

# Secret Disciple?

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Thank you very much Thomas for your very warm welcome. It's nice to be amongst you and I can hardly believe it's, you reminded there 20 years, it's quite extraordinary and Oona has done so well. But I really found that quite extraordinary that that's 20 years because it does not seem anything like that and I think we're all conscious of just the speed of time. If we can go back to where we read in Mark chapter 15 and we read at verse 42 there, Mark 15 verse 42, 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. Now as we know discipleship is something that is very, very much at the heart of the Christian life or the Christian faith and I was looking for the definition and there's various definitions given but it says, well a definition that

I came across, it says a disciple is someone who embraces and assists in spreading the teaching of another. And when we think of that, that's very much what it is with regard to the Christian because we embrace the teacher of Jesus and we seek to spread the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we know that we today would be disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. Every follower of Jesus is really a disciple. But we know that there are also disciples that are termed secret disciples and that's the man we're going to look at tonight and in fact in the John's Gospel, John refers to him as a secret disciple and here he is somebody who, it's very obvious that he's come out as was mentioned, and the prayer of somebody who has come out of the shadows. And I believe that the Christian church is full of secret disciples. It shouldn't be, but it is. At one level it is impossible to be a secret disciple because you may think that you're a secret disciple. If I'm speaking to anybody in here tonight who is a secret disciple, and by that when I say a secret disciple is somebody who has never nailed their colors to the mass, who has never come out publicly on the Lord's side, who has tried to keep the work of Jesus quiet. They're kind of trying to cover it as much as possible. But that's what I mean, you cannot be a secret disciple because it is known to others, everybody can see. And that is often the case with people, particularly people who have come to the Lord maybe gradually and there's no great show about it. I mean some people are converted very dramatically, but some people it's a very gradual work that goes on. But it's noted and it's known before people even come to a prayer meeting, before people make a confession or a profession, people can see the change that takes place because a tree is known by its fruits. And so it is with the Christian because the fruit of the Spirit becomes obvious and evident within a person's life, whether that's at work, at home, whether it's in the community, whether it's in the church, there is this change that has taken place in a person's life. It might be very subtle, it might be very small, but still people are able to see that there is this change. And so we have here this man, Nicodemus, who had never come before really to profess the Lord Jesus Christ.

And then with regard to professing the Lord Jesus Christ, we've got to remember that what we do tomorrow is part of the profession of the Lord Jesus Christ. Because when we come to the Lord's table, we are reminded in the warrant that we read that we do show forth or we proclaim the Lord's death until He come. And you ask quite a wonderful thing. Part of what you do when you take that cup, part of what you do when you take the bread, when you eat and when you drink, you are making a statement to every person who is looking on. You are making a proclamation that Jesus is my Lord, that Jesus' body was broken for me, that Jesus' blood was shed for me. And as I take this bread that signifies his body broken and this cup that signifies his blood shed, I am proclaiming to anybody and everybody who is looking around, Jesus is my Lord and my Saviour. So it's a powerful statement and a powerful witness. Sometimes we lose sight of just how powerful it is. We shouldn't.

And that's what Jesus makes that emphasis in the word that we have here. That as often, every single time you do it, you are proclaiming, you're showing forth the Lord's death until He comes. So what we're going to pray we'll be doing tomorrow is part of this statement, this wonderful statement. So here we have in this chapter a secret disciple who comes good. And what we have here is an account of the funeral and the burial of the Lord Jesus Christ. And as we know, we're used to if we've just had the burial of our Queen.

And it was an amazing event and I'm sure all of us at one stage or another, maybe some people watched the whole thing. Others may have viewed in and out, but I'm sure there was nobody really within the nation who didn't catch at one way or another something of just all the pageantry and all that was involved, all the service, all the various stages of it. And it was a global event. And that's what happens when somebody of great significance dies. And yet here we have the greatest King ever. And we're going to go to people at his funeral. We've got this man Joseph of Arimathea and we read also in the other Gospel of Nicodemus who appears with him. So here you have only two people, but this is a wonderful thing that heaven had arranged for the burial of the Lord Jesus. And that was important because we know that back then, sometimes those who were crucified, they were just left for the birds to eat. Sometimes we read there that historians will tell us that sometimes when they were crucified, that's what they were told, you'll be there and you'll become fodder for the birds. It's an awful concept, an awful thought. Now of course we do know that because

