

9.3.24 Evening Preparatory Service

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[0 : 0 0] It will turn now to read God's word in Mark's gospel, Gospel of Mark and chapter 15. Gospel of Mark, chapter 15 and at verse 33.

Read to the end of the chapter. Mark 15 at verse 33. And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.

And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani, which means, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And some of the bystanders hearing it said, Behold, he is calling Elijah. And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and gave it to him to drink, saying, Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.

And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion who stood facing him saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, Truly, this man was the Son of God.

[1 : 2 1] There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James the Younger, and of Joseph and Salome. When he was in Galilee, they followed him and ministered to him.

And there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem. And when evening had come, since it was the day of preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

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.

And Joseph brought a linen shroud and, taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.

Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Joseph, saw where he was laid. Amen. And may God bless to us for the reading of his own holy word.

[2 : 4 5] We'll bow in prayer just before we sing. Lord, our God, we give thanks for the word that we've just read. Help us always to see that this is your word that is given to us, so that we may learn, so that our understanding may be deepened, and that our knowledge of the truth may be greater, and that these things will be applied into our own hearts to help us in the way that we live out every day.

Help us, Lord, to be wise towards salvation. Help us, Lord, to seek to live according to this word. Lord, we pray that you will shine more within our hearts in a way that will influence for good other people.

We pray to bless us then as we prepare tonight for the sacrament, and we give thanks, Lord, for what you've given to us to help us.

It is there as a means of grace to strengthen our faith, and we pray that we may discover through it a real strengthening of our faith.

And we pray, as we heard for any who love you, who maybe have followed you at a distance, that they might be given that courage that Joseph was given to come forward and to do what has been for them so difficult to allow.

[4 : 15] We pray, Lord, that you will touch their hearts and help them. We ask that you'll be with us and open the word to us. We pray that you'll bless us all, bless everybody gathered here.

Pray your special blessing on David, and we give thanks for his ministry here and the encouragements that he has received. Be with him and Mary and the family, and likewise we pray for Ronnie and Joan and family.

Watch over us then and do us good and cleanse us from our sin. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen. Before we come back to the word that we read, we're going to sing from Psalm 116 in Gaelic.

Psalm 116, and we sing verses 13 to 16. Coupon, and we sing verses 13 to 16. And we sing verses 13 to 16.

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[5 : 22] Psalm 116, 13-16. Psalm 116, 13-16.

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[8 : 22] Let's turn again for a little to the chapter we read in Mark's Gospel.

Mark chapter 15. And verse 43 tells us there, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

And I want us to think of what Joseph did, but it tells us there that he took courage. Now as we know, discipleship is something that's very much at the heart of our Christian faith.

And a disciple is a disciple is a follower or a pupil of a teacher. A disciple is somebody who embraces the teaching of a particular teacher or leader and doesn't just follow that teaching, but is also engaged in spreading the word of that teacher.

And of course that's exactly what a disciple of the Lord Jesus is. The immediate disciples of Jesus, they were passionate followers of Jesus and they went on to spread the word of Jesus.

[9 : 53] And so it goes on right down to this very day. That's what you as followers of the Lord Jesus do. You seek to spread the word. But we also know that amongst the disciples of Jesus, down to this day, there are what are known as secret disciples.

It was not a very good definition because in a sense, a disciple of Jesus cannot really be a secret disciple. Because if a person loves Jesus and follows Jesus quietly, privately, within their own heart, and while they may think that it is a hidden life, hidden that nobody really knows, it cannot be hidden.

Because Jesus is reflected in his people. And every person who follows and loves the Lord Jesus Christ, Jesus can be seen in them.

You know a tree by its fruit. And you know a Christian by the fruit that is born in their lives. The fruit of the Spirit. Which becomes obvious and evident in their everyday life.

Wherever they are. Whether it's at home, how they live, how they talk. Whether it's in church. Whether it's in school. Whether it's in the community. Whether it's at work.

[11 : 20] Wherever people are. The light of Jesus and the Spirit within them will become evident. So that's why I'm saying at one level, a secret disciple is not possible.

Yet, we know that there are secret disciples. And often what we term a secret disciple is somebody who has not publicly come out on the side of the Lord.

And of course, what we're going to do tomorrow is such a thing where there is a public demonstration of the fact that you love the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that Jesus loves you. Because that's what we do when we come to the Lord's table. We come in obedience to what he has commanded us to do. And that we show forth.

Because you see, when you actually take the bread and you take the wine. You are publicly demonstrating what Jesus has done. What Jesus has done personally for you.

[12 : 26] And what Jesus has yet to do. That he tells us that as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup. You do show forth the Lord's death till he come.

So it's a powerful witness. Sometimes we're not conscious when we're actually taking the bread and wine of how powerful a witness it is.

