

Lake Cities Community Church  
Series: On Your Mark  
Pastor Craig Schill  
November 15, 2009

**“Joseph of Arimathea”**  
Mark 15:42-47

---

Vince is by all accounts a very successful man. He is not only famous but legendary! Vince is a Rock and Roll musician who created a whole new genre of rock music and inspired many new artists. He will one day be in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

But like so many musicians early in their careers, with the fame came drugs and alcohol. A “rocker’s lifestyle” led to the early deaths of many of his friends – and he knew he was heading quickly down that same path. In spite of all his success he found himself empty and an alcoholic.

Then Vince met the Lord Jesus Christ and he returned to his childhood faith. He became a believer! As a rock star you can imagine this was not an easy thing to do. In fact, he knew that to embrace Christianity might leave him without a job – his music, lyrics and lifestyle were the antithesis of Christian virtue. He said in a radio interview: "I used to celebrate moral decay, the decadence of it. I can look back on what I did then and what I'm doing now and they're two different things. But at the time I was the poster boy for moral decay, you know. So yeah, I've got a lot to be forgiven for..." When Vince told his agent he had become a Christian, his agent said to him, “You’re out of your mind. Don’t let this ruin your career!”

But now Vince, his wife and children attend a Bible Church – not so different from ours. And believe it or not, their church recently finished a series on the Gospel of Mark and

his wife was part of an elaborate dramatic reading. The pastor there continues to disciple hi; and Vince and his family are growing in the Lord.

When I first heard his story I was impressed by his courage to put his career, fans and fame on the line for Christ. He reminds us that courage is an essential part of discipleship. Like Vince, for some it takes great courage just to become a Christian; knowing there is a high price to be paid. And all of us need courage every day to stay faithful to Jesus. I remember in school the pressure of friends who would ridicule my faith. In the business world, once I was asked by a boss at work to lie on a report. Another time I was asked to support a program I had moral disagreement with. What do you do in times like those? You had better have courage to follow Jesus.

As we continue in our study through the Gospel of Mark, we come to the burial of Jesus, and it is highlighted by the courage of a man named Joseph who was from a town called Arimathea. Turn with me to Mark 15:42-47. As you turn there, let me note that this is a passage easily overlooked - as it is wedged between the crucifixion and the resurrection; two of the most important texts in the Bible. But we don't want to overlook it this morning, but to learn from it.

Mark 15:42 When evening had already come, because it was the preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Mark 15:43 Joseph of Arimathea came, a prominent member of the Council, who himself was waiting for the kingdom of God; and he gathered up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. Mark 15:44 Pilate wondered if He was dead by this time, and summoning the centurion, he questioned him as to whether He was already dead. Mark 15:45 And ascertaining this from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. Mark 15:46 Joseph bought a linen cloth, took Him down,

wrapped Him in the linen cloth and laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. [Mark 15:47](#) Mary Magdalene and Mary the *mother* of Joseph were looking on *to see* where He was laid.

Isn't it interesting that this story *is not so much about the burial of Jesus as it is about the man who buried Jesus*. Mark is again showing us what a true disciple of Christ looks like. Like blind Bartimaeus, the woman and her two copper coins and the woman breaking her alabaster jar --- today we have the courage and faith of Joseph. Rather than doing a verse by verse exposition, this morning, I want to take a different approach and unpack four principles from Joseph's life to challenge and encourage us.

### **It is never too late to become a believer**

The first principle that might be easily overlooked but is right there in front of us - is that: **"It is never too late to become a believer."** Joseph is at least a middle-aged if not elderly man; well established in his career and family. Yet it is not too late for him to believe. Matthew's account emphasizes this: **"Joseph... had also become a disciple of Jesus."** ([Matthew 27:57](#)).

If you have unsaved grandparents, mothers, fathers, brothers or sisters – raise your hands. Yes – most all of us. Do you believe that as long as they are alive – it is never too late for them to trust Christ? I know I need this encouragement because sometimes I just get tired of praying for some of my family members who are not yet Christians. As time goes by my faith droops like wilted lettuce. They seem just too....old to be saved. Too set in their ways. And to make matters worse, some of them are dead set against Christianity. They

don't even want you to bring it up. We have an atheist in our extended family that we are praying for, who argues against the faith. It sometimes seems hopeless.

But! **"It is never too late to become a believer."** In the broader context remember the thief on the cross was a convicted criminal who was minutes away from his death, yet God saved Him. The centurion had participated in the killing of Jesus – yet he confesses Jesus as the Son of God; God saved Him. And Joseph we are told was a member of the Sanhedrin Council the group behind Jesus' arrest – yet God saved Him. Until their last breath – it is never too late to trust Christ.