[ 7 : 57 ] Jesus being a Jew and because it was the preparation of the Sabbath and according to the religious law, he would not be allowed to remain on the cross. He had to be taken down. But back then there was no provision as such for burial. Sometimes we read that people could just be thrown as it were like on a rubbish heap or just there was no dignity, there was nothing to it. But God had made preparation for it. Heaven had made its preparation because this Jesus who had been despised and rejected right throughout his life in his ministry, in his teaching, in his work, in his witness, wherever he went, people were talking about him, misrepresenting him and came all the way to his trial and was so brutal, everything, all the way to the crucifixion itself. But of course here as we say, heaven has made preparation for that. And so we find that this man, Joseph, comes forward in order to seek the body of the Lord Jesus. Now this man, Joseph, we find it's quite interesting that he is actually one of the Sanhedrin, he's one of the council, one of the group that were set into this important group of Jews that made all the decisions, not just religious decisions but also social decisions as a group of 70 men and they were sort of the leaders, they were the ones actually who had condemned Jesus to death and yet it's from that group that this man comes. So that in itself is quite an amazing thing. And we've got to remember that not everybody of that 70 were told that were in favour of the decision that was being made for the death of the Lord

Jesus Christ. And so we find that this man comes forward and he's a good man, we're told in Luke's Gospel he was a good and a righteous man and we're told here that he was a man, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God. So here's this man and we don't know how he came to faith but he has come to faith, he has come to believe that Jesus is a Messiah. He had heard the teaching of Jesus, he had seen the miracles of Jesus, he was a student of the law, a studier of the law and he put it all together. He wasn't bigoted like most of them were and he was facing up to the facts and he was tying in with the life of Jesus and the message of Jesus and everything that was happening with Jesus and putting that against the Word and he was coming to the right conclusion. And that's why the Word is so important. The

Word is important in your life and my life as well. As we go through this world, as you live out your days, live it with the Word. The Word tells us so much, not just about the shells but about the world that we're living in, about where we are, about what everything is about and one of the great things that the Word tells us is that God is still in control. We're looking at our world just now and it looks like it's out of control and sometimes we can begin to fear and there's so much fear and so much such a sense of despair and hopelessness right throughout society but God reigns. And that's why it's so important that the Christian gets back to the Word and remembers God's still in control because it makes such a difference to our lives. And God's Word made a difference to this man's life as he came to understand and grasp that this Jesus here is none other than the Son of God. And of course Joseph would have contrasted the teaching of the scribes and the Pharisees over against the authoritative teaching of the Lord Jesus. But what I want us to, the one little phrase or whatever you call it from here that I want us just to think about is that we find that Joseph took

courage and he went to Pilate. As I said in John's Gospel it tells us that he was a secret disciple and I wonder why is it that there are so many secret disciples? Why? Well I think that maybe we can focus on two particular reasons and the first I would say is this. Why is it that people might be following the Lord? Maybe tonight there's somebody like that here. You're following the Lord, you know the Lord, you love the Lord but you're not prepared to profess the Lord publicly. And the first reason is this.

You're afraid and it's a very in many ways a commendable reason but it's one we've all been there before. You're afraid that if you become a member that you'll end up bringing disgrace on the cause of Christ. Because as you look at your own life you see your own frailties, you see just how insecure and vulnerable as it were you are as a Christian and you have this feeling within yourself you know it's safer and it's better for the church, it's better for me that I follow the Lord at a distance without nailing my colours to the mast because this way yes I love the Lord and I follow the Lord but I'm scared that I'll end up making a mess and I'll bring dishonour on the cause of Christ. Well let me say if there's anybody thinking like that tonight you're not the only one who's ever thought like that. I would imagine and believe that all the believers in here tonight who are professing faith in the Lord Jesus Christ have thought that very thought and it's not just a thought that you've thought before as a Christian and as a member and as an office bearer and as a minister it is something that is still bearish with you. What have

[14:57] I fall? What have I... but you know this is what we've got to do. The God who saves us is the God who keeps us. We don't keep ourselves, we can't. We cannot save ourselves in any shape or form and we cannot keep ourselves. There's that beautiful word that runs throughout Scripture kept by the power of God. That's what's happening, kept. That's why you're still following despite all the dunce and all the blows and all the trials and all the things that have come into your life that have shaken you and tried to turn you around, still following because you're kept, kept by the power of God. That word, it's a beautiful word for you're surrounded, garcined, held tight. So that's one reason why people sometimes don't profess because they're afraid that they'll bring dishonour. Well get rid of that because as we say the Lord who keeps you, you remember this, to say to the... because the Lord is asking, he says to all his people, not to ministers, to elders, to deacons, to a select member, do this in remembrance of me. This is to everybody, to every person who loves the Lord Jesus irrespective of their age when they come to believe and to trust and to accept the Lord Jesus as Savior. He says, do this in remembrance of me. Take that, take that bread, take that wine in remembrance of me. You don't have to be an elite, you don't have to be at some particular level. And so it's incumbent upon every believer to do what the

