

Transcription of 17ID1955

Mark 15:42-47

"In Response To His Death"

July 16, 2017

Let's open our Bibles this morning to Mark 15:42 as we continue our verse-by-verse study through Mark's gospel.

We've spent the last three weeks or so speaking about the cross and all the things that took place there as the Lord gave His life for us.

This morning, between His death and the resurrection, all of the gospels tell us some early reactions to His death. And that's what we're going to look at this morning, from verse 42 through the end of the chapter, before we get to the resurrection, beginning next week.

Simeon, in the temple, the prophet, said to Mary (back in chapter 2:35 of Luke), "A sword is going to be piercing your soul, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed." And certainly Jesus' death revealed the hearts of many folks. I suspect that your view of who He is and why He died reveals your heart - in terms of your relationship with God. But it's an interesting picture to see what was taking place the moment the Lord died, before the resurrection.

It says, in (Mark 15) verse 42, "Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time. So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph." We know that Jesus died at 3:00 in the afternoon, as He dismissed His spirit. The Sabbath began (again, because of the Passover, there was more than one Sabbath in a row) at sundown. So, though the practice was to let people who died on the cross hang there for days as warnings to everyone around, in respect for the Jewish holiday, they often would break the legs of those who were crucified on that day before the Sabbath came. I think we talked to you about that last week, that you die through suffocation; and so, if you can't stand up or push up on your feet to exhale, you die much quicker. And if that was the case, you would die in hours rather than days. But even then, Pilate was

very surprised at Jesus in six hours - because they hadn't even broken the legs, if you will, of those who were condemned - that He had died so quickly.

But when He died, we read (in verse 43) that there was a man, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a Sanhedrin member, which meant that he was part of that ruling Supreme Court of the Jews, seventy guys and all. And that he was a prominent council member, a distinguished man; someone who'd been around a long time, held in high esteem, certainly, his wisdom sought out by others. He carried a lot of weight. And yet this guy, now, comes kind of out of the shadows to claim Jesus' body and to provide for Him a burial. Matthew tells us that Joseph was a very rich man (Matthew 27:57), that he lived outside of Jerusalem about twenty miles to the northwest - a place called Ramah. Ramah was the place that the prophet Samuel, in the Old Testament, was born. Luke adds in his account that Joseph was a good man and a just man (Luke 23:50), which doesn't seem to fit very much into the picture of these ruling religious leaders who were so brutal towards Jesus and so hateful towards who He is and why He had come, these guys that were charlatans and plotting His death for a long time. And yet the Lord said of Joseph, "He was a good man. He was a just man." And the Bible doesn't throw those words around loosely. Mark tells us that Joseph was "waiting for the kingdom of God," that somehow, through all of the events that had gone on, as well as the Old Testament teachings among the Jews about the Messiah not dying (they had spiritualized that; they were mute in terms of how He would suffer), Joseph was looking for the kingdom and somehow had become convinced that Jesus was the One that they were waiting for. So, at a time when every passage of the Messiah was kind of taught in a slanted way, Joseph was sure that He was the One. And now, after His death, Joseph comes to expose himself. Even though He was now not with them any longer, he came out identifying with Jesus and putting himself in a position where, though he was one of these supreme rulers, he would have been defiled with a dead body just in time for the Passover Feast that he couldn't attend. And so here's a guy whose life just gets kind of flushed out. At Jesus' death, his heart is revealed, and his faith is put on display. Up to now, according to John 19:38, he'd been a secret disciple, someone that had believed, but you wouldn't have known it. In his heart, before the Lord, he was convinced; and yet it hadn't affected him in any kind of a way at all, and so he had kept it to himself. He hadn't spoken of the Lord. He was not alone. We read (in John 12:42-43) that there were many of the rulers who believed in Jesus on this council; but because of the Pharisees, they wouldn't say so openly. "They loved the praises of men more than the praises of God." They were, out of fear of men, unable to speak

