

A secret disciple

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[0 : 0 0] We return with me now to the chapter that we read in the New Testament, Mark chapter 15. And we'll focus for a few minutes today on verses 43 to 46.

Verses 43 to 46 of Mark chapter 15. And now when the evening was come, because it was the preparation, that is the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, an honorable counselor, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came and went in boldly unto Pilate and craved the body of Jesus.

And Pilate marveled if he were already dead, and calling unto him the centurion, he asked him whether he had been any while dead. And when he knew it of the centurion, he gave the body to Jesus.

And he bought fine linen and took him down and wrapped him in the linen. Calvary, the time is the Friday afternoon of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

He had just died, and his body, his lifeless body, still hung on the tree. His disciples had all fled. Only a few faithful women waited and watched from afar off.

[1 : 1 5] The next day was the Jewish Sabbath. So everything, even on that hill of Golgotha, everything had to be tidied up. So that soon Jesus' body would be taken down, and would be thrown into a common grave, along with the other crucifixion victim.

The women watched afar off, but of course they couldn't claim the body of Jesus to give him an honorable burial. And it was at this time, at this very moment, that a man called Joseph, of a little-known place called Arimathea, came forward.

Now we haven't heard of him before, and we won't hear of him again. After this incident is over, we don't hear any more about him. This man is a man of influence.

He's a rich man. He's a counselor. He's a member of the highest court of the land, the Sanhedrin. He's a good man and a just. He is a follower of Jesus.

But secretly, we're told. He came to Pontius Pilate, and he asked for the body of Jesus. He's a very man for the occasion, because he had influence with Pontius Pilate.

[2 : 3 1] So Pontius Pilate commanded that the body of Jesus, after he had checked that he was really dead, the body of Jesus was released to him. We read that Joseph took fine linen.

He went and bought fine linen. And when he took the body of Jesus down from the cross, we read that he wrapped him in it and laid him in his own new tomb that was hewn out of a rock, and that he rolled a stone blocking the entrance.

And then he disappears back into history as suddenly as he appeared. So let's have a few thoughts about this man, Joseph of Adamathia.

This man, Joseph of Adamathia, was a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, but secretly for fear of the Jews. He was a Christian, but he didn't want it made public.

He didn't want anybody to know that he was a Christian. He didn't want his friends and his business associates. He didn't want the fellow counselors on the bench with him. He didn't want them to know that he was a follower of this carpenter, that he was a follower of Jesus of Nazareth.

[3 : 47] He didn't want them to know that he was a believer who believed that this Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah that they were all waiting for. So why was he a secret disciple?

What kept him back from publicly professing the name of Jesus? He was a man who liked to keep in the shadows in the background.

Maybe he wasn't bold and assertive at all. Maybe he was genuinely shy. Maybe he was genuinely afraid of what his fellows would say.

That he wasn't a strong personality, not a strong character. He was afraid of what they would say and what they would do about him. What we would call today peer pressure. Maybe he was afraid of naming the name of Jesus and publicly professing his name because he was rich.

We read that he was rich. Jesus himself has said how difficult it was for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. But when a rich man becomes a believer, then his riches can be often, and often is, a great help, a great talent to be used for the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[5 : 04] But it's also, the Bible teaches it, a great hindrance to believe. A great hindrance in the initial act of believing. It keeps a person back from following the Lord Jesus Christ.

And by riches, we don't mean just silver and gold. We mean the things of the world, the material possessions that people gather along the way. It keeps a person back from following Christ.

If you've got an awful lot of things and your heart is bound up for those things. The poor, you see, could easily follow Jesus because they didn't have much to leave behind. When Jesus said, follow me, then it was sort of no problem for them because they just walked away and left their old nets and things like that and followed the Lord Jesus Christ.

They could walk away from the things of the world without too much of a problem because they were leaving just a little thing behind. But Joseph of Arimathea was rich and he was slow to follow.

