

A Secret Faith is No Faith at All

(John 19:38-42)

I. Introduction

- A. Gary Coleman died on May 28 after suffering a stroke and lapsing into coma
 - 1. While he starred in a sitcom (*Different Strokes*), his real life was a tragedy
 - a. He suffered kidney disease, two transplants and underwent daily dialysis
 - b. His TV millions were siphoned away by his parents & business manager
 - c. He came famous for assaults, disorderly conduct & suicide attempt
 - 2. When he died at 42, no one had legal standing to decide what to do with body
 - a. His ex-wife, ex-girlfriend and even ex-parents fought over the remains
 - 1) So ex-wife announced the funeral, so ex-girl got a restraining order
 - 2) His parents weighed in; so did Todd Bridges (*Whatchutalkin 'bout, Willis*)
 - b. Of course, what they are fighting over isn't his body but his estate
 - 3. After delays and threatened court action, Coleman was cremated on Friday
- B. There was a similar question being asked after the death of Jesus on the cross
 - 1. OK, the problem wasn't people fighting over claiming control of his body
 - a. Problem was no one claimed the body because it meant taking a huge risk
 - b. Under Roman law, the associates of insurrectionist were insurrectionists.
 - 1) Authorities would look at one claiming Jesus' body with suspicion
 - 2) Who would come forward and expose themselves someone to risk?
 - 2. Well, it certainly wasn't the people that you would have expected
 - a. It wasn't His brothers, although it was really their responsibility.
 - b. It wasn't Peter or James or John—they were his closest friends.
 - c. It wasn't even Lazarus, the friend who owed Jesus his very life.
 - 3. The men who claimed the body of Jesus were the last we would expect
 - a. John identifies the men who buried Jesus as members of the Sanhedrin
 - b. Up to this point, they had not made their faith in Jesus known to anyone
 - c. After Calvary, these two men took the risk of making their faith known
 - 4. Our text this morning is taken from tomorrow's reading, **John 19:38-42**.

II. Having a Secret Faith

- A. Those who claimed Jesus' body were part of same Sanhedrin that condemned
1. The first was Joseph of Arimathea, whom John calls "*a disciple of Jesus.*"
 - a. But he was secret disciple too "*afraid of the Jews*" to follow Jesus openly.
 - b. Luke says he had not approved the vote to condemn Jesus (**Lk 23:50-51**)
There was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man, who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea and he was waiting for the kingdom of God.
 - c. Joseph had been afraid to act on his faith, but that would change here.
 2. The second man was Nicodemus, the Pharisee who came to Jesus in **John 3**
 - a. John says specifically in **John 3** that he "*came to Jesus at night*" (**3:2**)
 - 1) Why come at night? We suggested maybe he worked during the day?
 - 2) Or maybe he was trying to avoid the crowds that followed Jesus
 - 3) Or maybe he was trying to avoid being identified by the crowds.
 - b. John again identifies him as, "*earlier had visited Jesus at night*" (**19:39**)
 - c. It seems likely that Nicodemus, like Joseph, was a secret disciple
 3. This reminds us of what John says about some Jewish leaders (**12:42-43**).
⁴² *Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue;* ⁴³ *for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.*
 - a. Some leaders believed in Jesus, but they were afraid to confess him
 - 1) In **John 9**, the blind man Jesus healed was thrown out of synagogue.
 - 2) Jewish leaders were afraid the same would happen— *they kept quiet.*
 - b. John said they "*loved praise from men more than praise from God*"
- B. We live in a world that has become often blatantly antagonistic to our faith.
1. Sometimes things would go easier if we kept faith quiet. Ask Dan Pritchett
 - a. Pritchett heads a company called Logos Research (*creates Bible software*)
 - b. Dan volunteered to be a Big Brother—they asked about his software
 - 1) He said he was Christian and tried to follow Bible (*no premarital sex*)
 - 2) They turned him down as a Big Brother. Later he was quoted—
"I guess my morals were too high; they must be looking for low morals"
 - c. If he just would have kept quiet about his faith, everything would be cool

