

Acknowledge Jesus Before Men – Part 2

Let me begin this morning by asking all of you a question and then I will attempt to answer it in a way, that for most of you, you will not have thought to answer it this way, at least not at first. The question is this:

What do we need to remember MOST in our time of trial or suffering?

Notice that in asking this question, I am not supposing that any of you will be kept from all suffering. In fact, I would be willing to argue that God is not a loving Father to you if He were to keep you from all trials and sufferings. The author of Hebrews first quotes from **Proverbs 3** and then argues:

⁵ you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, “MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD [YHWH], NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; ⁶ FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD [YHWH] LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.” ⁷ It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline? ⁸ But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹ Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, **but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.** ¹¹ All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness (**Heb. 12:5-11**).

Now, there is a lot packed into these verses, but the main idea is very clear: **if we are God's children and He loves us, then we should expect Him to discipline us**. Now don't get frightened by that word “discipline.” We use it in many ways. The most common way we use it as Christians is actually very positive. We speak of Jesus' followers as “disciples,” by which we mean that Jesus, by the Spirit and the Word, is “disciple-ing” or “disciplining” us. He is training or teaching us how to live in Him: **to trust Him, to love Him, to obey Him, to walk with Him**. The negative of disciplining comes only when He lovingly brings us back into “the way” with Him when we step out of “the way” and He does this only because He knows that it is in “**the way**” that we will be most joyful both in this life and in the life to come.

The process, whether positive or negative, often **hurts** because God is reshaping, refashioning us by removing what is hurting us and conforming us into what will eternally benefit us – so that we can most enjoy His glorious presence. But when it hurts, we must remember that the scalpel is being held in the hand of our loving Father, who also taught His Son, Jesus, by the many things He suffered (cf. **Heb. 5:8**). Your Father always has a purpose for every painful scar He gives you (**see above Heb. 12:10-11**) – that is why He tells you, in our trials, to constantly keep your eyes on Jesus:

² [fix your] eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who **for the joy** set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, **so that you will not grow weary and lose heart (Heb. 12:2-3).**

So what then **do we** need to remember MOST in our time of trial and suffering? In our passage this morning, found in Luke's Gospel, Jesus tells us what it is that we need to remember MOST in **vv. 8-9: we must confess Him before men!** That's it! The most important thing you need to remember in your time of trial and suffering is **to confess Jesus before men – to be a witness to the good news of the person and work of Jesus.** This is true whether you are about to be martyred by radical Muslims or you are sitting in the hospital with the flu. Trials and tribulations are **God-graced-moments** in your life where God has uniquely placed you in a new situation where you, as His child, are being displayed by Him as a work of His grace. In that specific situation where He has placed you, you have the glorious privilege of giving testimony of Jesus, your King!. What do I mean and why do I say it is the MOST important?

It is the MOST important because - look again at what Jesus attaches to His declaration: both a positive and a negative. First, everyone who faithfully confesses/acknowledges Jesus before men, the Son of Man (**cf. Dan. 7:13-14**) will confess him before the angels of God (**v. 8**). But, everyone who denies Jesus before men will be denied by Jesus before the angels of God (**v. 9**). That is both one of the most amazing promises in all of Scripture and one of the most terrifying. What does it look like to be denied by Jesus? In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus warns:

²¹ "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*. ²² "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' ²³ "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS' (**Matt. 7:21-23**).

What does it look like for Jesus to confess us? John writes:

¹ My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; ² and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of* the whole world (**1 John 2:1-2**).

³³ Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; ³⁴ who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us (**Rom. 8:33-34**).

By referencing the "angels of God," along with the Danielic "Son of Man" reference, Jesus is pointing forward, eschatologically, to the future judgment of God, the Day of the LORD, where Satan, along with all his minions, and all mankind will be judge by Almighty God (**cf. Rev. 20:11-15**). On that day, no matter what you think of it now, it will become the MOST important day of your life when Jesus either acknowledges you as the one He came to die for OR He denies you, that He never knew you.

So since that day will be the most important day of your life, because it will forever secure your eternal destiny, then what you do in regards to that day must be the most important thing you will ever do and that is, as Paul says:

⁸ But what does it say? “THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART” — that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, ⁹ **that if you confess with your mouth** Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; ¹⁰ for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, **and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation (Rom. 10:8-10).**

But Jesus also knows that confessing Him before men, especially within a hostile world, will not always be easy. He promises us:

¹⁸ “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before *it hated you*. ¹⁹ “If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. ²⁰ “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also (**John 15:18-20; cf. 17:14**).

