

RELIGIOUS REBEL / WITNESS 2 – PART I

In the darkest moments, God often seems How would you fill in the blank?

Darkness can be good: *when you want to sleep, when you are watching a movie, when you are trying to scare someone, when you are playing laser tag, when you are developing film, when you are playing hide & seek.*

Darkness stops being not as good: *when you are playing hide and seek and you are running from your brother and you plow straight into a large oak and about knock yourself out and need a bunch of stitches to put your head back together. (me at 5)*

Darkness is bad: *when you are in a black out in a large city and chaos breaks out.*

Darkness is devastating: *when – its perfectly light outside, but you can't see past your nose because you have just gone blind.*

Pics - On 4/5, 2005 Captain Scotty Smiley – almost lost his life, as he lost both his eyes to a suicide car bomber in Iraq. He & his wife Tiffany, both deeply committed followers of Christ, had been married for 16 mos. but he had only seen her 4 of those. It would be several days till he woke to his condition. In the meantime, Tiffany lived every moment wondering if he would live. When she first saw him – she wondered not if he would live – but how they would live. She didn't marry a blind guy. 7 days later he woke fully to his condition – his darkness. And all he could think was - Why God? How could you let this happen to me?

In the darkest moments, God often seems **not good**.

MARK 15:44 (ESV) And *summoning the centurion*, he (Pilate) asked him whether he (Jesus) was already dead. 45 And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph. Last week, the crucifixion. Today - **Jesus is dead**. To all who followed this wasn't a dark moment, this was the darkest moment – pitch black. Everything they believed in, the person they had hoped in ... was dead, gone. This was Friday. This Friday we will celebrate the day of Jesus' death and actually call it **"Good Friday"**. Why? Why do we celebrate this day of Jesus' death and why is it good? Next week we celebrate the joy of Easter – death to life, death to life. But before Jesus came out of the grave to walk in new life, before there was a resurrection, - Jesus died and it was dark, ... **but we call it "Good Friday"!** Why? / Today I believe God wants us to wrestle with this 1 question... **Can the darkest moment of your life - be good?**

Answering our Question: *I love good mysteries like Sherlock Holmes. Stories where you have to observe, think, and solve a mystery. Today we need to do a little digging, a little detective work if you will if we are going to answer our one question.*

To do that, we are going to examine every account of the burial of Jesus and then follow where it leads us in regards to Joseph - the man who is at the center of burying Jesus. Ready? Here we go.

The 4 Accounts of Jesus' Burial

MATT 27:57-61 (ESV) - Matthew tells us Joseph was a rich man who used his own tomb for Jesus. He was a disciple of Jesus – his followers believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God who had come to bring God's kingdom to the earth.

MARK 15:42-47 (ESV) - Mark tells us Joseph was a respected member of the council – the Jewish rulers who led the people to riot & decided Jesus must die. He says it took courage to come to Pilate – meaning there was much reason to be afraid in doing this. *Interesting – he summoned our centurion from last week to see about Jesus' death. Can you imagine that convo?*

LUKE 23:50-56 (ESV) - Luke tells us Joseph was a member of the ruling council and he had disagreed w/ their decision and action in their council meeting. Luke also adds he was a good and righteous man – who was looking for the Messiah.

JOHN 19:38-42 (ESV) - John tells us Joseph was a *secret disciple of Jesus* – for fear of the Jews. He even tells us Nicodemus came with him – another leader who had come to Jesus in secret at the beginning of his ministry.

Joseph's Story

- Joseph was a rich, respected, good and righteous man from Arimathea, who lived in Jerusalem (where he owned a tomb).
- Joseph was a member of the Jewish ruling council made up of the 2 parties that led the council – the Sadducees and the Pharisees. *Joseph was probably a Pharisee bc of he was looking for the kingdom to come.*
- Joseph had been a secret follower of Jesus.

But **JOHN 12:42** tells us he was not alone in this view. Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; If they publicly aligned themselves w Jesus they would lose everything. Being put out of the synagogue meant losing your one place of worship. But it also meant losing friends, business, and your life as you knew it because you were not just banished from the synagogue and the temple – **others were banished from you.**

Joseph Follows Jesus in the Darkest Moment

- Joseph did not vote in agreement with the decision and action of the council to condemn Jesus. – *The one Joseph thought to be the Messiah, God – was being accused of blasphemy for saying he was God. While it was true, he said he was God, it was not blasphemy, for he was God. And the goal of this council was to kill Jesus. He could not stand by and follow in secret anymore – yet what compelled him to follow Jesus publicly into this dark moment of fear & confusion.*
- Joseph went to Pilate and asks for the body of Jesus. *Practically, this was an important thing to Joseph otherwise Jesus would be buried with all the other executed criminals – in one mass grave in the trash dump near Golgotha hill.* But

going public as a follower of Christ in this the darkest moment of his life. Why?