2. Or like UNC class discussion on, *“Why religious people are homophobic”*
 - a. Timothy Mertes spoke up and suggested *“phobic”* is the wrong word
 - 1) He said that as a Christian, he saw homosexuality as *“immoral act”*
 - 2) He said he was *“disgusted”* when had to explain men kissing to son
 - b. Professor accused Mertes of hate speech; his car was later vandalized
3. Or Jonathan Lopez who quoted two Bible verses in a speech in Speech 101
 - a. The professor interrupted him and forced him to stop his presentation
 - b. The professor refused to give him a grace, *“Ask God what your grade is”*
 - c. Everything would have been fine if he’d had kept his faith hidden

III. A Secret Faith Is No Faith at All

- A. **Back to the Text:** Jesus is dead and everyone who knew him hesitates a bit.
 1. His closest friends had abandoned him in the Garden of Gethsemane.
 - a. One of his trusted friends had betrayed him to his enemies.
 - b. The voices that shouted *“Hosanna!”* became taunts of *“Crucify Him!”*
 - c. The friend who said, *“I will never leave you”* then denied him 3 times.
 2. Jesus died virtually alone, and afterwards his body remained all alone.
- B. But two secret disciples ask for permission to bury him? *Why take the risk?*
 1. Was it guilt because Sanhedrin condemned Jesus? Neither had been there.
 - a. Mark says of Sanhedrin, *“all condemned him as worthy of death”* (**14:64**)
 - b. But Joseph had not given his consent— excluded from kangaroo court.
 - c. But Joseph and Nicodemus still might have felt personally responsible.
 2. What changed them? They saw the cross and cross made up their minds!
 - a. Maybe it was the gentle and dignified way Jesus faced his fate.
 - b. Maybe it was the forgiveness offered to the mob calling for blood.
 - c. Maybe it was the haunting cry, *“My God, why have you forsaken me?”*
 - d. Maybe it was the quake that shook earth or torn veil that shook Judaism.
 - e. Maybe they had to agree with the pagan Centurion’s confession.
 3. But there was something about the cross that led them to decide and act!
 - a. So they took their life in their hands and claimed the body of Jesus.
 - b. Secret faith was made known because they had come to see the cross!

IV. Conclusion

- A. The cross demands that we make a choice—you can't keep faith hidden
 - 1. You can't stay neutral to a story of a God who love you and saves you
 - a. You can respond in faith and action as did Joseph and Nicademus.
 - b. You can rationalize it away and ignore it like the Pharisees.
 - c. You can turn on your heel and head for the hills like the disciples did.
 - 2. But you can't be neutral—that is one thing the cross does not permit.
 - a. Either the cross is history's most important event or biggest fraud.
 - b. Either the cross is our life-giving force or it is the world's biggest farce.
 - 3. You cannot keep your faith secret, because a secret faith is no faith at all
- B. What are some signs that we might be trying to keep our faith a secret faith?
 - 1. Do people know about you favorite sport, music or movie... but not faith?
 - a. We tend to talk about things that we are passionate about, right?
 - 1) How long people close to me know me know I'm a Razorback fan?
 - 2) May it's the coffee cup, '94 championship license tag or coke bottle
 - b. So do people know you're a U2 or Avatar fan, but not about your faith?
 - c. If so, maybe you have a secret faith... which is really no faith at all.
 - 2. Do you get into conversations on politics but not about matters of faith?
 - a. Do the people around you know all about your political views on issues
 - b. You freely discuss healthcare reform, immigration law, bank bailouts...
 - 1) But then you tend to shy away from religious/spiritual discussions
 - 2) Not asking to preach at people from soap box (*doesn't work anyway*)
 - c. If you avoid faith discussions, maybe yours is secret faith—no faith at all
 - 3. Are those you work with or go to school free to discuss sin with you?
 - a. Do they curse, tell dirty joke, brag of sexual conquest or getting wasted?
 - b. And they feel free to do that because they have no inking you disapprove
 - 1) Again, that not to say you regularly preach at them and judge them
 - 2) But you've never shown them a better way... by your life or words
 - c. If any of this gets close, then maybe yours is secret faith—no faith at all
- C. Have you decided, really decided to follow Jesus this morning?