

Matthew 23-05-21b

We're in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 27. We have seen the response of the centurion and the soldiers who are the crucifixion party, recognizing from the witness of nature and the behavior of the Lord Jesus Christ, the conversations that have taken place, the words that have been spoken, the reaction of the crowd taking all of this in, these soldiers have concluded truly, this was the Son of God. And what a conviction to the people of Israel who should have been the first to know, the first to recognize based on their scriptures, which they so proudly point to and claim as their heritage.

What a failure. Many women who followed Jesus, verse 55, from Galilee ministering to him were there looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of Zebedee's sons. And these ladies are witnesses, people say, well, they were unafraid because women were so largely ignored in the patriarchal society of the ancient Near East and the Romans didn't view them as a threat, so they didn't expect to be arrested.

I think that is an underestimation of the faith and the faithfulness of these ladies who have accompanied the Lord Jesus. And I just want to point out that the disciples called by the Lord Jesus by name, recruited personally and individually by the Lord Jesus are all men. And you can't get around it.

Everybody that wants to talk about ecumenicalism and everybody's equal and women should preach and this, that, and the other, always have to somehow skirt, sidestep, explain away the fact that Jesus named exactly zero women to be his disciples and become his apostles. Even in the church age, after Pentecost, when he confronts Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, Saul is not a woman. What a great opportunity to show how patriarchal systems have all been set aside and in Christ there is no East or West, there's no male or female, Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, we're one in Christ.

So why wasn't it Paula that got accosted on the road to Damascus? We have assigned roles and functions and our faithfulness to them is what counts, not where it fits in the plan and purpose of God. God in his inscrutable wisdom, in his ineffable plan and purpose has decided in his divine power and authority to order creation in a certain way. In human society, to hold fathers and husbands accountable and put them at the head of a family structure.

It is not a diminishment, it does not demean or insult or somehow lessen or cheapen the role of women. Ladies have their place in God's plan, it is every bit as important. Notice the men here, the two thieves, the centurion and the soldiers at the foot of the cross, none of them are named.

Who is named here? The men here, the ladies who are present, they are identified, they are memorialized as those who are faithful unto death. In this case, it is the death of the

Lord Jesus, but they are not intimidated, they are not scared, they are not so fearful that they will not stand and do what they can to be supportive and a comfort to the Lord Jesus in the greatest hour of trial any human being has ever faced. They are standing as close as they can get, providing as much support as they can.

Wouldn't surprise me at all if the sponge of sour wine put on the reed and held to his lips was at the request of one of these women, could you please give him something to drink? It doesn't say that, but they are there. And sometimes it is just your presence and as an expression of your love and support that makes a difference. And it is noted and it is memorialized here for a reason.

Whatever role we are assigned, be it mighty or be it small, be it visible or invisible, if we think it's influential, if we think it's recognized, if we think it's noticed or if it's not, you certainly should not judge a church by its size or by its community impact or by the number of baptisms or the number of conversions or the number of varied ministries that it might undertake. There are churches that have great numbers of all of those things and you can't judge them as a bad church, nor can you judge them as a good church. Those things are between the leadership of that church, the members of that church and the Lord.

There are other churches that are quite small, that don't have a lot of formal ministries, that aren't engaged in the exercise of evangelism on a daily, weekly or monthly basis as a church, as a group, that don't sponsor revivals or days of evangelism or support a limited number of missionaries as they're able or whatever it might be. These formalities, these observations in terms of what assignment do I have in the plan and purpose of God, that assignment is not the basis of a judgment. What does God say through the Lord Jesus in the parable? He that is faithful in that which is least will be faithful also in that which is much.

You have been faithful in a few things. I just gave you a few things. It might've seemed small and insignificant, but you were faithful in what you were given.

I will make you ruler over many things. It is such a mistake to judge, well, I'm insignificant. I'm purposeless.

I don't have a mission. I don't have a calling. I don't have a function.

I'm not making a difference. I don't have an impact. I'm not an influence or an influencer.

There's something wrong with me or God would be using me in mighty ways. Wrong, wrong, wrong. Whatever our assignment, it is not the nature or seeming quality or status of that assignment.

It is our faithfulness in it. Can I be faithful in something that looks small, that looks out of the way? Think about Elijah. They thought Jesus was calling on Elijah.

One of the more famous episodes in Elijah's life is when God sends him to the brook Cherith and he's doing nothing. He's a prophet of God. There's all kinds of things going on.