up. And so here's a guy that secretly had made a commitment to Jesus, was convinced of who He was, but openly and outwardly he had sort of kept it to himself. And it's interesting to me that there'd be seventy guys on a council, and several of them believed in the Lord, and they didn't know it, and they didn't know each other because none of them were willing to openly speak about it. They were intimidated, they were afraid, there was a cost, they wanted the approval of others, they wanted to protect their position. Their income and their reputation depended upon it. It's kind of like the story (there in John 9) of the parents, you remember, whose son was born blind, who the Lord healed. And when they were called in for interrogation, it says that they feared the Jews, and when they said, "Is this your son?" they said, "Yeah, that's our son." And, "Was he born blind?" and they said, "Yes, he was." "Well, what happened to him?" And they knew. But they said this, "Well, he's old enough. Ask him." And then you read there in John that they were afraid of the Jews who had agreed that anyone that would speak up for Christ would be put out of the synagogue, literally excommunicated from the town; you'd be on your own, kind of shunned. And so they didn't say anything. Or the fellows (in John 7) who said to Jesus, "You should go up to the feast and show yourself," and He wasn't ready yet to reveal Himself in that manner. And then we read about those who went up to the feast who wanted to talk about Jesus, who believed in Him, but they wouldn't say anything out loud. They were afraid, so they said nothing; they didn't speak openly for fear of the Jews. And here's a guy who was on the council, had heard the wicked plotting, had listened to the attitude of the people. And yet, with all of his heart believing, the fear kind of overcame him, and he treasured the approval of men more than the consequences of, maybe, identifying with Jesus. And it isn't until He dies that he comes out and says, "Okay, I'm with Him." There's a lot of identifying today in the world. "I identify as a donkey. I identify as a whatever." I identify as a Christian. So I'm going to get a shirt that says, "I identify as a Christian."

But anyway, we read (in chapter 23:51 of Luke - it's an important verse, you should maybe write it in the margin) that Joseph "had not consented to the decision and deed" of the council when it came to Jesus. So though he had come to the meetings, we suspect that he and Nicodemus - who also was a member of that council - had not voted to support what they were doing even though we read in Mark 14:64 (the last chapter back) that everyone, when it came to Jesus' death, on that council had voted in agreement to have Him killed. So the only presumption we can make is neither one of these guys showed up for that meeting because they hadn't agreed to any of those things.

So here comes Joseph out of the shadows. We know from the other gospels, especially from John, that Nicodemus was another secret follower of Jesus who had, early on in His ministry, come to the Lord, asked all the right questions, got all the right answers, and then kind of went back into the shadows. We've mentioned to you before that Nicodemus, until the death of Jesus, always came to Jesus by night. And John, whenever he mentions the word "Nicodemus" says, "Who came to Him at night." "Nick at night." (Laughing) That's the way you remember that. So, it isn't until Jesus died that he comes out into the light, if you will. And we meet him for the first time coming to Jesus at night, asking all of those questions about who Jesus is and the ways of life, and the Lord gave him that great study out of John 3, about the need to be born again. And Nicodemus had left that meeting early on in Jesus' ministry. We don't really know what happened to him during those next couple of years except he was a believer who was in hiding. He had tried to stand up, weakly so, at one of the Sanhedrin meetings (there in John 7) saying to the people, "Look, how can we condemn a man before we've heard him and have listened to him?" and he was quickly just shut up. "Oh, you're a believer as well?" and that was about as far as he could get. And sarcasm and criticism kind of pushed him back into the shadows. He was another one of those secret disciples.

So we know of two - Joseph and Nicodemus. Both of them believed in Jesus, but somehow they feared man more than they loved God or were convinced that they should serve Him. And it isn't until the death of Jesus that both of them act upon their convictions; maybe too little, too late, it might seem like. We don't know how long they were believers. Like I said, Nicodemus shows up really early on in Jesus' three-and-a-half year ministry. Joseph, we just don't know; the Bible doesn't tell us. But both of them were willing to hide out until now. And now, even Jesus' death didn't deter their passion for Him. Something happened. His sacrifice, what He ultimately did for us - it moved them. This was a dangerous time to come out and be a believer. Right? I mean, the disciples had all run to hide. They were sure they were next. There was a reason there was an upper room with a lock on it and where people were kind of crowded together, hiding. They figured they were next. And any association, certainly, that you would have with a convicted man who had been killed puts you in danger as well. But for now, and for the first time, both Joseph and Nicodemus are driven by love that overcomes fear, and fear kind of gives way to devotion. But it happened after Jesus died. For Joseph, he boldly comes to Pilate, requests the body of Jesus, and after ascertaining He was dead, Pilate gives him permission. According to John, it is here that both Nicodemus and Joseph meet. I don't know that they knew each other; or they might have known

