

The Gospel of John

John 19:38-42

10.1.2023



THE JOURNEY
CHURCH

SCRIPTURE:

John 19:38-42

SERMON NOTES:

Many of you met our Israeli tour guide a few weeks ago, Amit. Amit is quite the character. He's brilliant. He knows the history of Israel, the stories of the Bible, including the New Testament, and he has a wonderful personality. On our trip to Israel, our group fell in love with Amit. And the question quickly began to surface: is Amit a Christian? What Brandon and I discovered in our frequent interactions with him was a strange mix of reverence and even belief in the things taught about Jesus, but with a true faith commitment missing. Toward the end of our trip we asked Amit questions about the resurrection of Jesus and how unbelieving Jews explain the empty tomb. He didn't really have an answer. You could tell the question made him a little squeamish.

But Amit came to Tennessee a few weeks ago, and he absolutely loves our church. He loves our city and state. He loves our people. At the Sunday evening event, someone asked him when he became a Christian (assuming he was). All eyes darted to Amit to see his answer to the question everyone wanted to know the answer to, certainly all the folks who went to Israel with him. His answer was evasive, hinting at there being something there, but also implying that to profess to be a Christian in Israel, with his family and culture, would be very costly.

And of course, we say "Duh, Jesus said count the costs." But it's important to understand people's unique situations instead of minimizing it. It led Pastor Brandon to text me the next morning wondering if Amit might be what the Scriptures call "a secret believer." I'm not sure if Amit is a secret believer or just hovering around that line of faith, but not yet crossed over it. But I want to press further into this idea today of "secret believers" because our text is going to introduce us to two in the same story.

Scripture Exegesis: John 19:38-42

The last several weeks we've covered the sentencing of Christ, His atoning death on the cross for sins, and the piercing of His side. This week we continue forward in John's account of what happens next.

VS 38 -- 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.

We are introduced here in John's Gospel to a man named Joseph of Arimathea. John calls him a disciple of Jesus, but in secret. He's a secret disciple. Why? For fear of the Jews. Each of the other Gospels introduce us to this man, each with a little extra details than the others.

Matthew 27:57 -- As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus.

Mark 15:42-43 -- 42 And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, 43 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.

Luke 23:50-51 -- 50 Now there was a man named Joseph, from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man, 51 who had not consented to their decision and action; and he was looking for the kingdom of God.

All 4 Gospels discuss Joseph of Arimathea and his role in the burial of Jesus. And from these accounts we learn that he was: a rich man, a member of the council (Sanhedrin), who was looking for the Kingdom of God (awaiting Messiah), who had not consented to the decision and action to hand Jesus over to be crucified. He was described as a good and righteous man, who took courage and went to ask Pilate for the body of Jesus. Matthew tells us he had become a disciple at some point. John tells us the same. He was a secret disciple of Jesus who was part of the Sanhedrin. This is significant. He had not publicly acknowledged his faith in Jesus, but the events of Jesus' death bring him to the forefront to acknowledge his faith. He asks Pilate for Jesus' body so he can bury Him.

Joseph's request caught Pilate by surprise. Jesus was dead sooner than he expected. Perhaps Pilate was relieved all the fuss about Jesus was over. But he was probably even more surprised to see a member of the Sanhedrin standing before him, willing to risk position and reputation to give Jesus a king's burial. This is what Joseph and Nicodemus are doing here. Typically a criminal would be dumped into an empty grave or a field,

buried disgracefully under a pile of rocks. So this was unusual, both that Pilate granted their wishes and for them to identify publicly with an enemy of the state, someone convicted of treason and insurrection. Someone charged as making Himself equal to God.

VS 39 -- Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight.