You've got a wicked king and queen. You've got people who are and are not bowing the knee to Baal and drought going on and one thing and another. There's widows and children that are gonna eventually need to be raised from the dead.

Where's Elijah? Sitting there by a little rivulet, watching it dry up, waiting for unclean birds to fly overhead and drop his food. Day after day, week after week. How significant is that assignment? Well, from his point of view, he would say, I am completely useless.

Nobody can see me. Nobody can hear me. I am called as a prophet and I'm not prophesying.

It always makes me smile because over and over again, you will see, and if you Google this, it's kind of comical, but there's an alternate instead of prophesying, people will say prophesying. It's like, well, what am I doing? Adjusting the prophecy to the limits of the crowd or I'm sizing the prophecy, prophesying. You find it all over the place.

It's one of these, you know, my prostrate gland and a lot of these other malaprops, but prophesying. My job is to prophesy. I'm not prophesying.

What good am I? His time, his experience at the Brook Cherith is recorded in the pages of inspired scripture and has been a blessing and a challenge and a piece of scripture that rebukes, corrects and instructs us ever since. Elijah couldn't see that. Do you think Elijah had any notion that there was gonna be a written canon of scripture and that he would be in it in any of his activities? Prophets of Baal, Mount Carmel, Jezebel, fleeing, God having to come to him and restore him out of clinical depression.

He didn't see any of that ending up in the pages of scripture. The fact that he couldn't see it doesn't mean God didn't already have it incorporated as a part of his plan and purpose. And it is required of someone who has been entrusted with a stewardship, whatever that stewardship is, to be found faithful.

I recently saw a piece of a movie. I think I slipped through part of it, but I saw part of it. And a man, when he met the love of his life, something happened with a quarter.

He needed money for a ticket. He didn't have it. This girl was sitting across from him.

She gave him some change out of her purse. So he paid for his ticket, it's a buck 50 or something. And he had a couple of quarters left over and he wanted to give this quarter back to her.

And it turned out to be a 1964 solid silver quarter. And she said, keep it, that's lucky.

That's a wonderful thing that it's a solid silver quarter.

Well, decades later, his wife has passed away, but he still has this quarter. It's meaningful to him, it's valuable to him. He has faithfully retained that quarter all of these years out of love for his wife.

Then one day he's visiting and a clown comes by and wants to do a magic trick. And he says, give me a coin, give me a coin. He said, I don't wanna give you a coin.

Give me a coin, I'm gonna show this little child a trick. And so he reluctantly gives him this silver quarter. And he says, now I want that back.

So the clown does this prestidigitation and then hands Tom Hanks the quarter back. And Tom looks at it, it's not a 1964 silver quarter. And he ends up, I think getting arrested for assaulting the clown because the clown won't give him his quarter back.

It's a small thing, but it is meaningful because of who gave it to him. This is my point. It's just a quarter.

How many quarters are there in the world? This quarter is special because the love of my life gave it to me. We had a conversation about it. It's significant.

I got it from her on the day we met. And it's a small thing. It isn't the size of the thing or the quality of thing, even that it's a 64 silver quarter, it is an emblem of the relationship.

This is how we should view our assignments, our trusts, our stewardship from God. If we are here breathing air, God has a plan for our life. God is using us in some way.

He has entrusted us with a stewardship and it is required that we be found faithful to whatever that stewardship is. Maybe we're just hanging onto a quarter. Maybe we are investing millions of dollars on behalf of other people.

Maybe we are just talking to a few members of our family. Maybe it's a pastor who, I heard a sermon from Dr. Criswell and he said, well, they tell me that this service is being televised and there's 150,000 people watching and listening to this sermon this morning. What an opportunity.

But I will tell you that any pastor worth his salt is just as careful, just as prepared, just as interested, just as invested in his presentation, whether there are four people or 4,000, whether it's 15 people or 150,000. If it's one person, two people, it doesn't matter because who entrusted the messenger with the message? What is the stewardship? Faithful as he who calls you, you should be faithful to the calling, whatever it may be. Well, it's a small calling, so I'm not gonna be very invested in it.

What a tragic mistake. We think about our own lives. You don't know a difference you're gonna make.

Do you think the repentant thief on the cross had any notion of how God would use this one sentence? He says one sentence in his entire life as a criminal and he's in the eternal pages of scripture. Think he had any notion? Not a chance. God knows, God cares.

