

# Secret Disciples?

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- [ 0 : 00 ] This message was recorded at Vision Baptist Church in Alpharetta, Georgia. This is the next message in our series on the book of John entitled, Jesus is God.
- Take your Bible if you would and turn to John chapter 19. I want to talk to you this morning about being secret disciples. And I guess maybe it's hard to understand or see here in America.
- But I'd like to just show you just a little bit of what I experienced as a missionary in Peru. As a missionary in Peru, our people would come to church. And this is how they would come to church.
- They had to walk 20 minutes. They didn't have a car to drive up so nobody knew what they were doing. You could have been going to the movie theater or whatever. They would come to church like this. And then when they got to church, they would pull out their Bible inside the church so nobody knew.
- Others literally came to church like this. And you would see them, they'd come in the door. I can't get it in them, too fat. They'd come to the church and they'd walk in the church. And they'd get in the door and you'd see them just as they got in the door.
- [ 1 : 04 ] They'd be pulling out the Bible real slow. Get the Bible out where they could see it. Or they'd have it under their jacket. And a lot of them told me, they said, we don't like big Bibles like you carry. You can't hide those very easily.
- And as they walked down the street, it was a little bit different than what you go through. As they walked down the street, you had to go by one of the biggest liquor sellers and bars.
- And people would always be sitting out on the street. Because a lot of places in Peru, you can't go inside because they're afraid you'd steal. So they'd sell them the alcohol and they'd be sitting on the street. And as they came walking down the street, the guy sitting on the sidewalk would go, Ooh, there goes a little brother.
- Brother, brother. Hey, brother. Hey, brother in Jesus. Hey, Jesus. Hey, brother. And so they hated that. And it took them a long time to get where they could walk by that place.
- Some of them asked me if we could take some of the men and go down there and teach them a lesson about insulting our people as they came to church. You know, they want to practice a little Christian love and pound them in the head in the name of Jesus's love.
- [ 2 : 10 ] Amen. But so secret disciples are not unusual. It's a little easier in America. It's a little easier in America to hide your Christianity because you pull up in your car.
- They don't even know where you're going. And thank God you're going to a warehouse that doesn't even have that big a sign. Say amen. And you can get your Bible out and nobody knows. And maybe you just bring an iPad. You don't even have to bring a Bible. And no one would even figure out where you're going.
- Isn't that good? And then when you go to the restaurant and it's time to pray, you just get a headache real quick. Or you say, thank you, Lord. Or you tell all the family, let's pray.
- Let's pray with our eyes open. You know, you work out ways to make sure nobody figures out who you are and figures out what you're doing. Well, in the story today, we're going to talk about two men, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus.

And I'm going to tell you that I like both of these guys. And I'll always say they're probably saved. I say that because I have this big old heart full of mercy for weak, backslidden Christians.

[ 3 : 15 ] Some commentators say, yeah, I believe they might have been saved because of what they did. Other commentators say they are definitely not saved. And you'll get to be the judge of that today as we go through it. But here is, let me just say this, there ought not be a question about whether or not you're saved.

It ought not ever come up that, well, I'm not sure if he's saved or if he's not saved. I can't be for sure. You know, he's never really stated it. He's never really come out.

He's never really made it clear that he is a born again believer. And the Bible is going to show you some verses that are just blatant. And could I just say to you that you are really playing with fire, literally, to be a secret disciple and ashamed of Jesus.

And I'll show you verses that will actually make that pretty clear, which would lead you to honestly think that neither one of these men were born again in spite of some beautiful things the Bible says about them.

So I want to talk to you about being secret disciples. Could I just say that that is a very common trend, even in maybe this room? A friend of ours was in Morocco.

[ 4 : 24 ] And there was a church that he attended while he was in language school. And while he was in language school, this church ran about 35 people. But the Moroccan pastor, there was an American, European man working with them as missionary.

But the, and this is not our missionary I'm talking about. Our missionary was a student learning the language and he just attended this church. And the Moroccan pastor of the church was so afraid of telling his own family that he was saved that his wife did not know that he was a believer.

His wife did not know that he was a believer. And when trouble came and the missionaries got kicked out, the church dissolved. Because secret believers won't stand.

And so today, would you go with me to look at this? What's the picture of a secret disciple? Take your Bible and look at the picture of a secret disciple. The first one I want to look at is Nicodemus.

Nicodemus, he's found in chapter 19 in verse 38, 39 actually, yeah, 39 actually. And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pound weight.

