from Pilate and get back to the hill outside of Jerusalem and bury our Lord Jesus Christ. So apparently these two had been among the crowd around our Lord's crucifixion.

Now this is very interesting, you see, because even the apostles with the exception of John and perhaps another were not there at that time. They had all forsaken him and had fled. But these two men, attracted by their love for Jesus and the things that had happened, at least they stood there. Of course, they had not given an outward confession of him and it was easier for them to stand there than it was for the apostles. So when the time came, Joseph and Nicodemus went in to see Pilate. I think that probably they had an agreement; that Joseph would go in and request the body and that in the meantime, Nicodemus would go off and get the spices that were necessary for the burial. And so, Joseph of Arimathaea went in before Pilate.

Now this cost him quite a bit. I read in the newspaper yesterday that one of the Rothschild has married. A man seventy years old has married a theater usher in the City of Paris whose age is twenty-seven, forty-three years difference. And I noticed that in the account that no member of the Rothschild family came to see this burial except a niece by marriage, by marriage. Now they had all outlawed and ostracized this marriage of this old man to this young girl. Do you think that she could have been interested in this man's money? [Laughter]

Now if it cost him something to go through that marriage a few days ago in the City of Paris, how much more did it cost Joseph of Arimathaea, a man respected in

Judaism, to go in now before the Roman Procurator, Pilate, and say, "I want the body of Jesus Christ." And Pilate, I'm sure said, "Joseph, are you out of your mind? Why do you want his body?"; "Well, I am a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth."; "You, a disciple, of Jesus of Nazareth, this man who has just been put to death?"; "Yes, I am a disciple of him and I would like the privilege of burying him."; "Joseph, do you realize what this means? Do you realize that when the Jews find out that you want to bury the Lord Jesus Christ, do you realize that if you bury this man Jesus that you are going to bring upon yourself all of the reproach? That the Torah of Israel states that you should not bury a man who had been blasphemous, you should not even have contact with a dead body!" But Joseph insisted, "I want the body of Jesus Christ." And finally, Pilate gave him the body.

Now Nicodemus, in the meantime, had gone and gotten his spices and the two of them came to the cross where Jesus' body was and they took that body down. And then they proceeded to render to it the kind of rights that were demanded by Jewish custom. They took the body down, they bathed the body, then they wrapped it with spices, and as they wrapped, they put spices within it. Now that is important for what I am going to say next Sunday, the Lord willing. Finally, after they had completed winding the body round with the linen cloths with the spices in between. Then they put strips of cloth around the body in order to hold the wrappings together and they took the body to the new tomb, which had been hewn out a great stone in the garden, which was on the estate of Joseph of Arimathea.

And then do you notice that pitiful little verse, the 61st, "And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre"? In other words, almost as if they were afraid to even take an active part in the burial itself, the two women, Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary. They had little hope, of course, but they had a great deal of love for him and you can see it expressed even in this weak way in that 61st verse.

But now this morning, for the remainder of the time, I want to speak to you on the general subject of the meaning of this burial because this is the important thing for us to remember. And I want to set forth a couple of theological facts, which are important, and then conclude with what I think is one of the most important practical things in all of the New Testament. And, first of all, theologically, what does the burial mean? Why, the burial, first of all, is the completion of the humiliation of our Lord Jesus Christ. The active sufferings of Jesus are over. When he cries out, "It is finished," but the passive sufferings of Jesus go on.

You see, when a man is buried, he is returned to dust and that is part of the judgment that is due because of sin. In the Garden of Eden, remember, when man sinned it is specifically stated that man should die and that he would return to dust. It is part of the judgment of sin. Furthermore, a burial is a going down in itself and that suggests humiliation. And also, there is a kind of agreement between the objective stages of Jesus Christ's redemptive work, his death, his burial, his resurrection, and the subjective application of them to the believer.

For example, the Apostle Paul says in Romans chapter 6 that when we believe in the Lord Jesus, we are reckoned to have died with him, to have been buried with him, and to have been raised together with him. And certain practical exhortations are addressed to us because we have participated, in the mind of God, in his death, burial, and resurrection. And you'll notice that in those accounts, the burial of the Lord Jesus is linked with the putting off of the old man. In other words, it is part of the humiliation aspect. It is not until the resurrection comes that we're introduced to the positive possession of new life.

Have you ever thought about a burial in the light of these things? This past week, it was my very unhappy privilege to participate in the burial of a young man whose life was, it seemed, all before him. And in reflecting upon that burial, certain things come home to you immediately. You know a burial is a very sad time, but there are some

things that are important that come out at it. For example, when you are a funeral service, every funeral is a kind of beginning of that process whereby the glamour that we may have had as living individuals begins to fade.