Well, this brings us now to something I just find fascinating. These ladies are standing there. It's important, don't overlook verse 56.

Why are they mentioned? They are in their place doing what they can do. It's as much as they can do. These same ladies are gonna be involved in preparing the body of the Lord Jesus.

Why? Because they're present. They know what's going on. They haven't fled.

They're not in hiding. They're not distracted and thinking about other things. They're where they should be doing what they should do.

It's the smallest thing in the world to simply stand and observe. I am sure that they are praying. I am sure that they are hoping to be an encouragement to the Lord Jesus that he is not bereft.

He is not alone. All have not fled and abandoned him. They are there.

The men aren't there. They are. It's what they can do.

And they're memorialized forever in scripture. Now we come to, I think, one of the most fun verses in the Bible. It's verse 57.

When evening had come, there came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. That's the verse. If you look in Mark chapter 15 and Luke chapter 23 and John chapter 19, you have this or a very similar statement in all four gospels.

What do you think about this? Evening came, a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph. That's as much as you need right there. All four gospels mention Joseph.

Joseph and all four gospels mention where he is from. If something is recorded in scripture, it is important. If it's recorded twice, it's especially important.

If it's in there three times, we better sit and take a very close look. If it is in scripture four times, this is Richard Dreyfus trying to get the kid to get rhythm, put the helmet on and beat him on the head with drumsticks. Are you getting this yet? Bonk, bonk, bonk, bonk.

Joseph of Arimathea, it's important. So what do we know about Joseph of Arimathea? We know two things. We know he's rich and we know where he's from.

How easy is it for a rich man to enter the kingdom? Camels, eyes of needles, yet Joseph is risking his life to go to Pilate and request the body of the Lord Jesus. So how much of a rarity is Joseph of Arimathea? He is a rich man who loves God and wants to honor the Lord Jesus by ensuring that his body doesn't go to the potter's field. Right? That he's not thrown willy-nilly into Gehenna.

Unwittingly, he is fulfilling prophecy that says that he will make his grave with the rich. You're familiar with that. So there are two unique things about Joseph.

One, he is rich. And I could go on for 30 minutes about how unusual it is that this rich man is risking everything to ask for the body of the Lord Jesus and to honor him in his death. But it is the other fact that is so interesting.

Where is he from? Arimathea. Where is Arimathea? What is Arimathea? If you start digging into this a little bit, you find out that Arimathea is a town about five miles north of Jerusalem. It is in the land of Ephraim.

Remember the Northern kingdom was thought of as Ephraim. And it is in the tribal allotment of Benjamin. Arimathea is five miles north of Jerusalem.

Not terribly far away, but it's in what had been the Northern kingdom area. And it is in the area of the tribe of Benjamin. Now, what town is this? Today, it is known as Er-Ram, E-R-R-A-M.

There is a settlement there to this day and it's called Er-Ram, E-R-R-A-M. And you can see the remnants of its name, Arimathea, right? The town has an interesting history. Do you remember when we did the study of Gilgal and how significant that town and that name is? Well, turn with me to 1 Samuel chapter one.

1 Samuel chapter one. Now there was a certain man of Ramathaim Zophim of the mountains of Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah, the son of Jeroam, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zeph and Ephraimite. Take a look at the name of the town that Elkanah is from.

Who's Elkanah's famous wife? He's got two wives, Hannah and Penina. Elkanah and Hannah are the parents of whom? Samuel. So this is Samuel's hometown.

This is where his parents live and are from. There was a certain man of, look at the name, Ramathaim Zophim. If you put an A in front of that name, you have Arimathaim Zophim.

That Z is a T-S in Hebrew. But this name in the later parts of 1 Samuel is gonna be shortened to what? What is the town of Samuel? Ramah. This is Ramah.

Oh my goodness. Once you realize that Joseph is from Ramah, the town of Samuel, think

about this. Just let your mind explore this idea.

What is the significance of Samuel? He does a lot of things that the giant book of the Old Testament named for him. If you had to narrow down the most significant thing Samuel ever did in his entire life, what would it be? I'll give you a clue. It involves anointing oil.

Who made David king under the direction of God himself? Who poured the anointing oil on Jesse's youngest son? Samuel. Samuel is from Ramah. This is the inception of the monarchy.

By the way, he also anointed Saul, the first king of Israel. The unfaithful king followed by the faithful king. The only two kings in Israel anointed by Samuel are Saul, who essentially dies the sin unto death, and David.