each other, but that they were coming together that afternoon. They were both secret disciples is what John writes. And when he came to take the body, Nicodemus showed up to anoint the body. He was another wealthy guy. In fact, he brought a mixture of aloe and myrrh, burial spices. The Jews didn't embalm, and they would wrap these cloths around you and in the layers put this anointing spice and all. And so he showed up with a hundred pounds of it. Now think about that for a minute. A hundred pounds is overkill. It's overkill for anybody. They could have buried the whole community with a hundred pounds of aloe. But he's making up for lost time. Love doesn't know any bounds. He hadn't done a very good job of it while He was alive. "I'll make up for it." And if you think that's love, wait till you see the ladies who go with them and the hundred pounds to the tomb and decide that, as soon as the Passover is over, they're going to bring some more. A hundred pounds for the girls wasn't near enough. But for any normal burial, it was way too much. But John tells us they meet here at the cross when they take the body of Jesus down, and they, together, wrapped Him up for burial and then carried Him to Joseph's tomb. So, they both come boldly at His death. Joseph's tomb (John tells us) was in a garden right at the base of the mountain from which Jesus was killed or at the foot of the hill, as John puts it in chapter 19. And so two guys who probably knew each other from work but didn't know their relationship with the Lord at all.

It's an interesting thing. When you go to Proverbs 29, there's a verse that says, "The fear of man brings a snare" (verse 25), "but whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe." There is something about the fear of man that steals from you everything God would want to give you. And you find it kind of exemplified in these two lives. I mean, here're a couple of guys that, maybe for three years already, had trusted the Lord, believed He was the One, and yet for three years - out of fear - had missed out on hanging out with Him, listening to every word He had to say, watching Him open the eyes of the blind; having to hide at the back of the crowd if they were there at all, to sit with people that just wanted Him dead, and pretend it didn't really matter to you; or missing meetings that you didn't really want to speak up. And they went through all of these motions out of fear - secret, silent, isolated. It's hard to live a quiet Christian life. Right? It brings a snare. The word means to be trapped. It's the opposite of freedom. And at least in the Old Testament, the word "trap" is always something that you get stuck in, and you know about it when it's too late. It wasn't something you looked at and stepped in. You stepped in, and then you went, "What did I step in now?" and you get caught.

You might remember that Peter, when he was in Antioch (according to Galatians 2), had been eating with the Gentiles because he had been taught - as had many in the church - that grace was for everyone; there was no distinction between Jew and Gentile. That distinction had been removed in Christ. And so Paul said, when he was in Antioch, that Peter would just go over and have hamburgers and spare ribs with the Gentiles. But then it says when those from James came into town, and James was the pastor in Jerusalem, and that church, more than any, was slow to accept this "everyone can be saved." They were kind of locked up in their outlook as, "We're God's chosen people," and so they tended to be a little bit more legalistic and not yet so free in the grace that God had given. And it says (there in Galatians 2) when they showed up, Peter got up from the Gentile table, wiped his face with the BBQ sauce, and went over here (Laughing) and ate some Jewish food, something that was acceptable to them, some kosher stuff. And then Paul said, "I watched this happen, and then Barnabas," a guy that looked up to Peter (discipled by the disciples), "got up and moved, too." And Paul called Peter onto the carpet and openly challenged him, and he said, "You're playing the hypocrite, and Barnabas has been carried away with your hypocrisy." But it was all about fear of man. What would they think? And Peter, a guy who preaches the first sermon - a guy that has every reason to say, "This is what's right," he was at that Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 deciding about grace and mercy and how God had extended it to all, he'd been to Cornelius' house, he'd watched what the Lord had done with the Gentiles - he had every reason to stand fast, but fear of man negated the very truth, and not just truth, his experiential truth. He'd been a part of that, and yet the fear of man turned him away. Fear of man doesn't affect religious people. Most people that are religious are proud of it and outspoken. "Well, he's got a religious conviction." But pursue a personal relationship with Jesus, you can have problems.

But how do you deny His great love? And I think that's what happened here. Fear of man had kept them from saying a word until they realized the love and the extent to which Jesus would go. Jesus said, "If you deny Me before men, I will one day deny you before My Father." That's a horrible verse. Right? Matthew 10:33. I wish I didn't know where it was, but I know where it is. But I wrote in my Bible the word, "Yikes!" right next to it.

What do you really fear of man? I mean, you could make a list for these guys. Approval gets lost. Opinions matter. You want to be acceptable. No one wants to be ridiculed. Rejection and social isolation is nothing that anyone would sign up for.

But if this isn't your world, and the One that you're being isolated because of gave His life for your sins and went to save you, then what's holding you back? These men didn't speak to their families, their neighbors, their friends, their workmates. They lived a silent, believing, fruitless life. They wouldn't even know that each other believed, and they might have sat next to each other for years. There's no Bible verse that says God called you to secret service. There aren't any secret servants. Only the fear of man will keep you from publicly living it out.