Now John throws in the surprise sentence of the Gospel. If you don't remember, we first introduced Nicodemus in Ch. 3, our 9th sermon in John. There we have the famous encounter with Jesus and Nicodemus where Nicodemus goes to Jesus in the cover of night. He's a part of the Sanhedrin and senses Jesus is sent from God, but he doesn't know or understand. Jesus tells him he must be born again to enter the Kingdom of God and Nicodemus doesn't get it. The teaching goes over his head. He has no spiritual grasp on Jesus' words. I told you then that Nicodemus would show up again in this Gospel. Here were my exact words: *"There is a story arc about Nicodemus in this Gospel. Remember, the purpose of John's Gospel is that we might believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and in believing have life in his name. Nicodemus' story is going to be a microcosm of that greater purpose. So rather than giving any spoiler alerts, I'll just let you know that this won't be the last time you see Nicodemus in John's Gospel."*

And it wasn't. Nicodemus shows up again in John 7. The Pharisees debate about arresting Jesus. They hate him. Nicodemus presents the opinion that Jesus should not be dismissed or condemned until they have heard from Him personally: *"Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?"* (John 7:51). The rest of the Council dismissed Nicodemus's suggestion. There's nothing else added, but John not only recounts this interaction, but highlights that Nicodemus has gone from going to Jesus in the secret of night, to defending Him to the other Pharisees.

This is a big deal in the progression of Nicodemus' story. But if you want a flavor as to what the prevailing attitude was from them about Jesus. Remember when Jesus heals the man born blind? Listen to this interaction: **24 So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, "Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner." 25 He answered, "Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." 26 They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" 27 He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" 28 And they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we**

are disciples of Moses. 29 We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” (John 9:24-29)

The thought of being considered a disciple of Jesus, or even wanting to, reviled them. Yet amongst this group are leaders like Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus who are wrestling with who Jesus is. So we see Nicodemus in John 7. Then he shows up here at the end of the Gospel in our text today. Nicodemus has come full circle. He secretly goes to Jesus at night. He speaks up in the meeting on behalf of Jesus, but is dismissed. Now he shows up with Joseph of Arimathea to care for the body of the crucified King. Nicodemus has publicly identified himself with Jesus. He has shown that he is a disciple. Not only does he help with the burial physically, he financially provides for the materials used, 75 pounds worth of materials. The value of the 75 pounds of aloes and myrrh in today's market has been valued at \$150,000-\$200,000. That is not an amount you give to someone you think is a fraud and criminal. That is a lavish financial gift to the One you believe is the Redeemer.

Here's an irony of ironies that happens in these last 24 hours. As soon as it became clear that their leader was being crucified, Peter and other high-profile disciples of Jesus went into hiding. Fear and despair gripped them; self-preservation and survival dominated their thinking. They had publicly associated with Jesus for over three years, but now out of fear they disowned Him. Meanwhile, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, members of the Sanhedrin, moved in the opposite direction. For three years they hid their commitment to Jesus, but now they come forward after the mistreatment and slaughter of their Savior. They decided to give Jesus, in His death, what Israel refused to give Him in His life: homage as King. Nicodemus and Joseph gradually came to recognize that their secret belief needed to be expressed in public action. The events of Jesus' crucifixion gave them that chance, and they took it!

VS 40-42-- 40 So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. 41 Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. 42 So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.

The task of peeling Jesus' bloody body off the cross and carrying Him to the tomb, body fluids still dripping, was a difficult task. They had to carefully wrap Him in the bandages and anoint His body with both the myrrh as a preservative and the aloes and perfumes to minimize the stench of decomposition. This was an act of love for Joseph and

Nicodemus. Two high-ranking religious officials, stooping low and exhausting themselves to honor their Lord. You imagine their friends, their families, wondering why these two men of stature would take such care for a rejected Messiah, a despised enemy of Rome. And as they performed this thankless task, racing the clock to get Him into Joseph's tomb before sunset (before Passover officially began), doubt and fear crept into their hearts. What would their lives look like next? If Jesus was God, how could He allow Himself to be arrested by the Sanhedrin and crucified by the Romans? Why didn't He summon the armies of heaven and fight back? Imagine the range of emotions they are feeling.

It's important to take a moment to consider what held these men back in the previous months and years before Jesus' death. Courage looks different on different people and in different situations. At times, Jesus did not speak or move about openly, knowing His enemies sought Him but His time had not yet come. There are situations where prudence is the best witness, such as Christians in closed countries, working to slowly plant seeds of the gospel. I have a friend who is a strong believer with a full-throttled biblical worldview who works at Disney in the corporate offices. He isn't in hiding, but he has to really navigate how he talks about things like DEI, gender and sexuality issues, and more. It gauges carefully who he can trust, and what alliances to build. They've even created a slack channel for believers inside of Disney corporate as a place to talk about issues they face. It's important to realize that this isn't always cowardice.