The impression that we make upon others begins to fade. We become ourselves incapable any longer of giving self expression to our personality. The body is there and that is all. The person has gone to be with the Lord, if they are Christians, but the body is there. We become a name; we become a person who is the object of the exposition of others. We become a person who is a figure or a symbol. We are there in the body and a minister may get up and give a kind of eulogy of that person. By the way, whoever conducts my funeral; please do not give me any eulogy. Give Jesus Christ a eulogy that he was willing to save such a wretch as I am, but do not give me a eulogy, but often that comes. Or, at any rate, if it's not a eulogy, the person is the subject of the exegesis of others. That is a funeral. It's a kind of outward public testimony to the fact that we've lost our grip on time.

Now when Jesus Christ was buried, there is all of that involved in it, but even more so, because you see, the Lord Jesus is the great Messiah. He is the majestic Son of God and I don't think there was ever a time in the life of our Lord Jesus when the discrepancy between the Messiah, the majesty of the Messianic King is so in contrast with the body of the man Jesus as at the funeral or burial service of Jesus Christ. Here is the great Messianic King, but all we have is a body and he is the subject of the exegesis and exposition of the disciples who do not understand him. There has never been a spiritual leader and there has never been a spiritual rebel who has stood out for some false doctrine who had disciples who so little understood the significance of his life as our Lord Jesus Christ.

In fact, it almost seems as if at the burial our Lord Jesus; there is not one person who understands who he is and what he has done. This is a part of his humiliation and theologically when we think of the burial, we should think of humiliation for our Lord

Jesus Christ. And remember, we must look at this from the standpoint of men for this is the way God is manifesting our Lord Jesus Christ.

That's important, but that's not all that is important about our Lord Jesus Christ theologically. This is also, I think, the turning point and from now on, we will have little indications of the fact that he is soon to be exalted. It's a kind of inception of his exhalation, too, if I may put it that way. For example, let me just point you to a couple of things. In the 60th verse we read, "And laid it (that is the body) in his own new tomb."

Now I do not think it was an accident that Jesus was buried in a new tomb. I know it might seem that way in this account, but it's not so. One thing that every Jew knew was this, that when a king is received, the objects that are devoted to his service must be things that are new in order to measure up to the character of that person who is the king. And you'll remember when Jesus came into the city of Jerusalem; he rode upon a new colt. In fact, Luke goes out of his way to say, "It was a new colt upon which never yet had man sat." And here he is placed in a new tomb because God, in the burial of our Lord Jesus, is giving us some inevitable clues to the fact that this is the King and that death and burial cannot hold him.

Not only that, did you notice that he was also placed in a garden? That is stated in John chapter 19 and verse 41, too, and I think that is not an accident either. Because, you see, the first man Adam sowed the seed of death in a garden and the last Adam who comes is going to sow the seed of life in a garden. And so, in order to see the parallel, Jesus' body is placed in a new tomb, in a rich man's tomb, symbolic of the King and also in a garden, in order to testify to the fact that he is the representative person, who when he comes forth from Joseph's tomb, comes forth as one who has within him all of the redeemed who have believed in him or shall believe in him in the future.

Now these are great theological truths, but there is something I think, if anything, more important than that. I think in the lives of these two men, Joseph and Nicodemus, we have one of the most beautiful illustrations of the delivering power of Christ's death

that is found in all of the New Testament. Now we read in the Johannine account that Joseph was a disciple of the Lord Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews.

Now I want you, if you will, to turn with me to Mark chapter 15 and verse 43. Now that's the New Testament, Mark chapter 15 and verse 43 and it's the Markan account of the burial of Christ. Now here we read, verse 42, do we all have it? Mark chapter 15 and verse 42, and then I'm going to read 43,

"Now when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathaea, an honourable counsellor, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly (Did you notice that? Came and went in boldly) unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus."

Now John says he was a secret disciple, but Mark says he came in boldly and claimed the body of Jesus. Some men are very bold. Some men are intrusive. Some men are self-assertive. Some men are even impudent. Some men, as we say, rush in where angels fear to tread. They are fearless often because they are brainless, but here, two naturally timid and cautious men broke with their natures, defiled themselves, and conquered eternally.

How did it happen? Why there is only one explanation of how this man who was a secret disciple of Jesus now comes in and boldly claims the body of Jesus before the Roman Procurator. What has happened between the time of his secret discipleship of our Lord Jesus and his bold avowal of faith in him before the Roman authorities, which would ultimately come even before his Jewish friends as well? How did it happen? Why it happened by reason of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Many months before this, Simeon had stood in the temple and he had said to the mother of our Lord Jesus that this child, this little babe, which is in my arms, "Is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel." And he added that the thoughts of many might be

revealed and as Joseph and Nicodemus stood about that cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, something happened to these men that caused the timid disciple to become a bold confessor of his faith in the Lord Jesus.