[ 5 : 43 ] So Nicodemus, Nicodemus is a picture of a secret disciple. The way I know that is the first thing, notice in the verse, he came by night. He came by night.

Do you remember John chapter 3? Maybe you could jot that down somewhere. John chapter 3, verses 1 and 2. There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. The same came to Jesus by night and said to him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God.

For no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with you. Now, that's a good step. I mean, he went to Jesus. He spoke to Jesus. He said, we know some things.

And he said, we know that you're a teacher that's come from God. And we realize that nobody could do these miracles that you do, except God be with you. He couldn't understand simple, basic things.

When Jesus said to him, to be saved, you must be born again. And Nicodemus, being a grown man with a strong intellect, looked at him and said, born again. Now, how would that exactly work?

[ 6 : 43 ] Would I have to get back in my mother's womb to be born again? And Jesus basically looks at him and says, I cannot believe. You claim to be a Bible scholar, and you can't understand something that simple. And that's the story of how he came.

In John chapter 7, verses 50 to 52, if you've got your Bible open there. John chapter 7, he's afraid, but he does want to say something like, I'm with Jesus.

Look at John chapter 7, verse 50. Nicodemus saith unto them, he that came to Jesus by night. Now, isn't that going to be an interesting little thing? From now on, every time you hear old Nick's name, it's going to say, here's Nick, the guy that was so scared he came at night.

Here's Nick, the guy that came under the cover of darkness. Nicodemus, that came to Jesus by night, being one of them, doth our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doeth?

They answered and said unto him, art thou also of Galilee? Search and look, for out of Galilee arises no prophet. You know, here's an interesting thing. Old Nicodemus has visited Jesus.

[ 7 : 41 ] He's found out he doesn't have two heads at least. He is at least showing a modicum of respect towards Jesus. And in a meeting when they're talking about Jesus and his name comes up, Nicodemus raised his head and said, wait a minute, guys, I'm not sure we ought to be saying that.

Does our people judge folks without that? And then when they respond back to him, Nicodemus goes, okay, that's it. I took my big risk. I stuck my neck out about as far as I'm going to it. He backs up again.

He was a religious man of much prestige and position. He is known as the one that came by night. When he gets questioned, he backs down. He's at least sympathizing with God's people if he's not a believer.

Look at chapter 19, verse 39 again. Chapter 19, verse 39. And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night. There it is. The first he came to Jesus by night.

And he brought a mixture of myrrh and aloe is about a hundred pound weight. And then they took the body of Jesus and wound it in linen clothes with the spices. That is a matter of the Jews is to bury. Boy, he comes out big time.

[ 8 : 40 ] Now, Jesus has just been crucified. It's as though he knew what was going on. It's as though he was ready. It's going to almost look like him and Joseph of Arimathea got together and made a plan about what they're going to do to take care of Jesus's body.

He stands for it. He comes with a, I mean, he comes carrying a hundred pound weight in their measurement. He's coming with, with this big package, at least in our measurements, at least a 60 pound package of, of perfumes and stuff that he's going to put on the body of Jesus.

He's coming. He's going to, he's making a bowl stand. He won't be able to, he's a Pharisee. He's of high position. He won't be able to participate in the Passover because he's going to be contaminated from touching a, a religion of a dead body.

And he steps forward. And when he steps forward, he says, I'm here to help bury Jesus. Could this open stand for the body of Christ be an open confession in daylight after starting cowardly at night?

We'll see. Second secret disciple. Look at your Bible there. John chapter 19, verse 38, Joseph of Arimathea. He is a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews.

[ 9 : 47 ] So if the Bible says, look at chapter 19, verse 38. And after this, Joseph of Arimathea being a disciple of Jesus, but underline secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus.

And Pilate gave him leave. And he came therefore and he took the body of Jesus. This Joseph is another big shot. He's rich. He's got a high position. He's well known in the Jewish council.

That's in Mark 15, 43. And Luke says some really strong things about him. Look in your Bible, if you would. In Luke chapter 23 and verse 50. And behold, there was a man named Joseph, a counselor.

He was a good man and just. Underline, a good man and just. The same had not consented to the counsel and deed of them. He didn't go. He didn't vote with them. He doesn't say he voted against them. It says he didn't vote with them.

He was of Armatheia, a city of the Jews, who also himself waited for the kingdom of God. So he was good. He was just and he was waiting for the kingdom of God. This man went unto Pilate and begged the body of Jesus.