Maybe he was like the young man who came to Jesus with questions about his salvation who went away sorrowful because Jesus had struck a raw nerve in telling him to sell everything that he had and to give to the poor.

[6 : 17] For this young man had great possessions, really. Joseph of Arimathea had wealth so at least we know that he was cautious and duly cautious.

He didn't cast in his lot with the poor people who followed Jesus at all. He didn't go down, as it were, amongst the ordinary people who followed Jesus. Oh, his heart was in the right place but maybe his wealth hindered him in the race.

Or maybe it was his position in the community. His position in the office, in the Sanhedrin. He was a counsellor. He was a majesty. He was an honourable counsellor.

So that he was concerned about his position. He'd be concerned about his human honour and the way that people considered him in the society.

Honour among men is a great danger to be warned against. Trying to be popular is a great temptation to everybody.

[7 : 19] But it is a grave danger, particularly in the things that belong to the truth. Particularly with the preachers and the office bearers and the church members.

It is a great weakness, not a, well, maybe not a weakness but a temptation to be nice and popular to nice people. So that people will approve of us and people will like us.

But not doing away with the truth. Not with the erosion of the truth. That cannot be, must not be. But Joseph of Adamathia was honoured amongst his fellows.

And although this honour and this desire for honour and popularity didn't lead him totally astray, maybe it did make him a little bit overcautious about matters of the soul.

His enthusiasm for Christ was maybe dampened down by his position in society. Or was it shrinking from public profession of the Lord Jesus Christ?

[8 : 22] Maybe it was a form of cowardice. Which is unworthy of the position into which the Lord had placed him because the Lord gives you your position in life. And he expects you to accept that responsibility.

So maybe it was a form of cowardice which was unworthy of the position that he had given to this man Joseph. And Joseph of Adamathia lost an awful lot in being a secret disciple.

He lost an awful lot by remaining in secrecy. because he didn't spend any time with the Lord Jesus Christ. He was not one of the twelve that followed Jesus everywhere.

And during that brief but golden period in which Jesus walked this earth when his disciples walked and talked with him and ate and drank with him and had fellowship with him Joseph was not with them.

He missed all that Jesus said and did. He missed those wonderful conversations that Jesus had with the disciples after the multitude had gone. He missed the teaching and the training that Jesus was giving his disciples that would have made maybe Joseph of Adamathia a founder figure in the early New Testament church.

[9 : 41] If he had thrown in his lot for the disciples maybe he would have been with Peter and John and James in the very building of the early church. maybe we hear no more about him because there is no more to tell.

Maybe he didn't do anything else other than just this one thing. Perhaps this one great act which ensures his name is not forgotten is the only thing he did that is worth recording.

We don't really know but we do know that Joseph must have been a sadder less useful man because he followed Jesus afar off. Because he was a secret disciple he must have been a man who didn't reach his full potential in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He missed out because he was a disciple but secretly. But it is interesting to see that the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ the crucifixion cross brought him out into the open.

When the crucifixion took place when Jesus died on the cross of Calvary Joseph is drawn into open and public profession the cross the life of Jesus the miracles that he had been formed his great discourses his wonderful teaching his lifestyle none of those brought Joseph into a public profession.

[11 : 09] These all were used by him probably to build up a secret discipleship but it took the death of Jesus on the cross to influence him into action.

He hadn't consented to the death penalty for Jesus we read when the Sanhedrin considered it in the court there. Maybe he and Nicodemus had abstained maybe they had left the room altogether but when he saw that the death penalty was passed and when he saw that the death penalty was actually carried out on this man Jesus whom he knew was innocent then Joseph was forced to make a public stand he couldn't remain a silent witness of murder without doing something so he came forward he came forward to claim the body of Jesus a servant of the Lord late Joseph very late Joseph but not too late maybe you've been a secret disciple of the Lord maybe you've been like that for years is it not time for you to leave the safety of your hiding place to come away from the anonymity of the crowd where is time for you to stand forced in public acknowledging you are the Lord with some of you it's late very late but not too late we have you see so much more understanding of the cross than Joseph had the Holy Spirit has recorded for us an awful lot about the crucifixion scene and he explains to us the meaning of the cross we have the sayings of Jesus on the cross and the way he patiently bore the spite and the hatred of the people who crucified him we know and we've studied