And so it is something that all the Lord's people should do. And as we heard, it isn't just for those. In fact, it's not for those who think that they are worthy.

But it is those who see themselves as unworthy. But seeing all the worthiness in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, the incident that we have recorded for us here is when a secret disciple comes good.

We're told in the other gospel writers. It's interesting when you compare. If you go through the gospel of Luke and the gospel of John. Again, reference is made to this man Joseph.

[13 : 32] And John tells us, Joseph of Arimathea, a disciple of Jesus secretly. That's what it says. That's where we have the word, the secret disciple.

A disciple of Jesus, but secretly. He had never come out. Yes, he did in different ways. We'll see that in a moment. But he had never really, really nailed his colors to the mast.

And here we have the funeral, as it were, of the greatest king that ever lived. King Jesus. Now, as you and I know that very often when a king or a queen dies, that there is an immense amount of pomp and ceremony goes into the actual funeral.

We had the funeral of the late queen recently. And we remember how amazing the whole structure, how wonderfully put together everything was.

The incredible detail that went into it. And millions worldwide were able to see it. Well, here we have the very opposite. Here is a funeral that really only two were involved in.

[14 : 46] The funeral, the burial of the Lord Jesus Christ. The King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And as we know, Jesus was somebody throughout his life that as a prophet had prophesied way back, who was despised and rejected of men.

The whole life of Jesus was one of being despised and rejected. His teaching was despised and rejected. His work was so often despised and rejected.

His claims were despised and rejected. And right throughout into his arrest, into his trial, into everything that took place, there was nothing but the whole sense of being despised and rejection.

And the hatred that was unleashed upon him. And I'm sure the small band of followers who were following Jesus and who had come to the cross, a thought that was going through their mind was this.

What is going to happen to the body of Jesus? Because very often at the time of the crucifixion, when people were crucified, their bodies didn't get any kind of state funeral or whatever.

[15 : 57] They would be just thrown into a pit. They were counted worthless. They were just to be got rid of. And I'm sure there was this horror in the thoughts of the followers of Jesus and the likes of his mother and John who had remained there and this little group of women who were there.

They'd be saying, what is going to happen to the body of Jesus? But you see, the days of Jesus' humiliation had come to an end.

And the prophet had written many, many years before, he made his grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death. And how true this was.

You see, when Jesus was taken down from the cross and when he was buried, that was the last the world ever saw of Jesus. Now we know Jesus made many appearances between his resurrection and his final ascension.

But all the appearances that Jesus made was not at large in the world, but it was simply to his followers. We know of the, like he appeared to Mary in the garden outside the tomb.

[17 : 15] He appeared to his disciples in the upper room. He appeared to those walking on the road to Emmaus. It tells us that he appeared to hundreds, but only to his people.

Nobody of the world ever saw the risen Jesus again. And they won't see him again until he returns. And his return is going to be so different to the way he came in first time.

He came in so quietly, so almost hidden. But when he returns, every eye will see him. And every knee will bow. And we're told that those who have rejected Jesus, that they will cry on the very rocks and the hills to cover them, to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb.

It will be such a different Jesus, the same Jesus, but coming in all his glory and his power and his authority. So the world had seen the last of Jesus at this time.

And so we find that heaven had made preparation for the burial of Jesus. And so the focus comes on this man, Joseph of Arimathea.

[18 : 29] And what's amazing here is that this man, Joseph, was a member of the Jewish council, the Sanhedrin. This group of men, about 70 of them, and they were responsible for all the religious and social life of the Jews.

And this was a body of men that had condemned Jesus to death. This was a group of people that had condemned him and handed him over to Pilate in order to fulfill the death sentence.

But of course, this man, Joseph, as we'll see, had not voted for the death of Jesus. He was against it. Not everybody in that Jewish council of 70 were for the death of Jesus.

And Joseph was one of them who wasn't. And we're told that he was a respected member of the council. He was somebody who was of good standing.

We're told in Luke's gospel, he was a good and a righteous man. So, here's this man, Joseph. And he was somebody who would be highly respected in the community, somebody who was looked up to, somebody because of his nature, because of his character, and I'm sure with regard to some people, because of his position, was somebody who was highly respected within the place.

[19 : 52] Jesus. But the wonderful thing is that Joseph was a wealthy man. And he had this tomb, I'm sure it would have been expensive, nobody had ever been in, it was a new tomb, and here was where that Joseph was going to place Jesus.

And so we're told this, that he was actually looking for the kingdom of God. This man, Joseph, that was it tells, was also looking for the kingdom of God. He was somebody who had come to faith in Jesus.

We're not told how, but no doubt, he was one, like all the Jewish people and all the religious leaders had heard Jesus speak. And as he listened to the words of Jesus, and he saw the works of Jesus, and as, like any good Jewish religious man, studied the word of God, he put it all together, and he could see that what the word of God was saying was being fulfilled in Jesus, and he accepted Jesus as being the Messiah, the sent one from God.