[ 10 : 46 ] Here's a very interesting thing. Joseph had a tomb prepared very close to the place of execution. It was new and it had never been used. The question is, we know the tomb belonged to Joseph.

The question is, did Joseph have this tomb for himself or did he just go buy a piece of property and get a grave ready? Kind of doubtful that he built his own tomb for him to be buried right where they crucified people.

Right where it was a regular place. Joseph has made big preparations. Joseph has gone to Pilate and pleaded the body of Jesus Christ. Joseph has come out.

Can I just say to you, they're both secret disciples. One comes by night and the other one, the Bible says secretly for fear, he's not a disciple. Can I say that in this room and in our society and among Christians, there are a lot of secret agent Christians.

Let me just name three or four of them for you. Number one, there's Mr. Fearful Witness. You met him. He knows he loves Jesus, supposedly. He knows he believes in him. He'll even go to church. He kind of hides his Bible in his newspaper when he comes to church, sticks it under his arm when he comes in.

[ 11 : 53 ] But when it comes time to mention the name of Jesus or take a stand for the cause of Christ, he is really a little bit on the scaredy cat side. He's not going to stand up and boldly proclaim about Jesus.

And if he does say something about Jesus, he'd rather just talk about his church or how good a feeling Jesus gives him. There's Mr. I don't want anybody to think I'm a fanatic. This guy says, you know, there's Sunday and there's Monday.

There's Sunday for Jesus and Monday for business. And I don't want anybody to think I'm a fanatic. I don't want to think I've gone overboard. I think it's only reasonable. I think it's only reasonable that I'd be careful not to give the appearance that I'm a fanatic or a Pentecostal or one of these weird guys.

You might find it interesting that in the country of Indonesia, where there's a lot of persecution, that most of the Baptists that I know of in Indonesia are pretty secretive about their witness. And the Pentecostals are a bunch of wild people go around telling people about Jesus.

When you hear about him getting killed over it, it's usually a Pentecostal. Because the Baptists are secret agent 007 Christians and the Pentecostals are pretty wild about saying who they are. So now that's two guys. Which one are you?

[ 12 : 56 ] Mr. I'm afraid to witness. I'm a Christian, but I'm afraid to witness. Brother, scaredy cat. And then there's the other guy. Brother, I'm not a fanatic. And then there's Mr. Chameleon. You know him, don't you?

At church, he knows how to say amen. He knows how to carry his Bible. He knows how to sing all the songs. He even knows when he's supposed to raise his hand, when he's not supposed to raise his hand. He knows what he's supposed to do in his prayer time. He knows all the things he's supposed to do.

But he also knows all the things he's supposed to do on Saturday night, doesn't he? Come Saturday night, he fits in just as good. He might be a Christian, but you'd never know it. He turns whatever color, he turns whatever shade of color that he's around, he can fit in with everybody.

There's another guy that says, I can't live the Christian life. I mean, his whole philosophy is, I realize I'll never be able to live the Christian life. I realize that I'm never going to fit in. And so I just give up. There's somebody else that says, I can talk about anything but Jesus and the church.

You ever met him? I mean, it's like, would you shut up? But you know, he loves Jesus. He could talk to you about the Republicans and the Democrats. He could talk to you about the economy. He could talk to you about the weather.

[ 14 : 00 ] But Jesus and his word are never going to be mentioned. And then the last one I'll just mention real quickly is, Mr. I don't want to offend anybody. These are my personal beliefs anyway.

And since they're personal beliefs, I'll just kind of keep them personal. I'm not going to say anything. You say, now, bro, that's ridiculous. You're kind of taking that too far. Joseph of Arimathea might have been scared.

And Nicodemus might have been scared. But we're good Christians. And I don't think you should have said all that. But the truth is, we just express our fear differently. We don't have to come at night. But isn't it amazing how often we're ashamed of Jesus?

And by the way, the most bold witness we'll ever get is put one of them fish on the back of our car. Or a bunch of fish. You know, a big one for daddy and another little bit smaller for mama. And then a bunch of little fish after that.

Or we'll put honk if you love Jesus. And then when they honk, we give them a signal with our hand that Christians don't give. Say amen. But we're going to be ashamed of Jesus.

[ 15 : 00 ] That's a picture of a secret disciple. Somebody that's embarrassed. Embarrassed for people to know that he loves Jesus. Why would anybody want to be a secret disciple?