There will always be a temptation for us, like the Pharisees, to conform to the pressure of this world's view of life and therefore to play the hypocrite in our devotion to God (**Luke 12:1; cf. Rom. 12:1-2**). We act one way before Christian people and another way before the people of the world. Jesus reminds us that the pressure to conform is often due to our fear of man – we are afraid of what others might think about us, what they might do to us, or what we might lose on account of Jesus. That's why Jesus warns us Who it is who we must truly fear (**vv. 2-5**). We should never live two separate lives – one in secret and one in public, thinking that what we do in the dark will always stay in the dark (**vv. 2-3**). While some may live by the adage that “what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas,” as Christians we know better, “It won't stay in Vegas forever”! In fact, if you really want your mind blown, it is **well known in heaven** long before it ever happens in Vegas.

There are no dark places before God! That is why we should be far more concerned about what He thinks about us, than what man thinks about us (**vv. 4-5**). We are called to always live **COREM DEO** – before the face of God! Jesus is King Now! We are His subjects, called by His name, saved for His glory. As the sheep of His pasture, we have nothing to fear by the worldlings of this age, who can merely kill the body and do nothing more (**v. 4**). It is not we, who should be afraid of them, but they, should be afraid, very afraid, of Him! For He has the power not only to end life here on earth, but He has complete control over all life after death, including sending a soul to hell (**v. 5**).

But that doesn't mean that we, as God's children, should not also fear God. But our fear of God is very different than how the sinner outside of Christ SHOULD fear God. That is why Jesus goes on to describe the disciple's fear in **vv. 6-7**. Think about what Jesus is saying here. He is not merely saying look at how God loves the sparrows – isn't that cute! Jesus is saying something far more profound. There are many things in life that we value. There are a few things that we highly value. But then there are many things we couldn't care less about. Things we pass by every day and don't think about them at all. Sparrows for instance. In the ancient near east, sparrows were the cheapest thing

sold in the market and were often part of the diet of the poor. According to Jesus, five sparrows could be purchased with two assarions, a small Roman coin worth 1/16th of a denarius or a couple of pennies (v. 6). Yet despite their cheapness yet not one of them escapes God's attention. Or take the hairs upon your head. You have to be pretty lonely on a Friday night to stay home and count each of the hairs on your head. Yet God knows the exact number of them all (v. 7). We might even say God knows the exact number your heart will ever beat. Have you ever known someone who can keep track of a multitude of trivial matters in his or her head and yet carry on with all their normal daily activities without having to constantly review a whole list of inconsequential facts? Imagine knowing the location of every single sparrow, which exists, to feed and care for its every need or knowing not just the exact number of hairs upon your head but upon every head of every human being which lives or has lived or will ever live. Can you even begin to fathom such vast greatness of knowledge?

¹⁴ But Zion said, "The LORD [YHWH] has forsaken me, and the Lord has forgotten me."

¹⁵ [But YHWH answered] "Can a woman forget her nursing child and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you (Isa. 49:14-15).

The point Jesus is making is clear: if God cares, truly cares, about all these inconsequential matters, then how much more do you think He cares about you, His child? When you are called to suffer for Jesus' sake, don't be afraid – God will take care of you (v. 7). He knows exactly what you need. He knows your address. You will never stand for Christ in the face of rejection that God is not present with you. You will never be in need of His mercy and grace that He will not be there to give you all you need. Do not be afraid! You are of far more value to Him than many sparrows (v. 7).

Think about how this perfectly fits the Gospel of Luke as a whole. Do you remember why Luke is writing the Gospel? Look at **Luke 1:4!** Remember what the author of Hebrews said? Fix your eyes on Jesus (**Heb. 12:2!**) That's what we are doing this morning in the Gospel of Luke and what we will be doing in a few moments in the Sacrament of the Table. We are fixing our eyes on Jesus! Do you remember what Stephen looked upon in His moment of trial?

⁵⁴ Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they *began* gnashing their teeth at him. ⁵⁵ But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; ⁵⁶ and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (**Acts 7:54-56**).

