

“Going Public”—Matthew 10:32-33

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Going Public”, is Matthew 10:32-33 → Jesus says: *Everyone who acknowledges Me before men, I also will acknowledge before My Father Who is in heaven, but whoever denies Me before men, I also will deny before My Father Who is in heaven.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord (cf. 1Timothy 1:2). Amen.

Thanks to the marvel of media you have been exposed to the concept of “going public” to such an extent that you may be wondering who’s next. Seems that we’ve heard so many people go public with information they’ve kept hidden for years. From people confessing their addictions on the road to recovery to . . . people revealing being victimized by those in prominent positions to . . . people going public with their gender identity . . . and so forth. We are constantly bombarded with the revelation of sins in the lives of the rich, famous and prestigious. Suddenly, many gasp in horror, shocked that these people could act that way . . . as if the marvel of media automatically turned them into “saints”

somehow. Immediately the judgments, comments and opinions fly, many times without discernment, even to the point of destroying the reputations and lives of many.

What happens when someone “goes public” with their faith in Jesus Christ? I guess it depends upon how one understands going public with your faith in Jesus. Does it mean you confess your faith in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, stating that you will suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from Him? In our tradition that usually happens within the context of the worshiping Christian congregation with the Confirmation Rite and is celebrated by all present. If one understands going public with your faith in Jesus as freely speaking His Word in the daily vocations of your life, expressing the conviction that everyone needs to repent their sins and believe in Him to be saved, celebration may be the furthest thing from peoples’ minds who hear that confession. Instead, you may be attacked verbally or even physically.

As Jesus spoke to His disciples about going public *through all the towns of Israel* (cf. Matthew 10:23), proclaiming Him as the Christ, He told them straightway what they would encounter. They would encounter persecution on many levels: they would be delivered *over to courts and flogged in their synagogues* (cf. Matthew 10:17); they would experience family members kill each other, and not because they were a

dysfunctional family (cf. Matthew 10:21); they would *be hated by all for His name's sake* (cf. Matthew 10:22); they would be accused of working for the devil (cf. Matthew 10:25). Wow! Sounds like the kind of group you want to join, doesn't it?

Why would there be so much animosity toward the followers of Jesus? Because of the devil and the sinful heart. Before destroying life on the earth with a flood, Genesis 6:5 says *Yahweh saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*. Hundreds of years later Jesus described the sinful heart, stating that *out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander* and so forth (cf. Matthew 15:19). The heart lost in the darkness and slavery of sin loves sin, loves to hear about peoples' sins and hates to be told it has to repent of it's sin in accountability to anyone, let alone Jesus. At the same time, it also thinks it is always justified in it's sin. No wonder Scripture so many times refers to sinners as hardhearted (cf. Zechariah 7:12; Mark 3:5; 16:14; Romans 2:5; Ephesians 4:18). When the followers of Jesus reveal peoples' sinful heart expressing itself in words and actions, its natural inclination is to fight back. Thus, persecution.

Notice what Jesus says in verse 32 of our text: *Everyone who acknowledges Me **before men**, I also will acknowledge before My*

Father Who is in heaven. To acknowledge Jesus is not simply to mention His name, have a liking for Him as a great teacher, or acknowledge Him as a historical figure. It is to express publicly that Jesus is Lord. It's a public expression of the conviction that we confess in the Nicene Creed: that there is only "one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried. And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures and ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father. And He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead, whose kingdom will have no end" (cf. 2nd Article of the Nicene Creed). This Jesus is totally unique as God in the flesh.

To acknowledge Jesus ***before men*** (i.e. openly confess Him in the presence of others) is saying that His Person & Work defines your life now and into eternity. It is not saying that you've made Jesus Lord of your life. It is not saying that you were brought up in a church or are a member of a church and so forth. It is confessing **Who Jesus actually**

is rather than Whom you feel you've made Him to be. It is confessing your sins in accountability to His atoning sacrifice on the cross and then confessing that He is the resurrected Lord of all. Romans 10:9-10 puts it this way: *If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.* You are simply confessing the trust in the Person & Work of Jesus which the Holy Spirit places in your heart (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:9-15; 12:3).

The persecution which could accompany going public with your faith in Jesus involves risk, even the possibility of losing your life. This is a very difficult thought since we invest so much of ourselves into this life with its relationships and stuff which means so much to us. Thus the warning in verse 33 of our text where Jesus says: *whoever denies Me before men, I also will deny before My Father Who is in heaven.* In Mark 8:38 Jesus speaks of being *ashamed of Him **and of His words*** (i.e. His teachings) *in this adulterous and sinful generation.* Why would a Christian deny Jesus or be ashamed of Him and His teachings? Because the devil is constantly working through the sinful influences of a sin-darkened world to bring forth a denial of Jesus as Lord from your sinful heart. 1 Peter 5:8-9 instructs us Christians as it describes the

efforts of the devil through persecution: *Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, **knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.*** The suffering referred to here is persecution because of the **public** confession of Jesus as Lord.

In Matthew 10:28 Jesus commanded His disciples to not be afraid of *those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.* Instead, we are to *fear Him Who can destroy both soul and body in hell* (i.e. God). Jesus knew the force of idolatry in sinners very well. The nature of this sinful idolatry is caring more about what other human beings think about us with no regard for what God (Who sees all, always) thinks about us.

Have you ever found yourself having more respect for other human beings than you do for the Lord Jesus and His teachings? Have you publicly denied Jesus by agreeing with statements or teachings which minimize His atoning work of the cross by purporting many ways to God or heaven? Have you ever denied Jesus by continuing to live in unrepentant sin? Don't think you're exempt from such sins. Jesus' disciples weren't. After His resurrection from the dead Mark 16:14 says *He appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and He rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because*

they had not believed those who saw Him after He had risen.

Yet, it was these same disciples whom He sent *into all the world* to *proclaim **the gospel** to the whole creation* (cf. Mark 16:15). Why? Because sinners such as they, you and myself have experienced forgiveness from all sins of denial, *unbelief and hardness of heart* through faith in the Person & Work of Jesus! He still lives as Lord of all and comes to you daily in the good news of the forgiveness of your sins. He comes to us gathered here with His presence, giving us the forgiveness of sins anew in His absolution and body and blood. His Holy Spirit works through the Word and Sacraments so we can leave this place and go public, *not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes* (cf. Romans 1:16). Thus, going public in the confession of Jesus as Lord also reveals yourself as a sinner living under His forgiveness and grace daily. Amen.

Since then we have a great high priest

Who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God,

let us hold fast our confession.

For we do not have a high priest

Who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses,

but One Who in every respect has been tempted as we are,

yet without sin.

*Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace,
that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

(Hebrews 4:14-16)

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