Look in your Bible, if you would, at John chapter 12 and verse 42. Why would anybody want to be a secret disciple? Why would Nicodemus be a secret disciple? Why would Joseph be a secret disciple? In John chapter 12 and verse 42, the Bible says, Nevertheless, among the chief rulers also many believed on him.

But because of the Pharisees, they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue. And here's the reason why. Look at verse 43. Holy Scripture inspired of God.

For they love the praise of men more than the praise of God. Why wouldn't they talk about him? Why would they be ashamed?

Why would they be secret disciples? Here's why. They're afraid of people. They're more concerned with what people think of them than what God thinks of them. You know why we're secret disciples? Because we love our position.

[ 16 : 05 ] We love our position. Well, it might not be like a lot of the mission fields I've visited, where if they find out you're a Christian, you will be fired. Somebody recently in Morocco lost their job simply because somebody heard that they had become a believer in Jesus Christ and they lost their job.

It's not a place where your family members might hate you. We live in a country that will put up with you if you come out of the closet as a homosexual. Just don't come out of the closet as a Christian. Our country will tolerate everything but somebody loving Jesus.

Our country will tolerate infidelity to your spouse. Our country will tolerate anything you do. Just don't take a stand for Jesus. And we love our position. We don't want people taking away our place.

We don't want people taking away our place. We want to be popular. We want to be popular. And to be popular, you need just enough Christianity, just enough religion, just enough religion that nobody knows you're a fanatic.

Everybody's like, he's got just enough to be a good guy, just enough to be a nice guy, but it won't affect what he does. It's good to have people work at the workplace that are Christians as long as it doesn't get out of hand.

[17:17] We love our prosperity. We're afraid if people knew that we really believed in Jesus. In fact, can I just say this even? We love it that Jesus changed us and we love it that people want to do business with us because we've learned to come on time and pay our bills and be people of character.

We just want the credit for having done all that, not to give it to Jesus. Ooh, it's not going to be a pleasant day, is it? Austin's in trouble already.

We like prosperity. We don't want anyone to make fun of us. I can so remember being in high school and I don't know who came through, but some preacher came through.

And I was the young preacher boy in the church and that guy basically buttonholed me and said, are you a wimpy, sissy-fied Christian or do you take a stand at school? And I said, well, you know, yeah, I'm kind of, don't tell nobody.

And he said, well, bless God, you ought to go to church, you ought to take gospel, school, you ought to take gospel tracts, you ought to take your Bible. He said, make sure you put your Bible on top of all your books when you walk in. And so anyway, I decided I would pull that.

[18:20] Can I tell you, I mean, it was wicked, buddy. They walked by me in the hallway and when they'd come by me, they'd say, hey, queer boy, Jesus freak. Hey, Jesus fanatic.

I mean, every day of my life. There were days I'd say, Jesus, if you'd just give me permission, I'd like to hit him with a two-by-four. We don't want to be made fun of.

They used to come by and they'd say, oh, there's the virgin boy. He doesn't know anything about real life because he's like, Jesus, people. We don't want that. We want everybody to think we're like all of them.

Kind of like Joseph and Nicodemus. In a second, I think you're going to be sitting there going, I just can't believe old Joseph. I can't believe old Nicodemus. I can't believe those guys wouldn't take a stronger stand. I can't believe they had to wait until Jesus died.

But I would question you, where are we? I'd ask you to examine your life this past week. I'd ask you to examine your life any other time. I mean, gospel tracts, how easy is it for you to give out a gospel tract?

[19:19] How easy is it for you to give out an invitation? How easy is it for you to bring up the mention of Jesus Christ? How easy is it? I'm not telling you you ought to be one of those Christians. You've seen them driving down the interstate. You drive down the interstate and you go by their car and there's 75 bumper stickers on there.

Every one of them says something about Jesus. And you're like, man, that guy's a weirdo. Yeah, he's a weirdo, but we wouldn't put one. Number three. Maybe Betty will like me after this is over.

Not even sure about her. Number three. Consider the misery of being a secret disciple. Would you consider with me the misery of being a secret disciple?

They show up at the funeral. They show up. You know, they're the guys that come. When you give the phone call and hospice is at the house and you give the phone call and you say, hey, my dad just died.

And they say, we'll be there in about 30 minutes. And they pull up outside and they got the hearse out there. There's not an ambulance. They come in. The body's already been washed. They carried out on a cart so you won't see it.