Well, it took these two guys years to come forward. And up to now, however they were able to repress their desire to speak up for Him or to button their overcoats so that no one saw what colors they were wearing, they wanted to hide it all away. They didn't want anyone to know. I always read these verses and think to myself - peer pressure is not just a problem for your kids. It's our problem. And when you walk with Jesus, you're going to have to be bold and singular and filled with the Spirit and convinced of His love. The ploy of the devil is pretty simple when it comes to fear. He wants you to love the praises of men more than the praises of God. He wants you to be desirous of the applause of others more than His approval. And yet, if you look at these men's lives, it's an unfulfilled, guilt-ridden, unfruitful kind of existence. And now they come out into the open. Something happened when Jesus died. Something happened to them when they realized what He'd done. These guys who had been unfaithful to their own convictions publicly now come out of the closet, if you will. And I'm pretty sure they're going to be surprised when they both turn around and go, "What are you doing here?" "What are you doing here?" I'm sure that they were both amazed that the death of Jesus made them re-evaluate what they had been afraid to lose. And everything they had sought to protect with their silence, now they risk. Whatever they had hoped to hang on to, now they risk it because the minute these guys show themselves like this, their careers are gone. They're not going back to the next assembly meeting and being welcomed with open arms. They're going to be fired! Their security is gone. Their position is gone. The approval of others - that they'd held onto so tightly - is gone. And the three years that they might have spent with Jesus are gone. The fruitfulness is gone. Experiencing His work, gone. Loving Him more fully, gone. A treasury of memories, gone. All because of fear. And some curled-lipped, long-bearded, narrow-minded, hateful, religious opponents - that's what they were moved by. And now it's gone.

Secret discipleship always leads to diminished fellowship with God and the missing of many blessings. Because you really can't see God work unless you're out there

living for Him. The cure is simple, though, and you'll find it in the text. Just stare at the cross until the love of God is the strongest motivator of a vacillating commitment. Just stare at Him till you realize that He did that for you, and then go out and speak up, speak out. Secret discipleship isn't God's idea. And the solution for both Joseph and Nicodemus, up to this point, had been, "Mum's the word, keep your convictions to yourself." Pastor Chuck used to say, "Any dead fish can float downstream. But if you want to get upstream, you've got to swim."

So we read, in verse 43, that Joseph took courage and he came. He asked for the permission to take Jesus' body down and bury Him. Now, it took courage. If nothing else, Roman law said that if you were associated with someone who had suffered capital punishment that they, first of all, were not entitled to a burial; and second of all, if you were their supporter, you might very well face the same plight as they had. So this was not an easy move both culturally, socially, but also politically. The Jews hated Pilate, and Pilate hated them. And if you remember, it was this Sanhedrin that had been putting the screws to this guy to do what they wanted. And Joseph was a member of that team. But Joseph just wanted to honor the Lord now. The tragedy is that he waited so long to bless Him who he loved. And I know for him, until the resurrection, it felt like it was too little, too late. We do a lot of funerals here. The church is large, and so people come and then go. There're always glowing eulogies. I listen to the things that are said by family members, and they're always tear-rendering. And I always think to myself - quit sending the flowers when people die; send it to them now! Tell them what you think about them now! Rather than when they're gone. The old "I-wish-I-hads." Well, Joseph might have wished he had. He never once stood up for Jesus. He never voted for Him. He never came to His defense. He never shared what he believed. And now that He was dead, he was going to risk it all. It's almost like it's still better to risk now than to have the guilt and self-condemnation of just being silent. So he's trying to make up. Both of them.

We read, in verse 44, that Pilate marveled that Jesus was already dead. And when he found out that He'd been dead for quite some time (after the soldier was sent to look), he gave the approval. Verse 46, "Then he" (Joseph) "bought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen." That's the typical burying practice of the Jews. "And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses observed where He was laid." John tells us that it was at the cross that, like I said, he and Nicodemus met. By the way, it is the first time you

see Nicodemus in the daylight - with a hundred pounds of oils and spices and anointing oils. And they, together, buried Jesus. They took Him down to the bottom of the hill. There was a vineyard there. There was a tomb that (we read in Matthew 27:60) was new. No one had ever used it. Jesus was only going to use it for the weekend. And then they rolled a stone in front of it and over the mouth of it. Isaiah had written of the Lord, "They made His grave with the wicked - but with the rich at His death" (Isaiah 53:9). He was placed in a very lucrative, beautiful garden vineyard, if you will. And Nicodemus and Joseph, that night, must have felt as good as they had felt in years, at least under the circumstances. They finally did the right thing. They finally spoke up. They finally gave in. They took their precious possessions, and they handed over to serve the Lord that they loved. But it seemed like, man, so much time has gone by.