Lord says. And the second reason that we'd say that people often don't take that profession is because of other people. They're afraid of what people may say, what people may think. They're afraid of how it may affect them within their workplace, within the community. You know, that's what happened here. I believe that that's one of the reasons why up till now Joseph had not nailed his colors to the mast because it tells us that although some didn't consent to the decision that was made regarding the Lord Jesus Christ being put to death, it tells us that there were those who followed Jesus amongst that group, but they didn't come out to declare that because they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. Whoa, it's not a serious thing. The praise, yes they loved the Lord, but they wanted, you see, the likes of Joseph, if he had come out and declared and said, you know, see Jesus, I'm a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, he would have been expelled, he would have been thrown out, he would have lost his position, he would have lost his power, he would have lost his popularity, he would have lost his influence, he would have lost all these things. And people say, oh, but you know, being a Christian is a cost involved. And that's why it's so important, we've got to say to ourselves, we've got to understand that, that there is a cost in being a Christian, it comes at a cost. And although there was a, we could say there's a human cost to it with regard to Joseph, because it would have cost him, not just with regard to his standing and such like, even at a financial thing, the whole tomb where it was in Jerusalem, it would probably be a tomb that he had purchased for himself, and that would have cost, and we know that Nicodemus who joined with him, they brought so much spices, huge weights of spices, that would have cost a lot, so there was a lot of cost financially in it. But above all, there was a huge cost to their own standing, within the community that they were used to. And sometimes that will happen, often it won't in the way that we think, but sometimes it will, but we've got to be prepared for it.

And the key word is courage. Can I say to you tonight, do you have the courage to stand up for Jesus? Because I remember there was a period in my own life when I didn't have the courage. I didn't have the courage to come forward. I remember a communion. I remember two communions, and I didn't have the courage to come forward. And I had all these reasons, these reasons, I would let the Lord down. What would people say? What would people think?

[ 20 : 26 ] Exactly what's here, same, nothing changes. And maybe it's the same for you tonight, but you know what? The Lord can give you the courage, and only the Lord can give you the courage.

And you ask the Lord tonight, Lord, give me that courage to make that stand, because you've got to. That's what the word says, do this, do it. It's not an option. Do this in remembrance of me. The fear of man brings a snare. That's what the Word of God tells us. So it's a very solemn and a challenging thing. And so we find that Joseph took courage, and he went to pilot and asked for the body of Jesus. That took courage as well. Because you know what I love about this man, Joseph is? You look around the scene, where are the disciples of Jesus?

What is the immediate follow? Over to be seen. You know, the only group that were there are the group of women, and they're at a distance. They don't have the means, they don't have the influence to go to pilot to ask for Jesus's body. But here's this man, and he does have influence. And he goes and he asks for the body of Jesus. And pilots are amazed that Jesus has died so quickly. And he asked for the centurion, the centurion who had been over the whole crucifixion. I would love to have heard the conversation between pilot and the centurion. Because remember, pilot washed his hands before he handed Jesus over.

Because he pilot said, I find no fault in this man. Pilot knew as he looked in Jesus that he was looking at an innocent man. He was looking at a righteous man. Pilate's wife had warned pilot, have nothing to do with this man. I had a dream about him. Let him go.

But pilot, because of politics and again wanting to curry favor with the Jewish people, handed Jesus over. But he knew deep within himself what he had done was wrong. And so he asks the centurion, is he really dead? This centurion, hard man, brutal man, he wouldn't have become, he wouldn't have risen. Remember a centurion didn't become, they weren't sort of people of wealth or whatever who sort of were commissioned right away. These were men who worked their way through the ranks. They were brutal men, hard men. This centurion probably had overseen, had been himself, had probably executed many people along the way. But he saw something different that day as he looked in Jesus, as he died. What does it tell us? It tells us in verse 39, and when the centurion who stood facing him saw that in this way he breathed his last. He had watched the whole thing. He had heard everything. He had seen everything.

[ 23 : 37 ] What does he say? Truly this man was the Son of God. Do you know there weren't many people, Jesus made the claim that he was the Son of God. Not many people agreed with that. But here's this Roman centurion. Caesar amongst the Romans was God, not anymore was this centurion.

Truly this was the Son of God. So I would love to have been listening in on the conversation when Pilate asked the centurion, is he dead? I wonder to the centurion say, you know what Pilate? Not only is he dead, he is everything he claimed to be. He is the Son of God. Pilate hands over, he gives the authority to Joseph to take Jesus and to bury him. As we say, Nicodemus then comes out, another man who lived in the shadows, a man who came to Jesus by night, he comes to help another secret disciple, throwing off the cloak of secrecy, coming out again on the side of Jesus. Tonight as we prepare for the Lord's suffer, I hope there's nobody who's still hiding in the shadows. If there is, or if you are, it's time to come out of the shadows. As we said, there's a cost in following Jesus, but it's nothing like the cost that he paid for us. So I would ask and urge anybody tonight who has not yet professed the Lord Jesus to consider doing so, and those of you who love the Lord Jesus, to make him again tonight in preparation of tomorrow, of the cost involved in giving his life to save us from our sins that is prey.