What is Jesus' title as king of Israel? What's another name for it? What do the blind men call out as he's entering Jericho? Have mercy on us, son of David. David wouldn't be anybody except for the anointing of Samuel, who is from Ramah. You say, well, that's interesting, but I'm not as dazzled by that as you seem to be.

However, Ramah figures again and again. I wish we had time to look at every instance of this, but so many significant things happen at Ramah. If you go to the book of Judges and figure out where Deborah is, it will surprise you.

This is in Judges 4, verse 5. We'll take a look at at least one of these. Go back a little bit from 1 Samuel to Judges 4 and verse 5. Deborah a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. And she would sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the mountains of Ephraim.

And the children of Israel came up to her for judgment. Ramah and Bethel. It doesn't get any more significant in terms of towns in ancient Israel than Bethel.

What do you know about Bethel? How did it get its name? Remember it was formerly called Luz. Who renamed it? Jacob, after he laid his head on a stone and saw the vision of angels ascending and descending on a ladder. Where was that? Bethel.

He goes north and finds his wives with Laban. And when he returns to the land, he comes back to Bethel. Bethel is a study in itself, but they are near each other.

They're almost sister villages, sister towns. Ramah and Bethel. Deborah judges between Ramah and Bethel.

1 Samuel is replete with references to Ramah back in chapter one, you look at verse 19. After she has the conversation with Eli, Hannah and her husband return. They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the Lord and returned and came to their house at Ramah.

Notice that Ramathim Tzofim is now shortened to Ramah. Same town. What does Ramathim Tzofim mean? Ramah comes from a root room, R-U-M, and it means height or elevation.

When you see that Ramathim, that means heights, plural, lofty mountains, high places. Ramah is going to be used anytime you hear in the Old Testament the decrying of people worshiping at the high places, that's your word. Ramah, Ramah is the word translated high places.

They put images, they went up and worshiped other gods on the high places. It's Ramah. It means elevated, lifted up, raised up.

That's what Ramah means. I say again, Ramah means lifted up, raised up. Joseph is from Ramah.

He's going to put the Lord Jesus in his own tomb, but his town of origin without which he is never mentioned is raised up, put him in the tomb. He's going to be raised up, Joseph of raising up town. Even more interesting, and there's so many of these references to Samuel, it's replete throughout 1 Samuel.

You find it in, every time you're talking about Samuel, he is at Ramah, he's going to Ramah, he's coming from Ramah. Throughout the book, it is emphasized over and over. Anybody who knew anything about the Old Testament historical books knows Ramah, inside out, upside down.

Do you think Joseph growing up in that town knew the most famous ancient resident of that town and all of the history that pertained to it? Of course he did. What I find even more interesting is the prophet Jeremiah. And we will close with this.

Jeremiah, the prophet Jeremiah, when did he prophesy? What was his time period? We went through kings and prophets. You remember Jeremiah is right at the end when the Northern kingdom is gone in 721, you come to 600 BC, 605, 598, 586. Nebuchadnezzar comes three different times.

Jeremiah is alive and prophesying at that time. Remember? And he is ultimately going to be taken captive, taken prisoner by the Babylonians. Jeremiah's name, think about Jeremiah's name.

Yer-um-ee-ah-hoo, Yer-um-ee-ah-hoo. The center part of Jeremiah's name, the R and the M are from room. And Yer-um, Yer-um-ee-ah-hoo means the Lord will raise up.

That's what Jeremiah's name means. The Lord will raise up. Turn with me as our final passage to, well, actually two passages.

Jeremiah 31, 15, I'll quote it. You'll remember it. This is what the Lord says.

A voice is heard in Ramah, Rachel weeping for her children and could not be comforted. That's Jeremiah 31, 15, quoted in Matthew with the slaying of the children two years old and under. A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping.

Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted for her children because they are no more. Ramah is near the tomb of Rachel. The reason Ramah is mentioned is because as Jacob returned to the land of promise and Rachel dies along the way and she is buried, Rachel's tomb is at Ramah.

Ramah is associated with one of the most famous tombs in the Old Testament. It's not Machpelah. She's not buried at Machpelah with the patriarchal ancestors.

Jacob could have made some effort to get her back to where his grandfather and father, grandmother and mother were buried, but he didn't. She is buried at Ramah. Now turn a few pages forward in Jeremiah to Jeremiah chapter 40.