[ 20 : 20 ] Finally, they put the body in a bag and they take it off and prepare it for burial. They show up after it's all over. They have no fellowship with that person. Now, Jesus died. Nicodemus and Joseph.

We know Nicodemus knew about him from pretty much the beginning. Chapter 2 was his first miracle. Chapter 3, Nicodemus shows up. And all these three, three and a half years, Nicodemus has not been able to enjoy fellowship with Jesus.

He hasn't been able to enjoy the preaching and teaching of Jesus. He hasn't had the joy and intimate, close relationship with Jesus. He hasn't had fellowship with other believers. Because since he's such a coward, he's afraid to be seen with believers.

And he's not enjoying that. The ember that's separated from the fire will soon go out. I know you people don't know much about that. Because if you have a fireplace, it is a gas fireplace.

And so you think that you just twist a little knob and click a little button and it pops into place. But if you had a fireplace with burned wood, you know what happens? If you separate a piece of wood off, as it's burning, it won't take long if that one burns out.

[ 21 : 22 ] Did you know Christians need each other? Could you say amen? We need each other. When we separate from each other, we get weaker. We separate from each other. The fire goes out. We don't lose our salvation. But old Nicodemus and old Joseph didn't get to have that.

By now, they feel like second-class citizens. They aren't in. They aren't out in their minds. But can you be a secret disciple for real?

Would you consider some verses with me? You might not look them up with me in the Bible, but would you look on the wall with me? Look at Luke chapter 9 and verse 23. This is what Jesus said when he was talking to them about being his disciple.

Can you really? Misery? Can you really be a secret disciple? Can you really be a secret disciple? And he said to them, if any man, he said to them all, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

Can I say that the majority of us in this room, we think that verse applies to pastors and missionaries. Most of us really think, hey, I'm not one of those special people that have to take up my cross.

[ 22 : 26 ] I'm not one of those special people that have to follow him. I'm not one of those special people that have to deny myself. But if you look up, he said to them all, he said to them all, if any, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.

Look, if you would, at Luke chapter 14 and verse 27, Luke chapter 14 and verse 27, it says that whosoever does not bear his cross and come after me. Would you repeat out loud with me what it says?

Cannot be my disciple. Whosoever does not bear his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. You can come listen. You can come be here, but you're not.

In Peru, we had, we had, uh, we had two words or three words, I guess we use for people that attend the church. You'd have a big crowd of people who would come to church. They'd never heard Bible teaching.

They'd gone to, they'd gone to mass all their life, but they'd never had anybody open the Bible and just explain the Bible verse by verse. And so they loved to go to church and they loved to hear it, even if they weren't believers. And so we had three groups of people that attended the church.

[ 23 : 31 ] We had believers, saints, people that knew they were saved, loved Jesus. And buddy, they were active for him. They, they were givers. They were prayers. They were attenders. They were servers.

They were all out for Jesus. We had another group and they were lost people. Some of them came to laugh and make fun. Sometimes they would almost heckle you in the service. Sometimes they would interrupt the service. They were lost people. But then we had a third group and we call them sympathisantes.

We call them sympathizers. They sympathized with us, but they weren't in. They weren't out, but they weren't in. They were just, we like you, but we're not in. We like you. We agree with you. We're kind of on your side, but we're not a hundred percent in with you.

Jesus said, whosoever does not bear his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. Look at a verse we use regularly in salvation. When we explain the gospel to people, Romans chapter 10, verses nine and 10.

If somebody's getting saved, we're going to read these verses to them. Romans chapter 10, verses nine and 10. That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth. Would you look at the word confess? Would you circle that in your Bible? Confess with your mouth that the Lord Jesus and shop believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead.

[ 24 : 36 ] Thou shalt be saved. Verse 10. Verse 10. The Bible says for with the heart, man believes unto righteousness with the mouth. Confession is made unto salvation. Now, yesterday we had a wedding and Kyle and Hannah got married.

And you know that we all know that before yesterday, all these decisions were already made. You know, yesterday I said stuff like this. Uh, uh, uh, not Kyle.

I charge you to do this. And Kyle's like, yes, sir. Hannah. I charge. Yes. Yes, sir. Hannah. Will you say these things? Yes, sir. You know, they already knew what they were going to say. You have been listening to Austin Gardner, pastor of Vision Baptist Church.

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