### **Followers of Jesus live by faith**

It is never too late to become a believer. The second principle is that **followers of Jesus live by faith**. Mark tells us that Joseph was a man who **"himself was waiting for the Kingdom of God" (15:43)**. What an interesting comment! Why does Mark mention it? He wants us to know that Joseph (as a follow of Jesus) had not lost his faith. In contrast to whom...? In contrast to the disciples! The disciples have *stopped waiting* for the Kingdom. With Jesus' arrest in the Garden their faith fell like a house of cards. But Joseph continues to wait and to have faith, as an example to us.

Now do you think Joseph had all the answers? Do you think he understood how the kingdom was going to come? I doubt it. He was probably as confused as the next person. BUT, the difference was that he continued to trust in God's sovereignty.

I remember when we went through a difficult period here at the church, when we had about six months when we did not have one visitor come to the church. We were not yet large enough then to meet our regular budget so each month we were eating into our

modest savings. We began talking about cuts to our already small budget. It was discouraging. “Why aren’t you working, Lord? Don’t you know we need to grow to survive?”

I needed, and we all do from time to time, to be reminded God requires faith in his followers! Especially during times of trial and confusion. The temptation is to give up on God and take matters into our own hands is strong. Mark presents Joseph and an ideal disciples who has not given up his faith in spite of difficult times.

### **Christians act with courage**

It is never too late to become a believer and second, followers lives by faith. Third: **Christians act with courage.** The text says, “**Joseph gathered up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. (15:43).** Your translation may read that he went *boldly*, but I like the NASB translation of courage. When I think of boldness, I think of self-confidence and arrogance; but that is not the meaning here. The Greek word means, “**to show resolution in the face of danger, opposition, or a problem...to have the courage, to be brave enough...**” I love this Norman Rockwell print called “High Dive.” A young boy peering over the diving board. If he is going to jump, he will have to gather up all his courage and overcome the perceived danger.

Joseph needed courage to go in before Pilate. Why? For at least three reasons. (1) First, he was associating himself with a convicted criminal, and therefore putting his own life in jeopardy. He just might be the next person up for crucifixion. (2) Second, being a member of the Sanhedrin Council he puts his own reputation and position on the council in great risk. Do you think this is going to make the Sanhedrin happy? Luke tells us that “**he**

had not consented to their plan and action” (23:51). But here he goes public with his faith, and in the back of his mind he knows there are going to be great ramifications. (3) Third, he is going against Roman custom. The Romans left people on the cross for days and days, until their bodies were picked clean by the birds and then put in a common grave. But Jewish custom was to bury the dead by sundown. Not only would it be highly unlikely for the Romans to release the body of a criminal – but it had only been a few hours since he was crucified! Pilate has to even check to see if Jesus is really dead and he could have easily denied the request or questioned it. It takes courage to ask for special favor on behalf of another.

It still takes courage to associate to be a Christian, doesn't it? God often asks us to do things that take courage. I was proud of Trevor and Hayden when they went with my Dad to India and Rwanda. It took courage for them as young teenagers to agree to that. It took courage for Tyler to say, “Yes I want to go to Pakistan” with his rock band Titanmoon. There were four bombing in the country while they were there. There are several of you here for whom it took courage to join a small group. To be in a big group is one thing, but to open yourself up deeper relationships takes courage. At every step, it takes courage to be a Christian.

There is the story about the courageous man who bragged that he had cut off the tail of a man-eating lion with his pocketknife. Asked by a reporter why he hadn't cut off the lion's head, the man replied: "Well, someone had already done that." Christ asks his follower not to take the easy road, but the difficult one and that takes courage – like Joseph.

## Leverage Your Means for Ministry

It is never too late to become a believer. Followers live by faith. Christians act with courage, and the last principle is that true disciples **leverage their means for ministry**. In other words, use what God has given you to further God's work.

For example, Joseph is "a rich man from Arimathea (Matt 27:57)." He is very wealthy. Second Joseph is "a prominent member of the Council (Mark 15:43). That is, he is a powerful man. Third, Luke describes him as "a good and righteous man (Luke 23:50)." He is a man with a strong reputation! Joseph is a very influential man at every level.

I imagine the servant comes to Pilate and says, "Sir, Joseph is here to see you." "Joseph – Joseph who?" "THE Joseph – Joseph of Arimethia!" "What? Why didn't you tell me? I'll be right there!" Most commentators believe that the reason why Pilate is so agreeable to release Jesus' body, is because of Joseph's influential status. *Joseph may be the only person in Israel to whom Pilate would have given Jesus' body. He is uniquely gifted by God to accomplish the ministry of Jesus' burial. Joseph can't watch Jesus perform miracles. He can't listen to him teach – but he can lovingly take care of Jesus' body and move him from a place of shame to a place of honor. He uses his means to accomplish this.*

God requires all of us to take our resources, gifts and talents and use them, leverage them, for ministry – to advance the Kingdom. For some it is leveraging our money or reputation. Another example is Esther who used her position of power to save her people. For others it might be putting a skill God has given you to work. I love the story at Willow Creek church where a car mechanic recognized his talents as from God, and he started a ministry to single mothers and to the elderly in fixing their vehicles during the church service. True disciples leverage their means for ministry.

