

TWO MEN ... who triumphed in the end
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(JOHN 19: 38-42)

The scene was dark and somber, for men had done their worst: Jesus was dead. The longings aroused in multitudes of hearts had perished, and the fairest Messianic hope in centuries had petered out. Alone, and friendless, the Carpenter had been crucified ; and His enemies were jubilant. Wrapped in the shadows of the green hill, the ugly cross seemed sinister and hateful ; a thing to be shunned in a locality to be avoided. And then suddenly a man approached. His movements were eerie ; his presence frightening. He paused to listen. Someone else was coming,. Footfalls echoed through the silence. " And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where he was crucified, there was a garden ; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day ; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand." The funeral was over; the two men stood before the tomb. They had known a long, grim struggle ; and although they had suffered many setbacks, their courage had ultimately triumphed gloriously. Even the angels were smiling.

Their Great Confidence

Nicodemus and Joseph had one thing in common-they looked for the Messiah. It would appear that whereas the ruler of the synagogue was governed by intellect, Joseph of Arimathea was ruled by his heart. One man was preeminently a thinker-the teacher of Israel ; the other was an honorable counsellor, of whom all men spoke well. We know that the teacher visited Christ under cover of darkness. Probably aware that Daniel had foretold the time of Messiah's coming, and that the stipulated time had already elapsed, Nicodemus wanted to know if Jesus of Nazareth were the Messiah. Thus he planned his night visit (John 3). We do not know how Joseph first made contact with Christ. Possibly he stood on the edge of a crowd and heard the greatest sermon of his life. He saw also the sick being healed, and his doubts were instantly dispelled. Confidence was born in the hearts of both men, yet neither of them had the courage to make open confession of his faith. Nicodemus carefully preserved the secret of his visit to Jesus ; and of Joseph, the Scriptures declare that he was " a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews" (John 19: 38).

Their Great Cowardice

Let us not condemn these men ; they had many difficulties to overcome. On one occasion at least Nicodemus made an attempt to support Christ. When the conference chamber was in an uproar ; when the Sanhedrin was incensed because the officers of the law had failed to bring in their prisoner; when tempers were frayed, and anger threatened violence, " Nicodemus saith unto them. . . . Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth? They answered and saith unto him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet" (John 7:50-52). Nicodemus remained silent. His intellectual capabilities might have provided a glorious defense for Jesus, but rather than risk the animosity of his fellow rulers, he

TWO MEN ... who triumphed in the end withdrew into obscurity. At a later meeting, when the council decided to crucify the Lord, " Joseph did not consent to their deed." He hated the decision of his fellow counsellors, but decided that discretion was the better part of valor. There were others who similarly remained silent (John 12:42, 43).

Their Great Conquest

It was all over ; they had lost their chance to kneel before a living Christ. Joseph, haunted by memories, and ashamed of his earlier cowardice, decided to do the only decent thing left to do. He made himself responsible for the funeral of his Lord. In another part of the city, Nicodemus, driven by remorse, and utterly ashamed of his unworthiness, determined upon a similar course of action. It seemed a thousand pities that he was unable to confess his faith before Christ, but at least he could be true to his memory. These courageous men met before the cross, and redeeming love united their hearts. We do well to remember that neither man expected the resurrection. Their immediate outlook was one which envisaged persecution and ribaldry. The victorious Sanhedrin would not be silent in regard to this burial. Their sneers would mean abuse. Fully aware of the coming storm, the two disciples determined to atone for the years of fear when cowardice had ruined their testimony. They went forth to bury a dead Christ, and soon rejoiced in the fellowship of a risen Savior. Some day we may have the chance to ask what the Lord said to them when they met. How proud they would be to hear, " Well done, thou good and faithful servants."

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