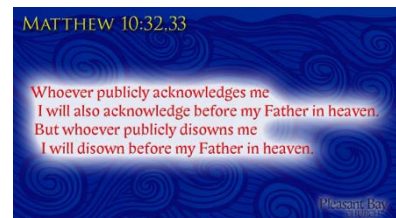


Public Hearing

I explained last week that we're taking things a bit *out of order* as I'm accommodating vacation schedules and such. Last week, Steve took us through Matthew 10:34-39; today we are stepping back two verses to the passage Bill read this morning. Some of these *red letters* that we've been studying for several months now are pretty easy to take; others are harder... much harder. I think these may be among the more difficult to take.



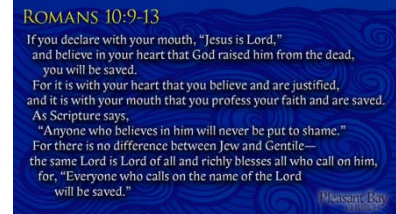
³²“Whoever publicly acknowledges me I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. ³³But whoever publicly disowns me I will disown before my Father in heaven.¹



Whoever publicly acknowledges me...

This is a consistent theme of our faith. We have this understanding that this relationship with Jesus is both a private and a public thing. We privately acknowledge Jesus as He meets us individually, and we publicly acknowledge Him, both within the community of faith and in the open public.

Romans 10:9-13 presents *public acknowledgment* as vital:



⁹If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

¹⁰For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

¹¹As Scripture says, “Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.” ¹²For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”²

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved... we call on Him both with the inner voice of our hearts / souls / spirits, and we call on Him aloud, publicly acknowledging that we believe and find ourselves to be His.

We publicly acknowledge Jesus, that we are His followers, that we are Christians, in all sorts of ways. With words and actions, behaviors and choices, and with whom we align ourselves with and call our community of faith, we identify ourselves with Jesus. By simply showing up here today we are publicly acknowledging Jesus.

Sometimes we do it with symbols. We wear crosses around our necks and t-shirts that declare our allegiance.

Some of us put a fish on our car.

I suppose that putting a fish on our car is a form of publicly acknowledging Jesus... but I'm pretty sure Jesus had something more in mind.



Has anyone else noticed that there are a lot of us *fish people* driving around out there who's driving may indicate that the fish is more stamped on the back of our cars than stamped on our hearts and lives? Shouldn't we be able to revoke the fish when we see it cut us off in traffic?

As a pastor, I think I ought to be able to pull people over and revoke their *Ichthys privileges*. Lights and sirens and all...

The whole **WWJD** (what would Jesus do) line of stuff has become a prominent part of witness wear.



A lot of funny (and sometimes poignant) things have been said about those WWJD bracelets.

I've heard a couple prominent speakers remind us that there isn't any magic in the bracelet. Just like the crosses we might wear around our necks, or even tattoo on our arms, at best all they do is serve as a reminder. They can't magically make us spiritual.

I heard a comedian tell a story that went something like this:

So I'm at a movie and the guy in front of me just won't shut up... talk, talk, talk... talking to his neighbors, talking to the screen, talking on the phone... this guy just wouldn't shut up so we could enjoy our movie. We tried "shushing" him, clearing our throats... all the polite ways to get our point across but this knucklehead remained oblivious. Finally I got up to get my point across a bit more forcefully... but just before I slapped the guy in the head I saw my WWJD bracelet. It caused me to pause and consider... WWJD... would Jesus slap this poor guy in the back of the head? Of course not... so I asked myself what would Jesus do... so I fried the guy with a lightning bolt from heaven and sent him to you know where!

That isn't a case of WWJD; it is a case of WWIDIWJ... what would I do if I were Jesus.

WWIDIWJ is often way more fun than WWJD.



WWJD bracelets and such are a fine way to publicly acknowledge Jesus... but, again, I'm confident Jesus had more in mind.

We know Jesus had more in mind because of the context in which He made these hard statements.

Jesus was sending His Disciples into the world to be His witnesses. These words **are for us** today, but there were **first** for the Twelve he chose to build His Church.

He said: ¹⁶“I am sending you out like sheep among wolves.” ³

Publicly acknowledging Jesus the way that He was directing would be dangerous. There would be persecution and betrayal.

Those of you who were with us last week, or listened to the podcast, will recall the words of Jesus that follow.

I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.