What moves you to follow Jesus even when things seem the most dark – when you can't see him?

Scotty Smiley – has **Phil 4:13 engraved** on the inside of his West Point class ring. He had always believed He could do anything with Christ. Half a world away in Iraq he lost his eyes, 7 months later at Walter Reed Army Medical Center he was walking back to his room after doing rehab by himself. He had made this trek by himself, he knew every step, every turn, every move – yet he found out that day if he daydreamed for a moment he could miss a turn. He ended up in a large parking lot alone, in a heap, on the ground, crying and crying out to God. He realized at that moment in his darkness he could nothing and even more – he wondered if God really wanted him to do anything ever again. Was this it? Had God abandoned this broken vessel for a better one. **Ever feel that way? Not only, I can't do anything – but you think God has left you for a better version, more able version of you?** **What moves you to follow Jesus even when things seem the most dark – when you can't see him?**

- **Joseph joined with Nicodemus to take down and bury the body of Jesus.** This action would officially align his life with Jesus and cause his excommunication from the Jewish faith and life. This would end his life as a Jewish leader – his influence and life as he knew it would end. This would end friendships – his social world as he knew it would end. This would end his ability to do his business as he had – his economic world as he knew it would end. This would end his ability to worship in the Temple – his religious world as he knew it would end.

What moved Joseph, in the darkest moment of his life, to follow after Jesus – believing He was good?

- Joseph had been a secret follower – but at the last moment in the council, he cannot hold back – he votes no
- And his decision to ask for Jesus' body had come at the last moment. Mark's account tells us he went and bought linen. He did not come to the execution ready to do this. Why now – in the darkest moment of his life – does he follow after Jesus.

What moves a man or woman – in the darkest moment of their life – to follow after Jesus?

Is this where you are? Are you in a really dark moment – **death of a dream, death of season in life, death of friendship or relationship, death of someone you love?** How do we move – much less follow Jesus in these moments when it feels like following him is not good. **Do you have a friend or someone you know in this dark place?**

Truth: we live in a world broken by sin, by the rebellion of men and women against holy God and because of that – we will all at some point find ourselves in a “darkest moment”. The question isn't if but when!

When darkness envelopes your life, when things aren't good – **Can this darkest moment in life – be good?**

What moved Joseph, in the darkest moment of his life, to follow after Jesus – believing He was good?

We need to do a little more digging. In order to see what moved Joseph to follow Jesus in the midst of great darkness, we must first see the deeper sin that moved him to live in the shadows when things were good - back to our passage in Jn 12.

JOHN 12:42-43 (ESV) 42 ... but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; 43 for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.

What does the scripture say, **“they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.”**

They weren't just timid, shy, or fearful. The word says there is a deeper issue. At the core, the real reason they hid in fear of their fellow leaders – They loved the glory of man more than the glory of God. **Glory?** It could be interpreted as praise or approval. But in this context – this word means so much more. What is the context? Let's dig deeper ...

JOHN 12:20-23 (ESV) (read)

JOHN 12:27-32 (ESV) (read)

JOHN 12:36-43 (ESV) (read)

glory – the greatness of something – in reference to God – glory is the overwhelming greatness of God

The leaders who believed in Him, did not want to lose the greatness they gained from men.

The “greatness” we get from men can be 1) their following, 2) their approval, 3) our control, 4) their affection, 5) the value they give us, or 6) how they make us feel. The greatness they knew from men was better than the greatness they knew from God. **This was the sin that kept Joseph in a secret fearful life in the shadows when things were good.**

What moved Joseph, in the darkest moment of his life out of the shadows, to follow after Jesus – believing He was good? I believe the same passage will show us.

VS 23 – Jesus says, it is time for me to be seen as the greatest of all – above all (glorified)

VS 27 – Jesus says, (for this purpose I have come): to reveal that God is the greatest of all – above all

VS 28 – Jesus says – do it – (Father glorify your name)

VS 28 – God the Father speaks for all to hear – (I have glorified it) throughout creation, Your life, your work, (and I will glorify it again) at your death when ...

VS 32 – (And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.) When I am lifted up on the cross – the glory of God will be revealed and it will draw men and women to God as the greatest of all – above all.