When you are called to confess Jesus before men, you have nothing to fear. Immanuel is with you, even to the end of the age (**cf. Matt. 28:20!**)

Now, Jesus adds yet another layer to this already overwhelming encouragement of His presence in **v. 10**. In a few more months, Jesus will return to the Father in Heaven to sit at His right hand. But He will not leave us as orphans. He will send the Holy Spirit upon us, to us, inside us to conform us into the life of Jesus. And He will be with us as we go about confessing Jesus before men. In fact, according to **vv. 11-12**, we are not even to worry about what we will say because the Holy Spirit will teach us – in that very hour – what we ought to say about Jesus (**cf. Lk. 21:14-15**). Remember how the Holy Spirit was with Peter in **Acts 4**, which we opened with, or with how He was with Stephen in **Acts 7** or with Paul in the ending of **Acts (21-28)**? Jesus' disciples can boldly face persecution because

of the promise that God's Spirit will be with them, to instruct them in what they are to say, to speak through them **to make Jesus known**.

And when they do – that is confess Jesus before men, Jesus provides yet another promise in **v. 10**. What does Jesus mean? There have been several interpretations of this passage throughout church history but here are a couple of the best ones.

First, Jesus is speaking here about those who reject Jesus during His earthly ministry, but since He has not yet poured out the Holy Spirit (**cf. John 7:39**), that denial of Jesus can be forgiven, assuming that that individual eventually comes to Jesus for salvation. But once the Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost and empowers the preaching of the apostolic Gospel and that work of the Spirit's testimony of Jesus is rejected, then that sin cannot be forgiven him.

The second is like the first, only more intense. Jesus is not referring to a single act of rejection but a persistent and decisive rejection of the internal witness of the Holy Spirit's testimony of Jesus. Let's look at **John 16:7-15**. Did you catch those last verses – Jesus declares, “He (the Holy Spirit) will glorify Me (Jesus), for He will take what is mine and declare it to you”? Have you ever wanted to join in with what God is doing in our world? To take your life and run it parallel with all that God is doing in redemptive history so that together with Him you are reaching toward the same goal? Paul said in **Ephesians 1**:

⁸ In all wisdom and insight ⁹ He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him ¹⁰ with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, *that is, the summing up of all things in Christ*, things in the heavens and things on the earth (**Eph. 1:8-10**).

All that the Holy Spirit is doing through the Word of God, all that He is doing in the history of the world is taking what Jesus has accomplished and declaring it – the Good News - so that He will glorify Jesus, which in turns glorifies the Father (**cf. John 17:1, 4; also 12:28; 13:31**). So what Jesus is saying here is that when the external Gospel is proclaimed, along with the internal witness of the Spirit testifying to the truth of the Gospel and that work of God is obstinately rejected – when the sinner fixedly refuses the Gospel – that person will not be forgiven. In other words, it is one thing to receive the outer, external witness of Jesus alone and temporarily reject Him. We might think of what Peter did in denying Jesus before the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost. But once the Spirit comes to testify internally in the heart of the sinner to who Jesus is and there is persistent and continual rejection of His testimony of Jesus, that sin will never be forgiven. This is the sin that leads to eternal death – the rejection of the Spirit's testimony to the person and work of Jesus, because if the sinner rejects the Spirit's internal witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, God has made no other way of salvation under heaven and on earth (**cf. 1 John 5:16-17**). It is this final, obstinate rejection that the Holy Spirit will overcome in God's elect by bringing about what Jesus describes to Nicodemus as the new birth from heaven above (**John 3:3, 5**).

While we remain in this world, it is knowledge of the heavenly resources which are ours already **in Christ** and made known to us by His Spirit which provide us with all the encouragement we need to faithfully persevere to the end and boldly acknowledge Jesus Christ, the Son of God, before all men. Paul said it this way in **Ephesians 1**:

³ Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ ⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless **before Him** (**Eph. 1:3-4**),

Peter said it this way:

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a **living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, **reserved in heaven for you**, ⁵ who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (**1 Pet. 1:3-5**).

The point Jesus is making here in the Gospel is very clear – the road we must travel as aliens and pilgrims in this world will not always be easy. After Paul and Barnabus had been stoned at Lystra and dragged out of the city, left for dead, we are told that they returned to many of the cities where they had ministered:

²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and *saying*, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (**Acts 14:22**).

But part of the good news you need to remember this morning is that in all things that God has ordained for your life, including the “many tribulations” He calls you to endure for His name's sake, He will be with you – together with us, His body, the Church. He loves us and He will see us through to the end. We will not have to go it alone, no matter how difficult it may become. Even in death He will be with you. Therefore, **do not be afraid**. King Solomon summed up our life with Jesus beautifully:

⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. ⁷ Do not be wise in your own eyes; **Fear the LORD** and turn away from evil. ⁸ It will be healing to your body and refreshment to your bones (**Prov. 3:5-8**).

Amen!

-SDG-