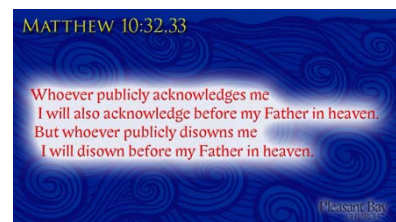
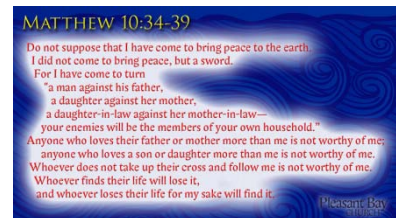
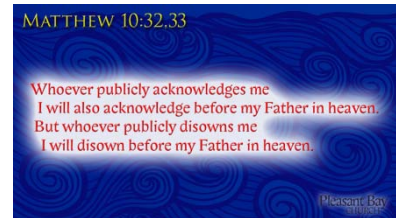
³⁷“Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves a son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” ³⁸Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it. ⁴

Each of these Twelve suffered for the sake of Christ. Most were martyred, losing their lives in the name of Jesus.

So facing this opposition, the followers of Jesus were given this extraordinary promise: ³²“Whoever publicly acknowledges me I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven.” ⁵

Go ahead... follow Jesus... follow Him boldly. Even if it is dangerous... even if it is deadly... even if it causes you heartbreak as it puts you at odds with your friends and family and neighbors and even government if necessary... it is worth it all because the best reward, the eternal reward, is prepared for those who publicly acknowledge Jesus.

³²“Whoever publicly acknowledges me I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven.” ⁶



The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version. 2005 (Mt 10:16). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version. 2005 (Mt 10:37–39). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version. 2005 (Mt 10:32). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version. 2005 (Mt 10:32). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Verse 32 is a great promise... but verse 33 seems like a grave threat.

³³But whoever publicly disowns me I will disown before my Father in heaven.⁷

³⁸Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹Whoever finds their life will lose it⁸...

Is this one of those deals that once *in the deal* the only way *out of the deal* leaves one far worse off than when they started. Is it worse to be *disowned* than to never be *owned* at all?

The Message of Scripture is clear; there will be a moment when this life is over when we want to find ourselves **owned** by God... being *disowned* by Jesus before His Father in Heaven would be Hell... literally.

At that moment, standing before the Holy and Righteous Judge, we would be **undone** except for our standing in Christ. 1 John may say it best:

we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ²He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins⁹

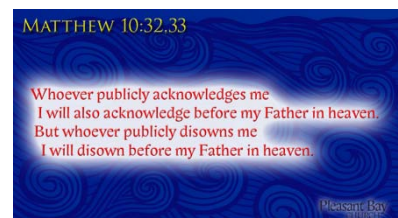
The price is paid, and we are owned by Jesus. When we confess that Jesus is Lord and believe, we are saved; we are owned by God.

It could be that the “so what” this morning is more of a “but what.” Don’t we have to ask ourselves about that most difficult word in our passage? Don’t we have to ask ourselves about that word: **disowned**? But what about that? Can we be disowned? Can we disqualify ourselves?



The patchwork quilt that makes up the Church around the world and through the ages is separated by all sorts of categories. We come in all sorts of flavors (like mixed nuts... some even broken and cracked). We draw lines along a number of issues, including: style, history, tradition, founding figures, reformations and revivals, interpretation of Scripture, and theology. We gather around personalities or favorite themes, ways of doing things, and sometimes we even gather around what we’re *against*. Hence all the various denominations and such that we enjoy today.

This question of our ability to do something that would *disown us* is one of those theological issues that divides the Church.



The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version. 2005 (Mt 10:33). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version. 2005 (Mt 10:38–39). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version. 2005 (1 Jn 2:1–2). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

There are those of us who are very concerned with our behavior so as to make sure that we are not disowned. We are careful to keep the rules and say the right things so that we don't backslide. We take seriously the injunctions of Scripture that call for holiness and right living. At the extremes, we're worried that we might get caught in some **backslidden** state. What if Jesus raptured the Church while we were watching an R-rated movie or smoking a cigarette in a bar? What if we had backslidden and didn't even know it, accidentally disowning Jesus? At the extremes, with these fears, we get saved over and over again... just to make sure, or at least improve our odds.

