

QUIET SUPPORTERS VS VOCAL OPPONENTS (Matthew 27:55-66)

You and I live in a noisy, noisy world. All about us are loud voices competing for the attention of an increasingly distracted culture. That same culture has placed its stamp of approval upon attention getters, headline grabbers, and publicity hogs. We say or hear such things as: *the squeaky wheel gets the grease, there is no such thing as bad publicity*, and there is the ever-present reminder, as if it was needed, to *express yourself*.

Fifteen years ago, no one had ever heard of the term *selfie*, and now, Google reports that its Android devices take 93 million selfies per day, and one poll claims that among 18-to-24-year-olds, every third photo they take is a selfie. The average person takes 450 selfies per year. That confirms what I have long suspected: I am far below average.

One study found that the average teen takes 6.9 photos a day and that 4.7 of them are selfies. Some people are simply addicted to taking pictures of themselves and posting those photos online for the world to see, but the world fails to take notice because everyone is obsessed with looking at and admiring their own selfie.

People want to be seen and they want to be heard, and they will go to just about any length to ensure that both of those goals are realized.

There is a daytime soap opera entitled, *The Bold and the Beautiful*. It is called *The Bold and the Beautiful* because no one is doing to watch a show called, *The Humble and the Homely*. That's just not going to happen.

The more I read my Bible, the more I am confronted with the fact that to live the Christian life is to live a counter-cultural life. Christian living goes against the grain of what our culture expects and routinely experiences.

For instance, in 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul encourages the believers in Thessalonica. He writes, "Aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands" (4:11). In other words, he is saying, "You don't have to be the center of attention. Just mind your own business, and live a productive life.

With that in mind, I want you to turn to today's text—Matthew 27:55-66. In this passage, we are presented with two distinct and very different groups of people. One group is composed of what I would call **quiet supporters**. Now, there is a difference between quiet and silent. They aren't the same. We are not called upon to be silent, but we are urged to live quiet lives. You can live quietly and still speak the good news of Jesus. The first group in our text are quiet supporters of Jesus Christ.

The second group are what I call **vocal opponents**. They are critics of Jesus and have made it their aim to stop Him and even destroy Him. We were warned back in Matthew 26:3-4, "Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill Him." They were successful in doing both, but even though Jesus is now dead, their work is not yet completed. They have one more thing to do. They have to make sure that he stays dead, and by that, I mean they have to keep the disciples of Jesus from promoting some crazy conspiracy theory that Jesus arose from the dead.

From our text, we are going to contrast what is involved in being either a quiet supporter or a vocal opponent. We are going to examine two chief differences.

Quiet Supporters and Vocal Opponents Are Different in the Outlook of Their Mission

Quiet supporters do not want the focus of attention to be upon themselves. They are more than willing to remain in the background doing what needs to be done and serving one greater than themselves. Let's look by name at some of those quiet supporters who served Jesus. Look at vv. 55-56. The name Mary was common name at this time, and there are no less than six different people named Mary in the N.T. When you compare this passage with the other gospels, it becomes clear that a woman named Salome was the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Salome was the mother of James and John who were also known as the sons of Zebedee. That means Jesus' disciple James and John were His cousins, and the mother who came to Jesus asking that her boys sit on thrones to Jesus' left and right was His aunt, His mom's sister.

When you read the NT casually, you might get the idea that Jesus and His disciples were a bunch of single men traveling around on their own "batching" it. That is not exactly the case. Look with me at Luke 8:1-3. There were a number of women who traveled with Jesus and His disciples, and some of them were well-off financially and helped bankroll Jesus' mission.

In addition to providing funds, I imagine some of the women bought groceries, cooked dinner, and did laundry. This was a labor of love done by women who had been blessed by Jesus. According to Luke, some of these women had been healed of evil spirit, others had been healed of various infirmities. Mary Magdalene shows up numerous times in the gospels. She was the first one to see the risen Lord. She had been possessed by seven demons, and Jesus had healed her. Her life had been forever changed by Him, and she couldn't do enough to serve Him.

The only male disciple who was present when Jesus was crucified was John. The others were in hiding, but the women were there. Matthew tells us that they had followed Jesus from Galilee. They were some 80 miles from home, a good four-day journey.

We are introduced to another follower of Jesus in v. 57. His name is Joseph. He is said to be a rich man. From the other gospels we learn that he also happens to be a member of the Sanhedrin, the same judicial body that condemned Jesus and asked Pilate to sentence Jesus to be crucified. It is clear that the Sanhedrin ignored their own rules and met privately at the house of the High Priest. It is quite likely that no one bothered inviting Joseph to this meeting. There is another follower of Jesus who was also a member of the Sanhedrin who also overlooked with the high court was assembled. That would have been Nicodemus, the one who came to Jesus at night, and the one to whom Jesus said, "You must be born again" (John 3).