But eventually, by their actions, Joseph and Nicodemus demonstrated that they were disciples of Jesus. At some point, all true believers have to be willing to acknowledge their commitment to the Lord. At some point we must be public Christians.

Joseph and Nicodemus demonstrate two qualities of devoted disciples. I'm going to address them in reverse order of importance. The second most important first.

****They gave to Jesus lavishly.**

Joseph gave up his own burial plot! Nicodemus brought 75 pounds of spices, which would have cost him a lot! These are not obligatory gifts from them. They give these of their own accord and love for Christ. What does this look like for us? It looks like financial faithfulness by giving to the things of the Kingdom. We prioritize generosity and giving to the church and other ministries. We also live open-handed as the Lord would put opportunities in front of us to serve or bless others. In this way, we show our love for Christ by how we give.

Here's the first and main quality of a devoted disciple:

****They identified with Jesus publicly.**

Today we've seen two individuals in Joseph and Nicodemus who previously laid low and didn't come public about their faith in Christ. But in the end, they stepped forward in faith and identified with their crucified Savior. It may be the day where you need to do the same.

How do believers identify with Jesus publicly today? Through baptism. Baptism is going public with your faith. It's how you go on record as being a Christian. There are some of you here, maybe you've been coming to TJC for a few months or for over ten years, but you've never publicly identified with Jesus in baptism. You cannot live forever in secret. At some point, as we see in our text today, it is vital that you take your public stand and declare your allegiance to the King. If that's you, I'm going to ask you not to wait any longer. At the end of service, come down and see one of the people that will be up front after service. They will talk with you about taking the next step.

Maybe it is being more public about your faith at work or with family or with a friend. There are situations in which people lay low about their allegiance to Christ, but for all, there comes a time when we must take our stand.

Luke 9:26 -- *“For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.”*

Don't be ashamed of your Lord. Go public with your faith.

REVIEW:

- ❖ Read John 19:38-42
- ❖ Who were Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus?
- ❖ Why is it significant that they ask to bury Jesus? What did they have to give up?
- ❖ What does Pilate's agreement to their request possibly reveal about him?

REFLECT:

- ❖ Why do people hide their faith in Jesus?
- ❖ Why should we be unashamed about our faith in Jesus?
- ❖ Discuss a time when you hid your faith in Jesus or when you publicly declared it and what happened.

RESPOND:

- ❖ What is holding you back from publicly declaring your faith in Jesus either through baptism or in a particular situation?

MEDITATE:

- ❖ Luke 9:26 -- *“For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.”*

MEMORIZE:

- ❖ Romans 1:16 -- *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*

PRAYER FOCUS:

- ❖ Director of Creative & Communication - **Ally Johnson**
- ❖ Ministry - **Kids Ministry**
- ❖ **Pray for our long-term families:**
 - The Wilsons
 - The Grays
 - The Starks (departing in October)
- ❖ **Pray for our mid-term sent ones:**
 - Kaesi
- ❖ **Pray for our short-term teams:**
 - Central Asia Team departs on September 29
- ❖ **Pray for the lost - Unreached People Group (UPG): Afghan in United States**
 - **Population in country:** 102,000
 - **Global population:** 918,900
 - **Christian Adherent:** 0.00%
 - **Evangelical:** 0.00%
 - **Primary Religion:** Islam
 - **Primary Language:** Dari
 - **Summary:** Afghans living in the United States are spread across the country. The largest concentrations are in New York, California and Virginia. They have been migrating to America in small numbers since the mid-1800s, but thousands relocated to the United States after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and Operation Enduring Freedom.
 - **Prayer Focus:** Pray for many Christian believers to take Christ to the Afghans in a loving way. Pray for the hearts of the Afghans in the United States to be soft, fertile ground for the word of God. Pray for them to encounter the good news in their own language and also in English as they adopt the language. Ask God to draw them to himself and establish a church planting movement among them.

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