There are also those of us who are so consumed with the idea of God's sovereignty that our actions and behaviors are of no concern. We aren't worried about being **disqualified** by anything we say or do because we aren't **qualified** by anything we say or do. If we couldn't get ourselves qualified, how can we get ourselves disqualified? If there wasn't anything we could do to get ourselves **in**, how could we do anything to get ourselves **out**? At the extremes, we say "once saved always saved." God chooses whom He chooses and there isn't anything we can do about it, one way or the other.

In **far** too overly simplified terms, the folks who focus on **our action** are classified as Armenians, and the folks who focus on **God's sovereignty** are Calvinists. I suppose most churches are one or the other (that is if they even know what they are); I know that we have some of each here.

Here's some of what I think.

There is tension between these two positions because, at least in my view, this tension is clearly found in the Bible. The reason that both positions can both be so skillfully defended by Scripture is because they are both there. We can be good Bible-believing Calvinists and we can be good Bible-believing Armenians. I like what I've heard our friend Dr. Kowalski says: "I think God is a Calvinist but He wants us to be Armenians."

So we have this tension. In the specific terms of this passage it is clear that we want to be owned by Christ. But can we do something that would cause us to be disowned? Once owned, and then not?

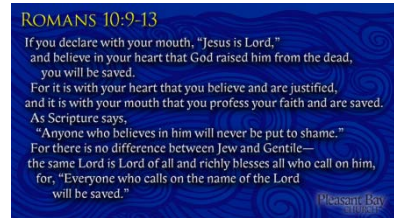
Commentators on this passage almost always point out that there was one among the Twelve who publicly disowned Jesus: Judas Iscariot. This betrayer disowned Jesus and it appears that he died in this terrible state.

But was Judas Iscariot the only one of the Twelve who publicly disowned Jesus? What about Peter, future leader of the Church? What about any of the Twelve? Weren't they all scattered? Didn't Jesus die on that cruel cross alone? Clearly that did not disqualify them from their destiny as the first builders of the Church? Did they backslide and then get saved again? Or were they always constrained by God's sovereign plan?

Tension. I'm convinced that God has it there on purpose. Frankly, I'm suspicious of those who think they have all of this completely figured out. Like the high-tension cables that hold together the Tacoma Narrows Bridge, I think God has purposefully built our Faith with tensions like these.

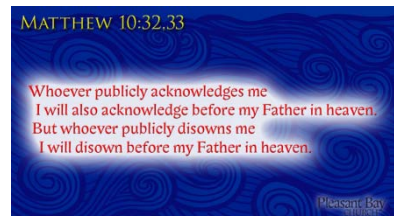
Can we disown Jesus to the point that He disowns us? This is an important question, especially in the context of this tension.

Once we have done what Romans so clearly states... once we have declared that "Jesus is Lord," believed and been saved... can we be *unsaved*? Can we be *backslidden*? Can we be *disowned*?



Well... yes, I think we can... but I think it is a whole lot harder than a lot of us think. Can we *unbelieve*? I believe we can... but I can't imagine how I could ever really *unbelieve*. Is it possible to unbelieve? I suppose, but I really don't know how... and I don't want to find out how.

Can my mistakes and missteps, my laziness and sloppiness, even my fits of willful disobedience translate into moments of publicly disowning Jesus to the point where I would find myself disowned. No... it just isn't that easy. Thank God it isn't that easy.



We find ourselves in the midst of this tension between these positions, between a focus on our action and a focus on God's sovereignty, not to pull us apart.

If we think the point of all this is to find that fine line, that line at which on one side we are owned by Christ and on the other we are disowned... if we think the point is to determine that fine line, then we have certainly missed the point. If we think we are to be defining that fine line so that we can get as close to it as possible, or if we think we are to find that line so we can determine who is *in* and who is *out*... we are missing the point.

We find ourselves in the midst of this tension between these positions, between a focus on our action and a focus on God's sovereignty, not to pull us apart in that tension... but to pull us to God.

Of course God is sovereign and is drawing us into His plan.

Of course God wants us to choose Him in every way possible so that we can enjoy all that He has to the fullest.

This tension is here to pull us toward God.

Why would we care to know where the line is to be **disowned**... we want to be **owned**! Fully owned! As owned as we most possibly can be owned by our God who loves us!

Personally and publicly... in our solitude and in the crowds... in our silence and with our shouts... we acknowledge that we are owned by God. And we take great comfort and courage that Jesus acknowledges that we are owned by Him.