Look at what John said about these two unlikely followers of Jesus and what they did following Jesus' death (John 19:38-42). One man said that secret discipleship can be thought of as a contradiction in terms because eventually, either the secrecy will kill the discipleship or the discipleship will kill the secrecy. In Joseph's case, his discipleship killed his secrecy. He went to Pilate, requested the body of Jesus, and at his own expense buried Jesus in his own, new tomb.

Likewise, Nicodemus, the one who came to Jesus under the cover of darkness with his

questions now in the light of day throws His support to Jesus.

The Sabbath starts at 6 pm on Friday night. Jesus died at 3 pm. Jesus had to be hastily buried because you can work on the Sabbath, and burying someone definitely qualifies as work. Had Joseph not come along, there would have been no one to bury Jesus. The Roman government crucified criminals, but they didn't bury them. Jesus' family and followers were from the Galilee. They didn't own land in Jerusalem much less a burial place in the big city.

Joseph stepped up to do what he could because that is what quiet supporters do—they do what they can. That is what Joseph did, and Nicodemus, and the women.

Are you doing what you can? Are you using what God has given you to serve Him?

One of my favorite stories comes from the late Fred Craddock. Years ago, he lived in Enid and taught at Phillips Seminary. When he was just getting started in the ministry, he served a little church in the Appalachians between Knoxville and Chattanooga.

It was the custom of that church to have baptismal services in the lake nearby. After the candidates had been baptized, they and the pastor would change their clothes in little booths that had been constructed by hanging blankets up. After changing into dry clothes, they would warm themselves at the fire in the center. The church would gather around and sing songs.

Fred said that Glenn Hickey always introduced the new people. He would tell their name, where they lived and worked. Then each person in the circle would tell their name. One would say:

My name is [Betty]. If you ever need somebody to do washing and ironing, call on me.

My name is (Earl). If you ever need anybody to chop wood, call on me.

My name is [Norma]. If you ever need anybody to babysit, call on me.

My name is [Leo]. If you ever need anybody to repair your house, call on me.

My name is [Lea]. If you ever need anybody to sit with the sick, call on me.

My name is [Thelma]. If you ever need a car to go to town, call on me.

Around the circle they would go.

After they ate and had a square dance, Percy Miller would put his thumbs in his bibbed overalls, and he would say, "It's time to go."

On one occasion, as Percy was kicking sand on to the dying fire, Fred stuck around thinking about the experience. Percy looked up and said, "Craddock, folks don't ever get any closer than this."

As he reflected on that experience, Craddock commented, "In that little community, they have a name for that. I've heard it in other communities too. In that community, their name for that kind of ritual is *church*. They call that *church*."

Around here, we call that kind of thing Liberty Southern. Our outlook should be one of doing what we can, not calling attention to ourselves, but genuinely helping and serving others because when do, we are helping and serving Jesus.

The outlook of vocal opponents is much different. Instead of distinguishing themselves by what that are for, they make themselves known by what they are against. God help us, but that is one of the failings of the Church. People know us for what we are

against than we are for. I don't believe that is the kind of reputation Jesus wants for His Bride.

I know that is not the kind of reputation I want for this church. I want people to say, "You know that church on the south side of town, they sure do seem to love one another, to care for one another, to support one another."

I want you to notice v. 62. What's the Day of Preparation? It is the day before the Sabbath. The Sabbath was to be a day of rest. You weren't even supposed to cook on that day. So, the day before, people would cook extra food. They prepared ahead of time so they wouldn't go hungry on the Sabbath.

So, what was the day after the Day of Preparation? It was the Sabbath. The religious leaders went to Pilate on the Sabbath to recruit his help in making the tomb secure. These religious leaders who were all about the people keeping the law broke the law. They worked on the Sabbath because of their hatred and opposition to Jesus.

Interestingly, Jesus' followers complied with all the Sabbath regulations. They did not go to the tomb on Saturday and made sure Jesus was buried before sundown on Friday.

If you have to compromise what you say you believe in order to promote your agenda, something is wrong. You better take a closer look at your agenda. We don't determine what is right and wrong based on our politics. We should base our politics on what we have determined is right and wrong. If it is wrong it doesn't become right when it suddenly becomes convenient.

I have a second truth I want to impress upon you.

Quiet Supporters and Vocal Opponents Are Different in the Outcome of Their Mission

I find it interesting that when Jesus died, His followers did not hold a strategy session and try to figure out a way to keep Jesus' mission going. Their job was to obey Him, not replace Him.

If you are a follower of Jesus, then neither you nor I am responsible for the success or the failure of Christ's mission. In other words, it is not up to us to see to it that His Kingdom grows and prospers. Our job is just to do what He tells us to do. If we are faithful in our obedience, then we have done our duty. We can trust Him to accomplish what we wills.

