



THE EXHORTER

“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40

The Palmer Road church of Christ, Westland, Mi. (prchurchofchrist.org)

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Jump Start # 1439

John 19:38 *After these things Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate granted permission. So he came and took away His body.*

His name is Joseph. His brief entry in the Bible is found in those few hours between Jesus' death and burial. Joseph was a prominent member of the Jewish Council, the same Council that condemned Jesus, produced false witnesses and sent the Lord to Pilate for Roman execution. Joseph was a disciple. One of the Gospels refers to him as a good and righteous man. Others tell us that he did not consent with the Council decision and action.

Jesus was crucified. It was late Friday afternoon. Within a few hours, probably about three hours, the Jewish Sabbath would begin. If Jesus was to be buried, it had to be within those few hours, otherwise His body would remain on the cross until Sunday. Joseph was fulfilling prophecy by using his tomb for the burial of Jesus. There remained one huge obstacle, he had to get permission. He couldn't just take the body off the cross. Roman guards, Jewish radicals and others would have prevented that. So, this secret disciple goes to Pilate. He is granted an audience, probably because of his role on the Council. Under normal circumstances, criminals executed by Rome would be dumped in a common, unmarked grave. But this wasn't normal times, nor was Jesus a criminal. Pilate listens. He grants permission. Joseph must have told Pilate his intentions because the tomb would be sealed and guards placed around the tomb.

The process of removing the body and washing it was not an easy task. Jesus was bloodied. There were holes in his hands and feet. There was a wound in his side. His back was ripped open by the scourging. His face would have been swollen and dirty. They move quickly. The body is wrapped in linens. Nicodemus, who also was there, brought spices to put on the body. It was then carried a short way and placed into the new tomb that belonged to Joseph. One must wonder if they said a few words over the body of Jesus. Time was short, but He was the Lord.

By now, the secret was out. Joseph had revealed that he was one of "them." He belonged to Jesus. His place on the Council would have been immediately removed. Fellow Jews would view Joseph as a traitor and a fool. The secret disciple was now revealed.

(OVER)

Most of us have stood in Joseph's shoes at one time. We fear others. We fear what friends might think about our faith. We fear not being accepted. So we try to keep a lid on our faith. We stuff our faith to the background. We hide our faith. But to be successful with this, it's more than being secret about our faith, we must go along with what others are doing. Instead of standing out, we blend in. Instead of being transformed, we conform. The secret disciple fears losing his job. The secret disciple doesn't want to be the focus of jokes at family reunions. The secret disciple doesn't want his hunting buddies or fishing buddies to not include him anymore. So his faith remains a secret. It doesn't show. He is not a light into the world. The secret disciple in today's world becomes a compromiser. He rides the fence on questionable activities. His language may be a bit rough. His choices lean toward the worldly side of things. Never does he talk about church and if his friends bring it up that he goes, he dismisses it as only to please his wife. He never corrects his friends loose and gutter talk. He never sees the rich value of being a follower of Christ. The secret disciple hides his faith and remains weak spiritually.

Usually one of two things happens to the secret disciple. With Joseph, it got to a point where he no longer could remain silent. He didn't care about self. Right was right and he went to Pilate. People would know. He didn't care. The principle trumps personal feelings. That happens today. A secret disciple can only take so much of his friends prejudicial mocking of some people. A fire burns within him and he defends what is right. He is tired of co-workers trashing God and ridiculing the Bible, so he speaks out. The secret comes out. He stands with Christ. He's changed after that. He no longer cares what others think. He stands with Jesus. He is proud to be known as a disciple of Jesus. From that moment on, he is on board all the way with the Lord.

But there is another choice secret disciples sometimes make. Instead of stepping up and standing with the Lord, they throw in the towel on Jesus. They pull the plug on their faith. They join their friends in becoming worldly, ungodly, and irreligious. They stop worshipping. They no longer believe. Some even write blogs about their terrible experiences in faith. They become loud and vocal against God's church. They are not in a position to speak on that subject since they barely knew anything, however, in their circle of friends, they become the loud spokesman against religion. Everything is seen through negative eyes.

Secret disciple. You won't see him bowing his head in public places to pray. You won't find him reading his Bible at work or on an airplane. He doesn't want others to know. He's afraid.

When Joseph went to Pilate, he didn't know if the Roman governor would grant his request or if he would have him arrested and executed as well. He didn't know. He didn't care. Right was right and he no longer could be silent.

Now, how about you? Do those you work with know that you love and follow the Lord? How shocking it is for people to say, "I didn't know he went to church?" Our faith ought to show. It should be obvious whose side you are on. Your dress, your language, your attitude, your work ethic, your behavior should point to Christ. It's time to stop being afraid. It's time to let the world know that you are a disciple of Jesus.

The secret disciple is a miserable person. He hopes no one finds out. He hopes that he can continue this little game for a long time. His secret is not doing himself any good and it is certainly not helping his friends find the Lord.

Stand up, stand up for Jesus-that's more than a song. That's the way it must be.

Roger Shouse