So you see that Joseph was the one who came forward at this time in order to bury the Lord Jesus. And it's, what I want us really to focus on at this particular moment is what Joseph does, and it tells us that he took courage, and that took courage going to Pilate and asking for the body of Jesus.

Because doing this, he was aligning himself completely with the Lord Jesus Christ. And that took a lot of courage to do.

[21 : 47] And you know, when we come to the communion time like this, I believe that there are a lot everywhere, in all congregations, of what we termed secret disciples.

And we have to ask, why do people not come forward? Well, I believe there are different reasons. One is that people are afraid.

If I go forward, I might fall, I might just make a whole mess of everything. And it would be better that I just stay where I am.

Now, that's totally understandable. Because as we look at our own lives, as I look at my life, as you look at your life, you see straight away that we're full of sin, the seed of every known sin lurks away within our heart.

And the potential for damage is huge. And that can be a very powerful reason in our own mind. And think, well, if I end up going forward, you know, I'm going to make a mess of things.

[22 : 56] And it would be far better that I just stay where I am. Now, we can reason that, and it's quite a powerful argument. But what we've got to remember, that the Lord who saves is the Lord who keeps.

And he keeps us despite our mistakes, despite our slips. And there isn't a Christian who hasn't fallen. The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down because the Lord holds him with his hand.

And you see, you go through the Bible and you see so many of God's people all the way down. They've slipped, they've fallen, but God has kept them. Kept them from going all the way down.

So we are not to use this reason that it will be safer for myself and for the church. No, it's not. Banish that thought.

Satan will make mileage out of it. The best thing you can do, the safest thing you can do, safest for yourself, is to come out and to confess the Lord Jesus Christ.

[24 : 02] Christ. Another reason why people often don't profess Christ is because of the fear of other people. What will people say?

What will people think? You see, back in the time of Jesus, this man, Joseph, wasn't the only person who was a secret disciple.

It tells us elsewhere that amongst the religious leaders, there were those who believed in Jesus, but this is what it adds, but they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

They didn't come out publicly on the side of Jesus, because they knew that if they came out publicly on the side of Jesus, they would lose what they had. They would lose the prestige, they would lose the popularity, power, they would lose the influence, they would lose all these things.

These things were important to them. So they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. The fear of man is a snare, the Bible tells us.

[25 : 17] And you know that is a very powerful reason. And maybe somebody tonight, and that's what's holding you back. Not just the fear that you might make a broken of the whole thing.

But that what do people think? What do people think at home? We live in small communities.

We often think it might be easier if we lived in big cities where our lives aren't so sort of known. We almost live under a microscope here because we see everything that goes on and everybody knows everybody's business.

and you say to yourself, I don't know if I can hack it. What will people say? Will people laugh at me? Will people be sneering at me?

And so there's all this going on in people's minds. Well, this man Joseph, he had for long enough, he had held back from throwing in his lot in a public way with Jesus because he would have been one of those who loved the praise of men but this very day it stopped.

[26 : 28] He took courage. He said enough is enough. I'm coming out on the side of Jesus. And so we find that he goes to Pilate and he asks for the body of Jesus.

And I would ask tonight that if there's anybody here who's held back, maybe for a little time or held back for a long time, that you would say enough is enough.

I need to come out on the side of Jesus. Because you know the thing is, it's not only for yourself that it'll do good, but also to the whole congregation.

Because I'm sure there are people who are waiting for you. And when you don't come, there's a disappointment. And they're saying, I was hoping he would come, I was hoping she would come, but you didn't.

So it does the whole congregation good. It's an encouragement to the congregation. And it will be a huge encouragement to yourself. And I know myself for a period I hid away until I could hide away no longer.

[27 : 42] And I went through all these kind of things. The fear of making a whole mess of things. the fear of what people would say. But it came to a point where I couldn't but take that step to come out on the side of the Lord Jesus.

Well, the time had come for Joseph to take that step and of course he was going to lose a lot of privileges through it. This was going to come at a cost to him.

Because it was a cost, the tomb was a cost, his position was going to be costly because he would become an outcast with many in that Jewish council.

also the Passover was just going to take place. And because of the whole structure around it, you couldn't be in touch with a dead body or you would make yourself unclean.

and if you were unclean you couldn't partake of the Passover. So at all kinds of different levels he was putting himself in the most vulnerable awkward place humanly.

[28 : 58] But he had to. He had to come out on the side of the Lord Jesus Christ. And you know the wonderful thing, although it doesn't tell us here, but in John's Gospel, when it records this very same event, it tells us that somebody else joined with Joseph in the funeral of the Lord Jesus.

And that was another person I leader amongst the Jews, and that was Nicodemus. You remember how Nicodemus had come to Jesus by night? It tells us in John's Gospel, after these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission, so he came and took away his body.

Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, he came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about 75 pounds in weight, so they took a body of Jesus.

Here's another secret disciple that comes good the same day or the same evening. Two men who had kind of tried to, because of fear of the Jews, fear of what they would lose, fear of so many things, came the time they had to take a stand.

I say to you tonight, it's time you took a stand, because the Lord's Supper, remember, is a means of grace, and a means of grace is that which is there to strengthen your faith.

[30 : 36] The Lord's Supper is not for people who don't have faith, it's people who do have faith. It's not for people who have great faith, even if your faith is just like the tiniest little strand, it's still faith.

Jesus talked about faith like a grain of mustard seed. He said to the disciples, oh you have little faith, and other times it was great faith, our faith varies, as long as we have faith, and so we have to come forward telling of what Jesus did.

And when you think about it, all he asks of you, and it's not an option, if you love the Lord, and if you say in your heart, Lord I'm a really poor follower, but I do love you, and I do want, remember he hasn't asked you to read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, he hasn't said that when you come, that you have to be able to tell everything theologically, he's only asking one thing, first of all examine yourself, have you faith, are you in the faith, have you got faith, if you have faith, do this in remembrance of me, it's not an option, do it in remembrance of me, and you know we need our communions, because you would think as Christians we wouldn't forget what Jesus has done, but we do, we sometimes forget the enormity of what he did, and when we come as we will tomorrow to remember the death of our

Lord, it refocuses our mind not only through reading and through preaching and through singing, but by taking something that's visible and tangible and we're involved in, to bring us to remember what he has done for us, so what he asks us to do for him, in a sense, is very little, but what he asks us to do for him is something that will strengthen your faith, it will encourage you in the faith, and you will be a stronger Christian as a result of it, and so these two men, they took courage and they came forward, and they did the greatest thing, of course, they didn't know, nobody, none of them were expecting a resurrection, although Jesus had told them there was going to be a resurrection, that he was going after three days, he was going to rise from the dead, and they came to embalm his body with these rich spices, with the aloes and with the myrrh.

The amazing thing about Jesus, although everything was similar to us, there was this exception when he died, his body saw no corruption, we're going to sing that in Psalm 16, that's part of the messianic psalm, that the body of Jesus, it's like the moment of death, it was like his humiliation had come to an end, his body didn't corrupt, so there was no need of him, they didn't know that, of embalming his body, because he was going to rise very shortly.

[34 : 04] As we conclude, can I say, I remember hearing, and you may have heard it before, of an old man who was dying, and he was a good man, everybody knew, he was a lovely Christian, but he had never come to the Lord's table, he had never publicly professed the Lord Jesus as his saviour, and somebody went to see him and said, how are you in the face of death?

Oh, he said, I'm perfectly persuaded of where I'm going, no doubts on that, but he said, I'm ashamed to be going into the presence of my saviour, I said, why?

When I think of all that Jesus has done for me, and the one thing that he asked me to do for him, I never did, which was to profess his name publicly, to remember him in the way that he has given to the church, and it's wonderful what he's given to us, he's given us this where we come together, communion with him, but also with one another, there's a bonding and a binding in the table of the Lord, so you make sure that tonight you see to it that you come forward to take your rightful place at the table of the Lord, so all that you have to do is to confess that Jesus Christ is your Lord and your saviour, let's pray, Lord our God we give thanks for our time together tonight, and we pray that your word will lodge in our heart, that we will be given the courage to take that step, we know that Satan won't be far away from any who are leaning towards that, and he will be putting every reason in the mind as to why he shouldn't come,

Lord help us to hear your voice above all other voices, do this in remembrance of me, pray your blessing upon the fellowship that will take place afterwards, ask your blessing upon us all, grant us your grace, take us home safely, forgive us for every sin in Jesus name, amen.

We're going to conclude singing in Psalm 16 from Sing Psalms, Psalm number 16, Sing Psalms verses 8 to the end, Before me constantly I set the Lord alone, because he is at my right hand, I'll not be overthrown, therefore my heart is glad, my tongue with joy will sing, my body too will rest secure in hope unwavering, for you will not allow my soul and death to stay, nor will you leave your holy one to see the tombs decay, you have made known to me the path of life divine, bliss shall I know at your right hand, joy from your face will shine, Psalm 16 8 to the end, Before me constantly.

[37 : 25] Before me constantly I said the Lord alone, because he is not my right hand, I must be overthrown, therefore my heart is gone, my tongue with joy will sing, my body too will rest secure in open heavenly

I will not allow my soul in death to stay, not regularly be an only one to see the tombs decay.

You have been known to me the part of life divine.

This child I know that your bright hand, joy from your face will shine.

Amen. Now may the grace, mercy and peace of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore. Amen.