That is a freeing realization. It is not your job to make sure that your friend, neighbor, co-worker, or family member trusts Jesus as Savior and Lord and becomes a Christian. That is not your job. It is your job to love that person, to befriend them, and to tell the good news of Jesus in a respectable way.

Loving Jesus and loving people is not a means to an end. Loving God is the end. Loving others is the end. As we do those things, we are fulfilling our mandate and our mission.

Consider the vocal opponents. They chose as their mission to stop Jesus. They would either succeed or fail. There was no in between, and it was all up to them. They plotted. They worked up a plan, and then they worked their plan. They arrested Jesus under the cover of night. They tried Jesus. They convicted Jesus. Then, they brought Jesus to Pilate, the Governor of Judea and the only one who could carry out a death sentence. At this

point, things didn't look good for their plan. He wasn't convinced of Jesus' guilt, but these men were astute politicians themselves. They ginned up the crowd, and they played on Pilate's fears and insecurities. In the end, they got what they wanted, and before the day was done, Jesus was dead. But these men weren't ready to hang up a banner that read, "Mission Accomplished."

They remembered that Jesus has said something about rising on the third day. Sabbath was Day 2. They didn't fear Jesus rising from the dead. In their experience, dead men tended to stay dead. Sure, Jesus had reportedly raised some dead people, but they didn't think that Jesus could raise Himself. That didn't seem likely, but they feared the disciples might steal the body and start telling people that Jesus was alive. They couldn't have that.

They wanted Pilate to station Roman guards at the tomb to make sure that no one messed with Jesus' body.

I love Pilate's response. Look at vv. 65-66. I had always thought that the guards at the tomb were Roman soldiers, but I have changed my view. I believe the religious leaders were left to use their own temple guards. It was Jewish guards who were at the tomb. That is why in the next chapter after the earthquake, after an angel rolled back the stone and announced that Jesus was no longer there, the guards didn't go report to Pilate. They went straight to the religious authorities. And that is why they were willing to take a bribe and tell everyone else that Jesus' disciples came and stole the body of Jesus.

There is a bit of irony in Pilate's comment. He told them, "Go, make it as secure as you can." It seems as though Pilate was making fun of them. As it turns out, they weren't very successful in making the tomb of Jesus secure. They couldn't keep Jesus from rising. They couldn't keep the angel from descending. They couldn't keep the angel from rolling the stone away from the entrance to the tomb. And they couldn't keep Jesus from leaving the tomb.

It has been said that the angel didn't roll away the stone to let Jesus out. He rolled the stone away to let people in so they could discover Jesus wasn't there. When that stone was rolled away, Jesus was already gone.

Game. Set. Match. Jesus. The religious authorities failed to fulfill their mission.

When I think about those religious authorities trying to stop Easter, I am reminded of the chief character in Dr. Seuss' book, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* You know the story. On Christmas Eve, the Grinch snuck into the sleepy town of Whoville. He entered every house and stole their stockings, gifts, food, Christmas trees. Dr. Seuss wrote:

Then the last thing he took
Was the log for the fire!
Then he went up the chimney, himself, the old liar.
On their walls he left nothing but hooks and some
wire.
And the one speck of food
That he left in the house
Was a crumb that was even too small for a mouse.

The Grinch proceeded to take all of those things to the top of Mt. Crumpit where he intended to dump it. Dr. Seuss describes the scene:

“Pooh-Pooh to the Whos!” he was grinchishly humming.
“They’re finding out now that no Christmas is coming!
“They’re just waking up! I know just what they’ll do!
“Their mouths will hang open a minute or two
“Then the Whos down in Whoville will all cry, Boo-Hoo!

“That’s a noise,” grinned the Grinch,
“That I simply MUST hear!”
So, he paused. And the Grinch put his hand to his ear.
And he *did* hear a sound rising over the snow.
It started in low. Then it started to grow . . .

But the sound wasn’t *sad*!
Why, this sound sounded *merry*!
It *couldn’t* be so!
But it WAS merry! Very!

He stared down at Whoville!
The Grinch popped his eyes!
Then he shook!
What he saw was a shocking surprise!

Every Who down in Whoville, the tall and the small,
Was singing! Without any presents at all!
He HADN’T stopped Christmas from coming!
IT CAME!
Somehow or other, it came just the same!

And the Grinch, with his grinch-feet ice-cold in the snow,
Stood puzzling and puzzling: “How could it be so?
“It came without ribbons! It came without tags!
“It came with packages, boxes or bags!”
And he puzzled three hours, till his puzzler was sore.
Then, the Grinch thought of something he hadn’t before!
“Maybe Christmas,” he thought, “doesn’t come from a
store.
“Maybe Christmas . . . perhaps . . . means a little bit
more.”

The main difference between the Grinch and the religious authorities is that the Grinch’s heart grew three-sizes that day, and the hearts of the religious authorities only got harder and colder.

But what about your heart? Give your heart to God, and let Him mold you into becoming a quiet supporter who does what you can with what He supplies.