Father forgive them for they know not what they do we've heard him say I thirst and he saw that he wouldn't drink the alcoholic mixture that would have dulled his senses for that up to the very last moment Jesus was the Savior and there was work to be done even on the cross his mother had to be looked after and had to be put in the care of the apostle John the penitent thief had to be listened to and dealt with and encouraged and led into glory that very day well we don't know if Joseph was there watching we don't know if he was listening but we know just as if we had been there at the cross we know what we don't do we know what Jesus said we know what Jesus did and his responsibility is on us to respond to the drawing power of the cross of the Lord

Jesus Christ and then of course there were the strange happenings when Jesus surrendered his spirit when Jesus died the sun acknowledged him and went out for three hours not just a local little sort of blip but throughout the whole world the sun went out for three hours darkness that was over the whole earth the temple acknowledged him because the veil of the temple was rent in two access to the most holy place available to all worshipers the earth acknowledged him because the earth shook with an earthquake the rocks acknowledged him because they splintered and death itself acknowledged him because death gave up some of the saints which slept in the graves and graves were opened and people came back to life the hardened

Roman centurions with a lot of the soldiers round about acknowledged him and said truly this was the son of God my friend my secret disciple is there nothing in all life that will make you come into the open it's a personal message he died for you the nails the spear the thirst the patient bearing of all the cruelty and the malice and the mocking and the division all for you and all for me and yet are you still afraid are you still ashamed to own him as your lord and saviour can you not say with awe and wonder he loved me and gave himself for me Joseph of Arimathea was moved by the cross and he was drawn by the cross he came out of his hiding place he came out and said to the Holy Spirit tell the four writers of the gospel tell Matthew Mark

[16 : 30] Luke and John tell them to write my name among the followers of Jesus because we have it recorded in the four gospels the story of Joseph of Arimathea but you may say that the times and the place in which we live do not demand witnesses in the same way that the time of the crucifixion of Jesus demanded that the time we live in is not really as demanding on a Christian and on people making their profession the church is strong the times are peaceful nobody is being persecuted for his religion Jesus is not hanging on a cross waiting to be buried so there's no harm done if I remain quiet and hidden Joseph had remained quiet during Christ's ministry on earth during all Christ's ministry on earth Joseph remained quiet the people at one time had taken up stones to stone

Jesus to death another time they said he was mad another time they blasphemed him saying that he was in league with the devil and that that was through the devil's power that he was performing miracles they demanded Barabbas at one time Barabbas be released instead of Jesus and they cried out again and again crucify him and throughout all of this Joseph of Arimathea remained secret and remained quiet hidden anonymous yes but still numbered with those who were enemies of the Lord Jesus Christ still numbered with them but when Jesus was crucified Joseph couldn't stand it any longer he stands out from the enemies of the Lord Jesus Christ and he publicly acknowledges that he's now joining himself to Jesus joining himself to the followers of the Lord

Jesus Christ are you content to go on being numbered with the unbelieving world oh you may have a hope within yourself that you're saved and that you're content to remain with the enemies of Christ knowing that you are saved you know my friends the church of the Lord Jesus Christ needs you today as much as Joseph of Arimathea was needed the church is under attack the truth is under attack all around us the very world attacks the truth the media the papers everything attacks the truth those in power in positions of power in state and sadly even in the church we join hands against our Lord Jesus Christ eroding and trampling underfoot the truths of the gospel standards are trodden underfoot around about us ordinary decent standards of day to day living as shown to us in the Bible are cast aside as man goes his own way doing his own thing and demanding a freedom that can only lead him into the pit of hell ignoring the maker's handle ignoring what the Lord says moving away from all that the Lord has laid down for the good of man and for his own glory all of these are under attack our land is given up to the mad rush after the things of today the things that do not satisfy the things that do not last is there nothing you can do for Jesus do you remain silent sitting amongst the Lord amongst the people who are the Lord's enemies doing nothing for Jesus it wasn't easy to do what Joseph did it wasn't an easy thing for him at all you can't be too hard on Joseph at all because he was a bold man he took tremendous risk in what he did he came to claim the body of Jesus and his position in the Sanhedrin as a counsellor as a majestrate was put at risk as risk and even his very life was put at risk because he was aligning himself with this man

