

From Fear to Faithful Commitment

My first article in this new series from John 19:38-42 was entitled, “A Fear of Commitment.” Thus far we’ve met Joseph of Arithemia and Nicodemus, two men who were “secret disciples” of Jesus because of a crippling fear of the Jewish leaders. Christians cannot keep their commitment to Jesus secret indefinitely. On the night prior to his crucifixion, Jesus commanded his disciples to “love one another. . . . By this all people will know that you are my disciples.” (John 13:35) Jesus’ command shows us that our commitment to him must also include an openly public and faithful commitment to our Christian brothers and sisters in the local church for “all people” to see (1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:11-16; Hebrews 13:17; 1 John 4:21).

In verse 38 we learned that Joseph of Arithemia, a “rich man” (Mt. 27:57), had asked the Jewish leadership to give him the body of Jesus so that he could be properly buried. Let’s look now at verses 39-40: Nicodemus, “came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.” It’s almost certain that Nicodemus, like Joseph, was a rich man. The burial spices would have been very costly to obtain. Both men would have, likely, had servants to help to carry this enormous amount of spices to the place where Jesus’ body was to be prepared for burial. The “burial custom of the Jews,”—rather than embalming—consisted, primarily, in the body being wrapped in spices. This was designed, generally speaking, to take away the terrible odor of the body as it decomposes.

In addition to the preparation with the “myrrh and aloes,” we learn in verse 41 that “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. . . . since the tomb was *close at hand*, they laid Jesus there.” This is important information. Not only is Jesus’ body properly prepared, as is the custom of the Jews, we know that time is running out. Shortly after three in the afternoon, Jesus had “given up his spirit.” (Mt. 27:50; Mk. 15:37; Lk. 23:46) These burial preparations had to be completed prior to six on Friday evening because that was when the Jewish Sabbath would begin. We’ve learned that the tomb is new; it’s close by; and no other body has ever been placed there. Matthew tells us that Joseph of Arimathea owns this tomb which he had cut in the rock (Mt. 27:60). We’re also told in Matthew that “he rolled a great stone in front of the entrance of the tomb.” Interestingly, John is the only gospel writer that tells us that the place where Jesus was crucified and the place where he was buried were remarkably close together within a garden—almost certainly an enclosed garden which was common in those days.

What are we to make of these elaborate and expensive plans for Jesus’ burial by these two men who had been—up to this point—secret disciples? Some might say, “They only honored Jesus in this way because they had the money to do it. After all, they were rich.” We know that those who do not follow Jesus—whether rich or poor—have no real

interest in doing anything to honor him. Here we see that these two men no longer wish to remain secret disciples. There's no indication *whatsoever* that these two men did this for any other reason than because, by grace, they had a desire to stop fearing man and to replace that fear with a proper fear or reverence for God. Their desire was *ultimately* to die to self and to live for Christ. A genuine fear of God must, necessarily, bring about positive change in our lives, including our full commitment to Jesus Christ *no matter the cost*.

In summary, after Jesus' death, Joseph and Nicodemus, by grace, showed their desire to overcome their fear of man and faithfully commit to Jesus by dying to their own selfish desires. Listen to these words of Jesus' recorded in Luke 9:25-26: "For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits his soul. 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....." True commitment to Jesus Christ cannot be honestly claimed by anyone who refuses—in an ongoing way—to *die to self* and comprehensively commit to Jesus Christ which will always include a faithful commitment to the local church.

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