VS 41 – And what is it that allowed Isaiah to speak of these prophecies about God the way he did? (Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory) **He saw the glory of God.**

And what moved Joseph and Nicodemus to follow Jesus in this the darkest moment of their life - to speak up for his body, and give up their life as they knew it – **they saw the glory of God when Jesus was lifted up on the cross.**

Joseph saw God's glory in Jesus on the cross and it moved him to follow Jesus out of the shadows into the darkest moment of his life. In the cross – and the cross alone, Joseph said - the greatness I see in Jesus is greater than the greatness I know and enjoy in men. It wasn't his faith, it wasn't his belief that something good was going to happen. ***It was the GLORY of God in JESUS ON THE CROSS DYING!***

It was Jesus on the cross that changed Joseph. Here he saw the goodness of God so bright, so loud, so brilliantly. For I believe God allowed Joseph and Nicodemus to see the Messiah – Jesus for who he was and what he had come to do: give his life for them, for us- for sinners who are broken and long for the glory of men more than the glory of God.

In the darkest moments, the cross is the only light that reveals the goodness of God.

God allowed Joseph to see Jesus as glorious – the overwhelming greatness of who He is was completely revealed as he died for him and his desire to know the glory of men. Jesus was shown as great – glorious – the true glory Joseph wanted - it made him come flying out of the shadows after the one who was dying on his behalf – for you and I.

Tiffany said, when she first heard about her husband's injuries, she knelt by her bed half a world a way and said God give me peace with whatever happens. She immediately had peace – but she said living in peace was a work of God over time – where he was constantly pulling her to Him in the middle of her confusion, wonder, doubt – her darkness if you will.

"Darkness doesn't mean the absence of peace - you just have to go to where the peace is in the middle of the darkness. Jesus is the peace." Tiffany Smiley

Can the darkest moment of your life - be good? Conclusion:

We long for the glory of men or others. *That is, we long for the greatness we get from others bc it gives us a taste of a hunger we have in our soul.* But it just gives a taste – it does not satisfy and we know this when we enter into the darkest moments of life. At these moments – the glory of men does not satisfy. *Their affection, following, or approval – does not satisfy our soul in the darkest moments. Our control, the value they give us, and how they make us feel doesn't matter. It doesn't satisfy, it doesn't help the confusion, - it doesn't give us hope.*

We are left afraid, confused, and hopeless. **It is at these moments – the darkest moments – we often think:**

*** God is not good – He does not want me.**

Tiffany said, Scotty yelled her out of his hospital or rehab room many times bc he could not literally and figuratively see the goodness of God. God is not good – can't be!

Are you here? Are you? In the darkest moment – **God is not gone or bad – you just have to go to where He is.**

God is not gone or bad – you just have to go to where He is.

Go to the cross! In the darkest moments, the cross is the only light that reveals the goodness of God.

If you want to see the goodness of God in the darkest moments of this life, the only place you can go is the cross. Because there, goodness in its fullest form is seen – holy God taking on Him all our evil sin & the evil of this world.

Couldn't see, couldn't soldier, couldn't husband – worthless. Got around other disabled vets and realized my worth didn't come from having all my abilities. But I still had little worth. Now I just had shame. Why couldn't I have their courage and resolve? I became a soldier again – in a sense and even became a dad and saw the beauty of my wife like never before – without eyes. But As I failed at soldiering, husbanding, and parenting – I realized Phil 4:13 in a whole new light. I wasn't just blind and weak in some regards. I was a weak human who couldn't follow Christ well. Phil 4:13 wasn't about what I could do – it was all about what Christ could do thru my weak body and my sin wrecked soul.

ISAIAH 53:4-5 (NLT) 4 Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. 5 But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. **In the darkest moments, the cross is the only light that reveals the goodness of God.**

Darkness reveals who we seek glory from – men or God. The cross shows us the glory of me is puny, weak and God's is great. But it also shows us we are sinful and in need of Jesus to rescue us.

If you are in a dark moment – God wants to rescue your soul – not just you from the situation you are in.

Darkness will come again and again in this world. Will you have peace in the darkness when it comes again? Only if you are in Christ – trust him with your soul today.

Believer - Darkness does not mean God is absent or doesn't want to use you. We must go to the cross and stare long and deep at God's glory. There you might see that you have longed for man's glory and it has kept you living a secret life of following God. If so – repent – see his glory in the cross and let him awaken you to his love, his peace, his presence that moves you to follow him even in the darkest moments. Come to the cross now. Good Friday is good bc it says:

In the darkest moments, the cross is the only light that reveals the goodness of God.