## **Application**

Let's talk now for a few minutes about **application** – how can we put this message into practice this week? What I want you to do is to choose one of the four principles to apply somehow in your life this week. Let me review them.

1) It is never too late to become a believer. For some this is the perfect application – to renew your prayers for unbelieving family and friends. Maybe your unsaved father will be the next Joseph of Arimathea. If this is your application – commit to praying for one family member every day this coming week – asking God with earnestness to save them, as he did the thief, the centurion and Joseph.

2) Followers live by faith. If you are going through a really hard time, this might be your application. Imagine a continuum – on one hand is the faithless disciples; who just gave up when the going got tough - and on the other side is Joseph – patiently waiting for the Kingdom, in spite of everything. Where are you on that scale? Closer to the disciples or to Joseph? How is your faith? Let me quickly tell you how to know where you are. Over here (by the disciples) is fear – over here (by Joseph) is peace. If you have peace you are trusting and you are living by faith. But, those of us with anxiety and fear need to spend some time before God, praying and seeking his peace as we trust Him more fully and give Him our burdens.

3) Christians act with Courage. Has God given you a difficult, challenging decision? If you are at a crossroad of some type in your life – this may be your application area. Seek wisdom from godly people, pray about the matter and then move forward in faith, regardless of the cost. A nun I read said, “Faith is one foot in the air and a queasy feeling in

the stomach.” It takes courage to take that step. As someone else said – it is better to be out on a limb with God than under the tree without Him. When God puts a clear opportunity or ministry in front of you, step out with courage and faith and see God work!

Finally – how can you leverage your means for ministry? If you are wondering how to integrate the various parts of your life into ministry – spend some time with this application. Get a sheet of paper and list all the talents, gifts and resources God has given you, and then pray over them, and ask God how you can use each one in service to Him. If there is something that may fit with the church, come talk with me. Be creative and God will use you powerfully.

## **Conclusion**

All this brings me back to Vince. Vince would tell you it is never too late to become a believer. He came to Christ later in life. He would tell you to use your means for ministry, which is what he is now doing. He has shown great courage and faith in his own life.

Who is Vince? His last name is Cooper. He is better known by millions as Alice Cooper – who pioneered what is known today as shock rock. Vince now attends Camelback Bible Church in Phoenix, Arizona. My Mom even scanned and sent me his family’s picture from the church directory! What a beautiful family!

In researching Vince’s story, I called my Dad who has been an elder at that church and my Dad asked me if I’d like to talk with him. I said that would be great, and on Thursday afternoon, I found myself on the telephone with Alice Cooper! Just the nicest man you would ever want to talk to.

I told him about how he reminded me of Joseph of Arimathea who was also a very public figure, who risked everything to follow Jesus. I asked Alice about what it was like when he became a Christian, and he told me about how his manager told him it would ruin his career. But he said to me, "My career is now about 4<sup>th</sup> on the list of things that are important to me." He said (I think in another radio interview): "We have to make a choice. And everybody, at some point in their lives, has to make that choice. When people say, 'How do you believe this? Why do you believe this?' I just say nothing else speaks to my heart. It speaks right to my heart and right to my soul, deeper than anything. And I totally believe it."

Alice told me that when he became a Christian he went to the Pastor of Camelback Bible, Tim Savage (who Married Tammy and I) and said to him, "Pastor, I don't think I can continue being Alice Cooper and a Christian." The Pastor said to him, "Do you believe God makes mistakes?" He said, "No." "Well look at where God has you – you are in the Philistine's camp! And now you are a new person in Christ. Stay there and be an influence for God." And this was a revolutionary thought for Alice, and he now seeks to leverage his influence for the gospel.

He said in another place, "I've had a couple of people that were friends of mine that I've talked to that have vocally said they have [accepted Christ]. I have talked to some big stars about this, some really horrific characters ... and you'd be surprised. The ones that you would think are the furthest gone are the ones that are more apt to listen." Praise the Lord for living faith and changing lives.

Now I am not suggesting you should add Alice Cooper songs to your i-pod shuffle. He is admittedly still a little edgy for some of us. ☺ - But he said to me, "Craig, becoming a

Christian was the most rebellious thing I have ever done.” I would add it was the most courageous thing he had ever done. May you and I have that kind of courage – the courage of Alice Cooper and the courage of Joseph of Arimathea, who both follow the courage of Jesus Christ – to submit to the Father in obedience, no matter the cost.