

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

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This morning I am going to ask you to allow me to put you into the shoes of a character from the era of the days that Christ walked the earth.

Your name is Joe. You're doing pretty well. Upper middle class is what most people would consider you. You're religious. You're anxiously looking forward to your nation's deliverer. In your heart you're convinced it really could be in your life time. So you're making every effort to be prepared when He comes. You want to qualify to participate in the coming kingdom that throws off the yoke of Rome.

This is why you joined the party of the Pharisees. Admittedly it's not everything you thought it would be. But joining the Pharisees, even if Messiah doesn't come soon, has earned you a lot of respect and influence. You've worked your way up and now sit on the Sanhedrin, the most powerful ruling body of Jews. You have money. You have clout. You have power. You have respect. Life is pretty good, all things considered. but they could be better. The only thing missing is the Messiah and so you pray, you hope, you keep your eyes open. Many have come claiming to be Messiah, they have all proved to be false. Maybe the next one!

As a matter of fact in yesterday's session you, your friend Nick, and a chief priest or two from the Sadducees were assigned to go check out a Galilean preacher. A leper had come into Jerusalem yesterday to be pronounced clean and he gave credit to this preacher/teacher/healer man for curing his leprosy. So you're off today with your colleagues to find him and investigate. Along the way you and Nick playfully argue with you're Sadducee counterparts about what Messiah will be like. Inwardly you hope, outwardly you put on a charade of hard-nosed skepticism. You have to be careful about falling for a hoax too quickly.

Eventually you track down his movements and location and you arrive at a house literally swarming with people. The air is thick with anticipation and excitement. Conversations are buzzing with messiah and kingdom talk. As you and your friends approach the crowd parts. Your robes and long tassels are attention grabbers. They tell everyone who you are and the front seats are yours. HE begins teaching. And it's not long and you are engulfed with awe. He's got your attention. You've never been handled like this before. You're used to droning on and on about rules, rules, and more rules. But there is something very different about him. He talks about life and the father with a sparkle in his eye. Watching him gives you a window right into his heart. There is a love present in his countenance, a winsomeness that you've never seen. You're endeared. You're hopeful. Your thinking this may indeed be the guy!

But then everything gets interrupted! There is a commotion overhead. Someone is removing the roof tiles. Everyone is looking up and the room gets quiet. You and everybody else are thinking what are they doing? Pretty soon it is quite obvious. They're lowering a pallet with some one on it. It's a paralytic. All eyes are moving back and forth from the man to Jesus. Everyone is thinking the same thing. What's he going to do? Jesus is quiet, but smiling up at the guys on the roof and then at the paralyzed man on the floor. Then he stands up, looks straight at you, Nick and the others. He holds his stare until it really starts feeling uncomfortable. It's as if he is looking straight through you. It's as if he was hoping to win you over, but knows that it won't be easy.

And he didn't make it easy either. Because the first words out of his mouth to the man were, "Take heart son, your sins are forgiven." Well, that's a sure way to fire up a bunch of Pharisees and Sadducees like you. The only word that fills your minds is "Blasphemy." This man blasphemes. But he's got your attention alright.

He looks straight back at you and says, “Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? Which is easier to say, “your sins are forgiven, or to say, Get up and walk?” But, so that you may know the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” (he turns to the paralytic and says) “Get up, take your pallet and go home.” and the man got up and left. You and your friends are speechless, confused, angry. But you sit quiet and say nothing because the crowd is ecstatic and buzzing like crazy now.

Well, that was nearly three years ago, but you remember that day like it was yesterday. At first all you could do was find fault. All you could do was come up with reasons and excuses why he couldn’t be the one. But that night as you laid your head down, all you see in your mind was that man get up and walk. His crippled ankles and legs straightening out before your eyes. You kept remembering the way your heart beat fast as he taught and your head argued for days and even weeks with your heart. You found yourself volunteering for more investigative missions. In your head you wanted to find enough fault with him to convince your heart to join your head in declaring him false, but every time you heard him, every time you saw how he treated people, healed people, taught it seemed as if your heart just got more evidence until one day you had to admit the truth to yourself. You were convinced. You believed.

But you couldn’t let that be known. By this time more than ever, all your friends and Sanhedrin members were convinced just the opposite. So your faith in Messiah remained in the shadows. Time would come you tell yourself, when he would reveal himself and it would be obvious to all. Then it would be safe to come out of the shadows. But for now there was too much to lose. Your friends, your clout, your influence, your membership with the Pharisees...all this has become more important than you realized.

So, anyway you kept going to watch and listen to him. You began to feel guilty and ashamed. Others were confessing their faith in him and being baptized, but not you. You remained in the shadows. You would walk down the streets and hear people telling their stories about how this man changed their life, but not you...you remained in the shadows. You were a pretender with a yellow streak down your back. Pretending to be something you’re not.

You thought, “Surely I have other friends who have also converted, but if so they’re not saying so either.” You would watch the faces of other Sanhedrin members who listened to him for even hints of expressions that would give them away. But there was only one that you thought may be with you. That was Nick. Your eyes met several times one night and you realized you were watching each other for the same reason. That night you confided in each other secretly. It felt so good to be able to talk to someone about all this. But the two of you had to do it privately. He too was living in the shadows. So for two and half years you just kept your allegiance and belief in Jesus of Nazareth a secret. You remained in the shadows. It’s safer in the shadows.

Secretly you envied the poor commoners who were following him. They hadn’t much to lose to make their faith public. You envied their joy. You envied their boldness. You envied their freedom to be who they were without fear. Here you are Mr. Prestigious, powerful, a fancy robe-wearing guy riddled with fear and envying those you used to look on with contempt. This is the kind of internal conflict that brewed inside of you night after night in those weeks that led up to Passover. You never thought your friends would take their rejection of him as far as they did. You figured if he was the Messiah he couldn’t be killed like the other false Messiah’s were. And if he wasn’t Messiah then he would be executed and it wouldn’t matter anyway. So again, all the more reason to remain in the shadows and keep your identification with him secret until it was obvious to all.