Jesus who had been crucified and the Jews had got a taste of blood and they were looking for people who were supporting the way who were supporting Jesus and following his teaching they were looking for people like that the persecution was about to start Pontius Pilate could have asked him what do you mean are you a Christian as well are you a follower as well and on his admission on his own admission he could easily have finished up on the cross there on the Monday morning he risked his life as well as his own position and then we read that he actually took down the body of the Lord Jesus Christ he removed the nails he took the body down from the cross which meant that he broke the Jewish ceremonial law now it might not seem much to us sinister us here but it was an awful sin that he committed it was an awful thing that he did there breaking the Jewish ceremonial law especially during

Passover week because it was completely against the Jewish law to touch a dead body and of course we read about that he had expense as well because he had to buy linen and he wrapped the body of Jesus in it and then he gave Jesus something that was very precious to a Jewish family the family tomb it was everybody's ambition to own a family tomb to have a tomb of their own and this was a new tomb that Joseph had got for himself and for his family he had got hewn into the rock but he put the body of Jesus into it he gave it up for Christ it seems to be in the study that Joseph of Arimathea is speaking to two people who may be here today the believer who remains hidden amongst non-believers peaceful uncomfortable doing nothing for Jesus nothing for his cause making the church the visible number of the church of Jesus Christ needlessly small and then the second person that I think

[23 : 24] Joseph of Arimathea speaks to is to the believer who remains hidden among believers peaceful and comfortable doing nothing for Jesus doing nothing for his cause making the church of the Lord Jesus Christ needlessly inactive do one makes the number of the visible church needlessly small and the other one makes it needlessly inactive and as we approach the communion Sabbath in our examination of ourselves not only do we look at our own sin at our things that we do that are wrong but we also see what are we not doing for the Lord Jesus Christ what are we not doing for his cause the forces of evil are active ever active and are we sitting back seeker disciples but inactive there is much work to be done and to the secret anonymous believer and to the lazy inactive believer

I plead with you with the words of the Lord Jesus Christ himself in the garden of Gethsemane when he came back there from praying and he found his disciples sound asleep and he saw the enemy approaching he said rise up let us go for he that betrayeth me is at hand the church of the Lord Jesus Christ needs people to stand up for Jesus even if you're only there to encourage the number you must not remain behind you must not remain in secret you myself but you also detract from the power of the church of Jesus and one day if you remain anonymous if you remain a secret disciple you will regret him because you will not reach the potential that Christ has for his own people who struggle and strive to serve him may one of us find the courage to do what is right may a Christian become an active

Christian doing what is right for our beloved saviour who died that we might live amen let us pray Lord we ask thy blessing upon thine own word and we pray that thy known Holy Spirit would move amongst us making us aware of what the Holy Spirit is saying to us and that each one of us would arise and go to serve thee wherever there was placed us we ask that we would serve thee there that if it is in a workplace if it is at a home if it is at a kitchen sink or at a cuckoo or wherever Lord we pray that we would not despise the privilege that was given to us of knowing that Jesus Christ died on the cross for sinners such as we are and we pray that we would be encouraged to go forward knowing that Jesus loves us this we know for the Bible tells us so so help us to be motivated by love do not allow us to sit down quietly in a corner as secret disciples but help us to march under the unfurled banner of the cross that each one of us would join to make this church a church that is terrible with banner hear us oh Lord God we need thy help we ask in Jesus name

Amen