

Be Bold and Acknowledge Jesus

²⁴ “A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. ²⁵ It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household! ²⁶ “So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. ²⁷ What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. ²⁸ Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. ³⁰ And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. ³² “Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. ³³ But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.

Do you like conflict? Not many folks do. You don’t want to become the object of scorn nor do you want to have to defend yourself in the face of events out of your control. But it happens. For example, a few years ago when football player Randy Moss played for the Minnesota Vikings he was involved in many shenanigans on and off the playing field. My friends knew I was an avid fan of the Vikings. Since Randy Moss’ actions weren’t too popular with many fans around the NFL, I ended up having to defend myself as a fan of the Vikings. This was mostly in jest, but somehow I became partly responsible for Randy Moss’ actions!

Now I’m sure you all know what it’s like to hold an unpopular position or opinion. You may like the “wrong” political party or take the “unpopular side” of a hot social issue like same-sex marriage or stem cell research. Or maybe it’s something simpler; you like music or fashion that others do not appreciate. There are limitless reasons why other people might criticize you and even physically oppose you. To avoid that kind of conflict, you might do as I sometimes do and just hold your tongue.

However, there are times when we can’t keep quiet. Usually this happens when the issue at hand is not a matter of opinion but of truth. Suppose my neighbor is sitting on his porch getting drunk. If I go tell him that this is wrong and he ought not do it, I’ll be told in graphic terms where to put my opinion! In that case, it’s probably better to just keep quiet. However, once he’s good and drunk, and if he heads for the car, I need to speak up. In fact if he’s been drinking at my house I can be held legally liable. It’s no longer a matter of moral opinion but of law. Facts and opinions. The world tells us to share facts and might even punish us if we keep them to ourselves; but opinions... the world tells us to keep to ourselves and might punish us if we share them!

The issue Jesus sets before us today causes us to confront this social rule. Jesus wants us to *acknowledge or confess him before others*. The problem is that the world has decided that any statement concerning Jesus is a matter of opinion rather than fact. As an opinion you and I are free to believe whatever we want about Jesus, but we are not so free to share that belief with others. Most people would like us to keep this opinion to ourselves unless we are asked for it.

We know that to acknowledge that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and the Savior of the world is considered an opinion. We know that to acknowledge Jesus as Lord makes other people uncomfortable, even violently angry. And so, perhaps more often than not, when the subject of Jesus comes up we are hesitant to acknowledge our faith in him. We pull a Peter. We don’t openly deny knowing Jesus but we don’t acknowledge him either. Later, like Peter, we regret our cowardice.

This is an issue that will not go away. We cannot hide from it. In chapter 10 of his Gospel, Matthew recorded Jesus’ teaching concerning our witness to the world about him. The chapter begins with Jesus naming the 12 apostles and sending them out to teach and heal as he had done. **As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The**

kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. (10:7-8). This was head on confrontation with the devil and the world. It was a battle for truth. Jesus didn't send them out to express their opinion about him. He sent them to physically demonstrate his claim that in him, God had come to earth to restore the world's broken relationship with him!

Naturally, there were both great blessings and grave consequences to this proclamation of the good news. One could be healed and have God's blessing. Or, **If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.** (Mat 10:14-15).

Jesus then went on to talk about more than just the 12 apostles. He talked about all follow him and become his disciples. **Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.** 'Everyone' includes you...and me. Jesus expects us to acknowledge him before others. On the one hand, that means, as the occasion arises, that we admit that we are followers of Christ and as Peter says, **"To always be prepared to give a reason for this hope we have."** (1Peter 3:15) On the other hand, it means to confess that what we say in our Creed is true! **"And I believe in Jesus Christ his only son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence he will come to judge the living and the dead."**

That confession offends the world. It offends the world because it claims to be, not an opinion, but objective truth that many people ignore. These are historical details—"suffered under Pontius Pilate"—and facts for which eyewitnesses were willing to die. The claim that Jesus is the Christ has always offended the world. When Jesus said it, it offended most of the Jewish leadership. They insulted and criticized him and finally killed him! Jesus told his disciples that if he, their teacher and master, offended the world, they would do the same when they repeated his words and deeds. **If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul [i.e., the devil], how much more will they slander those of his household!**

We, therefore, can expect trouble when we acknowledge Jesus before others. They will tell us to keep our opinion to ourselves. So where do we get the courage and the resolve to share this "opinion", no... to share this fact with others? That is the question Jesus tackles in this part of his teaching.

One of the places where we get this courage is the fact that Jesus really is the Son of God. The main point in all of Jesus' preaching and teaching is that he is the promised Savior. To prove that claim he fulfilled all of the Old Testament prophecies. He proved his teachings were true and had power by performing miracles. The Gospels preserve real history so that our faith is based on something factual rather than a nice idea. Since the Holy Spirit has convinced you of that fact, what we share with others is not an opinion but truth. And knowing that what we share is truth rather than opinion makes us bold!

The second thing that makes us bold witnesses is Jesus' promise: **Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven.** On the day of reckoning, Jesus will take you right up to the Father and say, "I know this one. He is my brother; she is my sister." Have you ever depended on a friend to get you into a party or a club or some business where you were otherwise unknown and unwelcome? All the friend had to do was say, "This guy's with me!" and you were in. That's what Jesus means. He will simply say, "This guy's with me! I suffered and died for his and her sins of denying me. At their baptism I washed away all their sins of failing to stand up for me! You cannot deny them. For they are mine!" and you will be in the kingdom of heaven. Because we know that we will be in God's kingdom forever because of Jesus' substitutionary work on our behalf, we will be bold witnesses for him, so that others will have that same certainty that we have.

And there's a third thing that makes us bold witnesses: God's control of things. Jesus says, **So do not be afraid of them. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.** Because of this great nation in which we live, we have the freedom to worship our Lord Jesus. It may not always be that way. It might happen that some of us will pay the ultimate price for our testimony. Jesus himself said that those who follow him can expect this. But death is neither a defeat for us nor a victory for those who oppose Christ. It is victory for us. The apostle Paul so confidently says in Romans 8:38,39, **"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."** No one can take eternal life from us. So there is ultimately nothing that others can do to stop us from speaking the truth and proclaiming Jesus from the housetops. Even if we die for it, we will win the victory.

Jesus adds one more thing. **Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.** As you go about yard work around your home or if you're out for a walk, you often see dead birds on the ground; a fledgling fallen from its nest, a sparrow killed by a cat. We might not think twice about it, but your Heavenly Father knows about those seemingly insignificant actions. You are so much more special to him. He offered his Son's life to save yours! If your Father in heaven pays attention to your little details, so that he even has the number of hairs on your head numbered, (for some of you it's easier for him to count than for others), certainly he pays attention and helps you when you confess the truth that he commands us to confess! Certainly he listens to your cry for boldness to proclaim his name to the nations!

Brothers and sisters, Jesus wants you to be his witnesses however and whenever that happens. And he doesn't want you to be afraid to acknowledge him before other people. He wants you to be bold. Jesus knows that many will reject our witness to the truth and insult us as they did him. But he says, "Don't be afraid of them. They can't harm you. I will protect you." Be bold witnesses and acknowledge Jesus until that day he takes you home to acknowledge you before his Father in heaven. May the Holy Spirit grant it to us for Jesus' sake. Amen.