But you were not prepared for what Passover week would bring. The way they would treat him. The way he would respond. You were nauseated by the hate and the anger of your party members. The way they stooped to set him up. They pulled out all the stops. Manipulation, false witnesses, illegal trial. Nothing could stop them. It was a steam roller moving forward that no one dared get in the way of.

You wanted to stand up, but you didn't. You wanted to argue for him, but you kept quiet. You just prayed secretly to yourself and remained in the shadows all the way until they put him on the cross. You saw the whole thing. You looked on as he carried the cross. You watched from a distance as they continued to beat him. You saw the lack of love and the hatred in the eyes and hearts of the other Pharisees and Sadducees who thought they were among the most righteous of all.

And then you listened as Jesus verbalized forgiveness of those pointing their fingers at him. You watched him make arrangements for his mother's care while on the cross. You listened to his last dying conversation with the lost guy on the cross next to him. Then again you looked at the high priest standing there with a cold heart, and unflinching stare. And that's when you realized you were wrong... wrong to think if they could kill him he couldn't really be the Messiah. But after watching the way he died, you knew he was the Messiah and yes, they killed him. And you stayed quietly in the shadows. And you could take it no more.

You're going to lose everything, but if you don't something you're going die inside anyway. There is no way after all you have seen and heard you could ever go back to a life of pretending. You'd never be able to live with yourself or face God someday if you didn't step out. You finally let go of your pitiful credentials, titles and worldly position.

Who are You? You are Joseph of Arimathea.

John 19:38-42 *Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. ³⁹He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. ⁴⁰Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. ⁴¹At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴²Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there. (NIV)*

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus finally threw caution to the wind and came out of the shadows. And nothing ever felt better. They were out of the shadows and forever identified as followers of Jesus of Nazareth. What about you? Does fear keep your faith in the shadows? Does everyone at work know you're a Christ follower? Or are you under the radar? Low key? I want you to know Jesus wants you to be very open about your association with Him. **Mark 8:38** *If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."* (NIV)

Every Christ follower should bring their faith out of the shadows and the scriptures instruct us in how to do this. Let me briefly just highlight some of the ways Christ-followers are called to proclaim Christ publicly.

Public Proclamations #1 – Proclaim Christ through Public Baptism

One of the very first public demonstrations Jesus calls his followers to after they believe is public baptism. Baptism is the public statement that you are a follower of Christ. It is the initiation ceremony. It is like a ring on the finger of a husband or wife. I put this ring on my finger after I made my vows publicly. In front of a crowd of witnesses I said I belong to this woman. I'm taken. I am unashamed and want this to be known. That's why we wear the ring. It is a public statement. The ring doesn't make me married, it declares my marriage. The Christian faith says Christ's followers are his bride and he is the groomsman. Baptism is the wedding ceremony, the public declaration.

If you have been claimed by Jesus Christ; if you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ, but haven't proclaimed your faith in him through public baptism you can make that decision today. There are baptism cards in the

bulletin along with a baptism FAQ sheet. (If you don't have one just hold your hand up and some one around you who doesn't need theirs will you give you one.) Jesus is interested in you standing up in front of other people and by submission to baptism declaring yourself to God, to the church, and to your family and friends. Our Festival of Grace is coming up July 23rd, if you have become a follower of Jesus Christ and want to participate in this, please fill out this card. If you've got questions about this and need a personal appointment contact me. But let's get this nailed.

Public Proclamation #2 – Proclaim Christ through Participation

Hebrews 10:25 *Let us not forsake our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.* (NASB)

Your faithful participation in your local church is a public declaration we are called on to make as well. Your public service to Christ in the church, your consistent regular participation in corporate worship is a statement. It's not a bold statement, but those who know you well ought to know and believe that your participation in your church is vitally important to you! **Romans 1:16** *I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. . .* (NIV) Baptism is kind of a one time public demonstration. The participation in and with the body of Christ is an ongoing one.

Public Proclamation #3 – Proclaim Christ Through Testimony

The apostle Paul challenged Timothy his disciple, **2 Tim. 1:8** *So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord,* (NIV) I challenge you in the same way. Live like your Lord, but testify of your Lord. Actions speak louder than words, but your words attribute your actions to Jesus Christ. It was Jesus who told his disciples *"you shall be witnesses of me in your home town, in your surrounding area and even to the ends of the earth."* (**Acts 1:8** paraphrased) Jesus said *"you are the light of the world and no one lights a lamp and then puts it in hiding or covers up."* (**Matthew 5:14-16** paraphrased)

Simply put: tell others about the difference the Lord has made in your life! Being naturally open about your association with Christ's church is one thing. But proclaiming Christ through testimony is about sharing from your life.

Public Proclamation #4 – Proclaim Christ through Communion

Christ gave us still another way to publicly proclaim him. Communion is an ordinance we are to use for two purposes, to remember his public humiliation and to proclaim his death publicly to others. **1 Cor. 11:23-26** *The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.* (NIV) Jesus wants us to proclaim his death for our friends and family until he comes back.

What step do you need to take to come further out of the shadows? Is it baptism? Is it unashamed participation among your brothers and sisters in Christ? Do you need to amp up the public nature of your relationship to the bride his church? What about stepping past your fears in giving public testimony? For those of you who think you may like to participate in the baptism service coming up July 23rd you need to fill out this card. If you're thinking about it at all, please fill out this card today so we know. But go ahead and fill this out today and ask for an appointment if you need greater clarification.

Let's pray.