Here are two men who had been taken captive by the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. They had seen him perform his mighty miracles. They had heard some of his great discourses. In their hearts they had had the experience of a timid and fearful faith being formed, but all of the experience of the teaching of Jesus, all of the evidence of the mighty miracles, which he had performed, all of their personal contact with him before, had never had the effect upon them that standing at the foot of the cross of our Lord Jesus had upon them at this time. In other words, these men as they stood by the cross in their simple, weak faith discovered in that cross something that transformed their weak natures. They saw their guilt. They saw the loveliness of the Lord Jesus and, finally, as they reflected upon that cross, the irresistible appeal of the cross of Jesus Christ fell upon these men and transformed them.

And I want to tell you something, that there is nothing that will transform the heart of men like sitting at the feet of our Lord Jesus Christ and looking off at Calvary and meditating upon that. There is nothing like that. You may listen to mighty discourses about the works of Christ and the teaching of Christ and the miracles that he performed, but nothing will transform the heart like standing at the foot of the cross and reflecting upon him.

I fully believe that this is one of the reasons why the church of Jesus Christ should often meet around the Lord's Table and reflect upon him. Sit there at the foot of the cross and look at him and have the touch of God the Holy Spirit come into their lives, for that's the touch. That is what brings this transformation to this man Joseph. If I may kind of reflect upon what might have gone in Joseph's mind, I think I would say something like this, Joseph as he stood by that cross, noticed that suddenly at noon the sun became dark



and he thought within himself, "Why, it appears as if even the sun has owned Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and has veiled its face at the horror of this crucifixion."

I stood Monday morning by the graveside of this young man with Dr. Criswell at the First Baptist Church and it was raining at Restland and he turned to me and he said, "You know, it seems as if the very heavens are weeping." And he stood up at the graveside service and he said to the whole audience there, he said, "It seems as if the heavens themselves are participating in the mourning over this young lad who has gone to be with Jesus."

And Joseph that day, as he saw the darkness of the sun, the darkness of that day, he thought within himself that even God's sun is owning that Jesus is the Son of God. And then when the mighty earthquake came, he said, "It's even as if the earth has owned him and has trembled to its very heart." And when the temple was rent in twain, that veil from top to bottom, he said, "The temple has owned him and the temple has rent its garments in sorrow over what has happened." And finally, when the dead bodies came out of the graves and went into the city, Joseph said, "Even the graves of men own the fact that this is the Son of God and I own him too." "The cross (you know, Mr. Spurgeon used to say) is a wondrous magnet drawing to Jesus everyone who is of the true metal."

Does that touch your heart? Does it come home to you when you speak about the cross of the Lord Jesus? Is there just something down there that you know is the touch of the Holy Spirit of God? You know, if I never preach anymore in Believers Chapel, the one thing that I could request of this congregation of people, individually, and as well as a congregation, is that we should never lose the sense of the wonder of the cross of Jesus Christ.

I'm not so anxious that you be dispensationalists as I am that you have that. I'm nearly so anxious that you understand other doctrines of the faith as I am that you have that because I know if your heart is right toward Jesus Christ and the cross touches you,

you more than likely will be right elsewhere too. For God the Holy Spirit who touches your heart will teach you those things too.

And so, Joseph as he stood there and Nicodemus as he stood there and they thought of these things that were transpiring, finally faith broke its bonds and Joseph and his friend did their daring and costly deed and they went and requested the body of Jesus and they buried him.

It's amazing, you know what great things can happen and people don't understand and don't get it. There were many other people about that cross. There were Roman soldiers who were about that cross. They thought so little about it that they gambled about the clothes of the one who was hanging upon it at the time that the Spirit of God was touching the heart of Joseph. "Earth's crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God; but only he who sees takes off his shoes; the rest sit round it and pluck blackberries," Ms. Browning said.

Too often today in the church of Jesus Christ while the great things of God are being proclaimed, some of the saints with tears in their eyes, I look out in the audience, you know, it's the greatest thrill in the world when I look out and I see some tears in some eyes. And I look out morning after morning some of you, you know, you can't hold it any longer and I just see the tears coming and I say, "Thank you, Lord, the Holy Spirit is working, he's really touching a heart." But, you know, it's possible in the midst of saints who love the Lord Jesus Christ and who are in tears as they reflect upon what he has done to sit here and just pick blackberries because it means nothing to you. The Spirit of God has never touched your heart.

Have you ever wondered why the gospel writers devote so much time to the passion of the Lord Jesus? Have you ever wondered why it is that Mark can hardly wait until he gets to tell the story of the passion? And a great disproportionate amount of this gospel is devoted to the passion. Have you ever wondered why that is so? Why this is only one week in the ministry of Jesus and yet this week is singled out because, you see,

the cross of Jesus Christ had touched the hearts of these men and they couldn't wait to tell the story.

