

Sunday, December 27, 2020 pm

## SECRET DISCIPLES

### John 19:38

Tonight, as we close out our studies for 2020, I want to talk a little about a disciple who only appears on the scene in the life of Jesus once. We want to talk about Joseph of Arimathea, a secret disciple of Jesus. We will notice some observations about him and then make some applications about being a secret disciple today.

#### I. Who was Joseph of Arimathea?

- a. We are introduced to Joseph of Arimathea after Jesus dies on the cross. He is mentioned in all 4 gospels for his courageous act of asking for the body of Jesus to bury in his own tomb.  
John 19:38-42, Matthew 27:57-60, Mark 15:42-46 and Luke 3:50-54.
- b. We know the following about Joseph of Arimathea
  - i. He was from Arimathea, a town which location we are unsure of.
  - ii. He is described as a secret disciple of Jesus, for fear of the Jews.
  - iii. He was a person of influence – Matthew 27:57 describes him as a rich man. Matthew also notes that Joseph had his own tomb that was new and had never been used (vs. 60).  
Mark 15:43 describes him a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God.  
Luke 23:50 in addition to describing him as a council member also notes he was a good and just man, who had not consented to the decision and deed – clearly, to condemn and kill Jesus.
  - iv. We are told in all 4 accounts that he went to Pilate and secured the body of Jesus. This tells us he was a person of influence, as a commoner would likely have not gotten an audience with Pilate, especially that quickly.  
Furthermore, his request for the body of Jesus, executed as a common criminal, was unusual as the history of Romans was to deny burial of convicted seditionists (the sentence for which Jesus was ultimately crucified). But Pilate granted it anyways and thereby fulfilled prophecy (Isaiah 53:9, *And they made His grave with the wicked— But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in His mouth.*)
  - v. Joseph, along with Nicodemus remove the body of Jesus and bury Him in the tomb and roll a stone against the door of the tomb.
- c. Was Joseph cowardly?
  - i. John 12:42-43 notes that even among the rulers, many believed in Jesus, but because they feared the Pharisees, they did not confess Him, lest they be put out of the synagogue – because they loved the praise of men more than God.  
This text does NOT speak highly of those who refused to confess Jesus.  
Furthermore, when you consider texts such as Matthew 10:32-33 we find that Jesus expects us to openly confess Him.
  - ii. Thus Joseph was likely was a weak disciple, UP TO A POINT.  
NOTE: The same could probably be said about Nicodemus who came to Jesus secretly at night (John 3:1-2), though we do read of an occasion where Nicodemus defended Jesus from unfair judgment (John 7:50-53).

In BOTH cases we find a timidity at best in defending Jesus. But note, they did NOT consent to the evil condemnation of Jesus. It could even be said that their secrecy was because of dealing with the corruption of the Sanhedrin. BUT they had limits.

- iii. Based on our text, whatever limits of secrecy existed had been reached – no more! Joseph, in an act that would have rebuffed the council went and asked for the body of Jesus AND saw to it that He received an honorable burial.
- iv. Consider: The only reason we know about Joseph of Arimathea is because of his bold act on this occasion that showed great honor for Jesus.

## II. Are you a secret disciple?

- a. But, what about you? Are you a secret disciple of Jesus? And is that a good thing? Let us consider this and make some application.
- b. A time for secrecy
  - i. There are things we need to do as Christians that are private or secret, and we do them regardless of who is looking. Furthermore, in some instances we make SURE no one is watching.
  - ii. Some examples of this:
    - 1. When it comes to our giving and charitable deeds (helping others) – 2 Corinthians 9:6-7 tells us to give bountifully, but also from the heart. Matthew 6:1-4 - It is not about being seen by men.
    - 2. When it comes to our private prayer life – Matthew 6:5-6 – go into your closet and shut the door
    - 3. Not bragging about any of the above – James 3:14 calls for us to not boast and lie against the truth. Christians are to lead quiet and peaceable lives – 1 Timothy 2:2. 1 Thessalonians 4:11 speaks of aspiring to lead a quiet life. We know we are not to draw undue attention to ourselves as we live our lives.
    - 4. There may come a time when Christianity is outlawed in this country – like Christians in later Rome, we may be driven into hiding. Will we continue to worship Him, even in our homes taking risks? Will we continue to live the Christian life, but with caution as we share Him with others?  
NOTE: This is not being cowardly but being cautious and wise – Matthew 10:16.
- c. A time to not be secret
  - i. The Bible condemns cowardice – Revelation 21:8, Matthew 10:28 warns us who to fear and who to NOT fear – we are to fear God.  
In fact, this is at the foundation of Matthew 10:32-33 – Jesus is sending out the twelve and telling them to not be concerned about what they will say, as well as warning them they will be rejected by many.
  - ii. There are times we cannot be secretive and be pleasing to God:
    - 1. We cannot hide our light – Matthew 5:14-16, Luke 11:33 says, *“No one, when he has lit a lamp, puts it in a secret place or under a basket, but on a lampstand, that those who come in may see the light.”*
    - 2. We cannot refuse to confess Him – Matthew 10:32-33. Revelation 12:11 speaks of those who “loved not their lives to the death”. These are the ones who overcame Satan (Rev. 12:7-10)  
Consider Peter as he denied the Lord 3 times (Matthew 26:69-75). Though

Peter did repent and was restored, this was an occasion where he failed to confess his Lord.

3. When it comes to rejecting immorality and ungodly behaviors – 1 Peter 4:3-5. We cannot give in to lusts and sinful pleasures and be pleasing to God.
4. When it comes to sharing the gospel – 2 Corinthians 5:10-11 – knowing the terror of the Lord, we need to strive to persuade men.  
1 Peter 3:13-15 as an example - are you willing to give a defense for the hope that is in you?
5. When it comes to supporting our brethren by assembling – Hebrews 10:24-25 – we can NOW put this in its context. They had abandoned their brethren by failing to assemble.
6. When His word is being maligned or blasphemed – will we resist error and those who practice such? Jude 3 – contend for the faith; Ephesians 5:11 – have no fellowship...; 2 John 9-11 – again, have no fellowship.
7. When it comes to how we speak – let your language be pure and godly. Ephesians 4:29 calls for us to let no corrupt word proceed out of our mouths, but what is good and necessary for edification.
8. When our faith comes at a cost – are we willing to suffer for Him? Throughout scripture, we find the challenge to be willing to suffer. 1 Peter 4:12-16. Paul told Timothy, 2 Timothy 3:12 that all who desire to live godly will suffer persecutions.

Consider: In an honest examination of yourself, do you believe you would be like one of the “secret disciples” if you lived back then, when Christianity was outlawed and the penalties for being convicted were severe?

- d. Are you ashamed of the gospel?
  - i. What we have been saying in this lesson boils down to this: Are you ashamed of the gospel? And does your life show that you are not!
  - ii. Jesus again said, “Whoever is ashamed of Me...” Luke 9:26-27, Mark 8:38
  - iii. I once heard someone say, “If Christianity were outlawed, would there be enough evidence to convict you?” Let us consider that.
  - iv. I also want you (and me) to examine your life regularly to determine if you are in the faith – 2 Corinthians 13:5. While leading a quiet life, do others know you are a Christian?

And even more telling – if they found out, would they be surprised? Think about that!

Conclusion: This lesson gives us more food for thought as we bid farewell to 2020 and welcome 2021 if the Lord wills. Let us resolve that in the coming year, we will openly and wisely share our faith with others. Romans 2:16 tells us there is a day of judgment coming. ON that day, God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to the gospel. What will he say to you? Think about it!