Significant at the cross is that, apart from John, all of the other apostles are gone. So in terms of where are they, the only thing we read in the Bible is that they ran for their lives in fear. They went into hiding. So it's almost the opposite of what we read of these two guys. The outward apostles, disciples of Jesus who had followed Him - when He is killed, run to hide to save their necks. And then there're two guys who are quiet about their faith who come out to risk their necks at the cross. So the disciples, at this point, have nothing. They are discouraged. They are afraid. His death kind of ended their hopes. His authority and power seemed to have died with Him. And it's interesting to me. Because there are a lot of people who walk with Jesus today who start off in their walks well enough only to somehow run into difficulty when the Lord doesn't do what they want, or do it in the time that they prayed for, or somehow suffer some difficulty that they hadn't planned, and they disappear. They're like these disciples, you know? They face persecution, or the Lord lets them down, and they quit identifying with the Lord. They don't walk with Him in fellowship. They hit the discouragement trail. And then there are others who seem to have years of believing but not really walking with God until they recognize the love of God, and then they can't say enough.

And then we have these faithful women, here in verse 47 at the end. Luke writes (in chapter 23:55), "And the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment." They saw a hundred pounds of spices and went, "Yeah, we can do better. Men! We can't leave it to the men!" These faithful women who continued to love the Lord do so, and they're kind of in the middle, aren't they?

They never once gave up. They never once turned away. You've got guys coming out of the closet, you've got guys going into the closet, and then the women are just faithful. They stay with Him. Unlike most of the men that you read about in the Scriptures, the Bible constantly shows women's capacity for tremendous devotion - I think far greater than guys'. In fact, I'll tell you what. If somebody burns me or rips me off, I am much more likely to write them off in my mind, forever. My wife doesn't do that. She irritates me. (Laughing) She makes excuses for them. She explains their behavior. She offers possible explanation. She just keeps loving these folks. I have written them off. Women don't need a reason to love, I don't think. They just do. Even if it's impractical, like these ladies here in our story. Men need reasons. They're much more practical. So they love far less. They go to the tomb and go, "Well, He's dead. Let's get out of here." (Laughing) And the women say, "Where are you taking Him? Where are you putting Him? And how are we going to get in there tomorrow? We're going to be back this week. We're going to finish the job." And they follow without any concern for personal risk. They haven't turn away, even if it was dangerous. Their love for the Messiah and their Master was boundless. The hundred pounds of spices wasn't enough. They just love. They've been through a lot. They've given up much. And though the resurrection to them, like everyone else's mind, is foreign, the love for Jesus didn't matter. "Despite the cost, this is what we're going to do. We're going to do it right." And like I mentioned, I think, last week or maybe the week before, the reward from loving the Lord like this is they get to see Him alive first on resurrection morning.

The only other thing that we know that took place between these verses is that on the following day, according to Matthew 27, the day after the Day of Preparation, some of the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. And they said to him - first of all, they're traveling on days they shouldn't - and they said, "While He was alive, this deceiver said that He would rise in three days." Now I find that very interesting because nobody in Jesus' group seemed to remember that. "So could you give a commandment to secure the tomb and put some guards out there so nobody comes to steal His body, so that the last deception will be greater than the first?" And Pilate gave them a guard, and he said, "Go your way," and then he said, "Make it as secure as you can." I always like those words. "Yeah, go ahead, give that a shot." And so they went, and they set the stone, and they watched it, and they sealed it, and the guards were there. That wasn't going to work either.

So you have these pictures of the early reaction to Jesus' death - both from the disciples, who had been driven by the fear of man, now coming out, out of the snare and willing to walk with Jesus, even if it's too late. And I would say to you - let them warn you - why waste your time? Get busy, man! The apostles are nowhere to be found, and the enemy will often use discouragement to drive you hopelessly away from the Lord; and that happened to them. So they take off disappointed, and they're in hiding. The cost of now associating with Him was too high, and the dividends were unsure. So they weren't willing to take the risk. And then there're the ladies who just - you can't say anything but good things about these diligent, selfless women whose great love for Jesus would be rewarded in the next verse.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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