As I conclude this morning, I wonder if there are really like people like Joseph in an audience like this. Are there people like Nicodemus? How many of us treasure his words. We wouldn't think of denying the words of Jesus. We think they're great. We study the Bible. We go to Bible classes. Some of you women in the audience, I look out and see you, I'm glad you're going to Bible classes. Some of you go to Bible classes several times a week. If there's anybody comes to town to preach the word, you can always count on you being there. That's very fine; I'm not against it all. I'm very much for it. I don't think it can possibly hurt you and it might help you a great deal.

But, you know, there are lots of us who treasure the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, dislike those who dislike him, sit in our pews, but because of some love of place, some love of pleasure, some love of position, we've never really surrendered to him. He never really has come to have first place in our lives. We're afraid of the mockery of our friends. Why Henry Martyn said, "Do you know I fear the sneers of men more than brickbats?" and so do I.

I don't like to have somebody say behind my back, "You know, he's a preacher," and they're constantly doing it too. I even get some letters addressed the Reverend S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. Some of my good friends do it. I'm sure they do it just to irritate me. [Laughter] But you know, to be a witness of our Lord Jesus Christ does cost us something. Is it possible that there's a little fear because of position, place, some pleasure?

My daughter wrote me last year when she had time to meditate. She said, "I learned a lot at school this past year." She said, "The Lord taught me lots of things and one of the things he taught me was that I ought to be more bold in the expression of my faith." She said, "Too often, you know, I had the attitude when I was at SMU that I wanted to be a good girl. That is, I wanted to be the kind of person that the girls would

like." And she said, "You know, Daddy, I didn't want them to go around saying that I was strange. I didn't want them to go around saying that, I wanted them to go around and say (quote and these were her words) 'Nothing odd about Grace, you know.'" How human that is. We don't want them to say, we're odd; we're strange; we're different.

Now, of course, if you're odd just because you're odd, that is bad. [Laughter] If you're peculiar just because you're peculiar well, that's bad too. I've known lots of peculiar Christians. They're very peculiar and it isn't because of their identification with Jesus Christ, it's in spite of it. But there ultimately comes a time when we have to take a stand for him.

Is it because you're timid and weak? Remember Gideon we talked about? Gideon was a man who went around saying, "Oh, alas, oh, oh, how can I? Impossible!", but then he came face to face with the angel of Jehovah. And when he did things changed. Defeated, enslaved, failing? Why so was Joseph. So was Nicodemus. Indifferent, empty? Is that your kind of life? Well, the answer is right here.

And so, I call upon you, if you've never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ to go over and take a look at the cross of Jesus Christ and see him as the one who has died for you. Recognize that he suffered and bled and died there in order that you might have everlasting life. That there, as a result of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, you may say within your heart, "I thank Thee, O God, for giving Jesus Christ to die for me. I thank you for this so great salvation" and accept it by faith. If you're here this morning and you've never really put your trust in Christ, why don't you right now just say, "Thank you, Lord, for dying for me." The moment you really say that out of a sense of need, he gives you new life. He makes you a new person. The Holy Spirit touches your life and you're born again as Nicodemus ultimately was born again.

But if you're a Christian in this audience and you've come in a Christian, I call upon you, too, to stand before that cross and look off at the one who has suffered there and agonized so in your behalf and measure your life: its pursuits, its aims, its purposes.

Measure your life by the gift of the Son of God and the greatness of that gift for you and may God, the Holy Spirit, touch your heart and may you come to such a place that you say within your heart, "Lord, by the help of God the Holy Spirit, I'm going to make a bold avowal of my faith in the Lord Jesus." Surrender the first place in your life to him and how wonderful it will be. Things will fall in line. The joy of the Holy Spirit comes and you're filled with a desire to represent him and God will use you in a way that will glorify him. May God speak to your heart this morning. I especially think this would be the greatest morning that we've ever had if a few of the Christians in this audience might make a decision to put Jesus Christ first in their lives within their hearts. Our time is up. Its 12 o'clock on the dot, I want you to notice today. Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Heavenly Father, we thank Thee for this wonderful word. We thank Thee for the testimony of Joseph and the testimony of Nicodemus. And, Father, we pray that Thou wilt, as we sit before the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, touch our hearts by the Holy Spirit. So transform us that Jesus Christ may have first place in our lives. And so, O Father, we commit each one present to Thee. For those outside of Christ, give them no rest or peace until they rest in him. For those, Lord, who do know him, O God; give them no rest nor peace until Jesus Christ is truly preeminent.

And now as we part may grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father, and God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, be in abide with all who know him in sincerity. For Jesus' sake. Amen.