Jeremiah chapter 40. The word of the Lord that came, the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord after Nebuchadnezzar the captain of the guard had let him go from Ramah. He had taken him there bound in chains among all who were carried away captive from Jerusalem and Judah, carried away captive to Babylon.

Jeremiah has been scooped up along with many other people from Jerusalem and Judah. He is in chains and he is marching to Babylon. When they get to Ramah, Nebuchadnezzar then lets him go.

Jeremiah is released from his chains at Ramah. Verse two, captain of the guard took Jeremiah and said to him, the Lord your God has pronounced doom on this place. Now the Lord has brought it and has done just as he said, because your people have sinned against the Lord and not obeyed his voice.

Therefore, this thing has come upon you. And now look, I free you this day from the chains that were on your hand. If it seems good to you, come with me to Babylon, come and I will look after you.

But if it seems wrong for you to come with me to Babylon, remain here, see all the land is before you, wherever it seems good and convenient for you to go, go there. And that story continues. How significant is it that Joseph who provides the tomb of the Lord Jesus is from Ramah? Ramah is where Deborah judged Israel, where Sisera ends up getting a tent peg through his head as a result of Deborah and Barak's victory.

Ladies involved by the way, do you think JL was a faithful woman of God when she saw her opportunity and pounded that stake through his skull? You think Deborah was a faithful woman of God when she recognized that she was being called to occupy a place that should have been filled by a man and there were no faithful men available and she stepped up and exercised the stewardship that God placed in her hands. At Ramah,

Samuel, the anointer of kings is from Ramah. That's where he was born, that's where he lived, that's where he was buried, at Ramah.

He went from Ramah to anoint two kings of Israel, the first two kings. Jeremiah has Ramah embedded in his name and as a prisoner in chains due to the judgment of God, Jeremiah is raised up. He is released at Ramah of all places.

This conversation could have taken place in Jerusalem before they ever left. But in the providences of God, it takes place at Ramah. People who were paying attention could think about Joseph.

Joseph himself could think about this and the history of his hometown. Do you think Joseph knew that Jeremiah had been released there? Do you think he knew that Deborah had judged there? Do you think that he knew that Samuel had been born and was buried there? Do you think he knew that Rachel's tomb was nearby? All of those factors are brought to our mind and brought to our attention because Joseph isn't just from somewhere. A faithful man named Joseph, a man who had come to Christ and believed, asked for his body.

Every single time he's mentioned, Ramah is mentioned. Arimathea. By the way, Sophim, you notice that's a dual or a plural also in 1 Samuel 1.1. Ramathaim is the heights and Sophim is the watchers.

Heights of the watchers is the full name of the town. And when you start exploring the watchers, Old Testament and new, those angelic watchers, but Ramah was on an elevation and you had good visibility. It's like some of the mounds here in Oklahoma that you can see and be a watchman on the wall to watch for what is coming.

It is elevated. But why is it that God hath highly exalted Jesus and given him the name that is above every other name? He has not only been raised from the dead, but he has been raised to the right hand of the father himself. He did not count obedience and his, he did not count his equality with God a thing to be grasped but he was obedient even to the shameful death on the cross.

This is the reason God has highly room Ramah him. If you were expressing this in Aramaic or in Hebrew, it would be your room. He has Jeremiah at him.

He has Ramah at him. He has Aramathaiim Sofim him. He has raised him up to where he is visible and given him the name that is above every name.

And it's all there in Joseph of Arimathea. I just think it's so fascinating of all the places he could have been from, of all the ways he could have been referenced. This is what God chose in all four gospels.

Well, we'll see the burial, the intermediate period and the resurrection next time. We'll

close here in a word of prayer. Father, we are so grateful for the privilege of observing and seeing the wonders of your work in our midst, among us, in human history, in the present and the anticipation of what you are going to do in the future.

We thank you for the Lord Jesus and the many ways that you invite us to appreciate him and to understand him and to share in his sonship and his inheritance, his priesthood, his future reign on this earth, his work and service and faithfulness as our example and the privilege of representing him on this earth, in this life. We're so grateful and we pray that as we reflect on his example and these wonderful revelations in your word that God, the Holy Spirit will motivate us and encourage us to be faithful to our calling, to recognize what we have been entrusted with by way of stewardship and whether it seems large or small to do what we do heartily in your presence as unto you and not worry about what the world thinks. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.