

**THE
BON AIR
PULPIT**

“That Everyone Might Know”

Matthew 10:32-33

December 6, 1998

All of us have to determine in our lives whether we are going to live them out before men or whether we are going to live them out before God. Jesus said one day, “*Whosoever is ashamed of me before men, I will be ashamed of him before God.*”

There are some people who are not interested in what is right. They’re only interested in what is popular. They’re not interested in what God thinks; they are only interested in what the crowd thinks. The deep motivation of their lives is that they be acceptable to everyone else. It is amazing how early that starts. One of my little granddaughters had her first loose tooth. My son began to notice that she was working on it quite frantically. He finally turned to her and said, “You don’t have to work on it; it will soon come out by itself.” With tears in her eyes she said, “But, Daddy, all of my friends have already lost two teeth! And if I don’t at least lose one they won’t like me as much.”

I love the lady who had just reached her 100th birthday and was asked what she like most about being 100, and she said, “Lack of peer pressure.” But there are many people who simply live their lives out before men. Jesus said, “If you are going to follow me, you are going to have to determine that what God thinks is more important than what others think.” In our passage of Scripture today, Jesus used the same phrase. This is Matthew Chapter 10, Verse 32. “*Whoever acknowledges Me before men, I will acknowledge before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever disowns Me before men I will disown him before my Father which is in heaven.*” The key to understanding the phrase is: who is he talking to? When you turn back to the first of the chapter you are aware that he is talking to the twelve apostles. And he is saying to them, “I am getting ready to send you on the first missionary journey. You are to go to all the cities in Israel. But this is the truth you have to understand:

unless you are willing to acknowledge Me before others, I am not willing to acknowledge you before God.” At the very heart, the essence of the Christian faith is that when I come to meet Christ, Christian faith is then something I am willing, anxious, and positively to share with other people. Jesus said that unless you are willing to let it flow out of your life to others then He will not be willing to acknowledge you before His Father which is in heaven.

This year we have been emphasizing in our church personal discipleship. Many of you are here today with those pins that you put on your clothing to symbolize that you are going to fan the flame and continue to grow in your Christian life. This next year we are going to be emphasizing sharing your faith with others--letting it flow out of your life, acknowledging Him before others. And when we do so, we’re going to confront isolationism. *Isolationism*, for many individuals, is they give their lives to Christ and their whole Christian life is just between them and Jesus. They are going to learn about Jesus and they are going to try to live for Jesus, but if you were to ask them of their Christian life, it’s “me and Him.” “I had a little tea party, I invited three. I, myself, and me.” All they think about is how *their* relationships with Christ are.

I ran into this early as a minister. A family came into our church one day and I met them as they were leaving. They invited me into their home and I heard a wonderful story: how they were fifty years of age, had never given their lives to Christ, and, by a mistake in his large company, the company had sent him to another city. While he was in the other city he became ill, went in to see a doctor, in the examining room the doctor began to talk to him about his relationship to Christ and led him to faith in Christ. When he went back home a telegram was there - “We are sorry, we sent you to the wrong place. Can you come back?” The couple came to our church to tell me how God had worked in their lives and led them to faith in Christ, and I was so excited. I said, “How wonderful! Would you maybe come to the church and I will give you a Sunday morning to share that wonderful story, and maybe you can become involved in our church and can help in our church,” and they said, “Oh, no, no, no. You see what we want to do is only to have a relationship with Christ. We want to grow in our relationship with Him.” So they were reading books, they were listening to Christian radio, and every Sunday

they would miss the music because they were listening to somebody on television, and they would come to church for the sermon, but they wouldn’t stay around and talk to anybody, “cause they would go back home to watch somebody else on television.” I worked with them for a year. I never got them out of their spiritual womb. Always in their cocoon. Just Jesus and me.

There are some people who think that’s what Christianity is. But Christianity is that Christ comes into our lives, and that when he comes in it is so revolutionary, it is so wonderful, that we want other people to know about it. And we then begin to share it with others. Very seldom in the Bible are people who are Christians ever called *believers*. In fact, I think they are called *believers* only six times in the New Testament. But hundreds of times we are called *disciples*. A *disciple* is a learner, is a follower. So it is true that in your Christian life you are to grow and to disciple and to learn more about Jesus. But interestingly enough, it you look at the first verse of that tenth chapter, Jesus calls his disciples something else. He turns to them and he says, “Now I call you apostles.” *Apostle* means *somebody who is sent out*. So notice the progression. *You believe, you disciple, you become an apostle*. Something in your mind, something in your life, then you share it with others. And the very progression of the Christian life is that you come to Christ and then you begin to share it with other people.

Now, when I read this tenth chapter again, I said, “Why did He send them? And why did he send them then?” These fellows did not know a whole lot. They just kept asking questions, they kept saying some of the silliest things. They didn’t know much. But in the tenth chapter He’s already sending them out. And my question is: why now? And the answer is this: The way you grow the most in your Christian life is when you get outside of yourself and start investing yourself in others. The remarkable truth is, the more you give to others, the more you have for yourself. And the more you begin to get outside of yourself and try to help them, the remarkable thing is you get helped yourself.

In 1991 we made a very significant decision in this church. We made the decision that we were going to get people to invest their lives in going on various kinds of mission trips. Some of our people have gone to various parts of the United States, and 25 teams from this church have gone around the world. Now you ought to talk to some of these people. They may be sitting on

the row with you. Some of our folk just got back from the country of Slovakia. I asked them, “How did it go in Slovakia?” They began to cry. “You just can’t imagine what this has done to my life.” They could have been here for years, but to be able to go! Some have gone to Brazil, some have gone to Thailand, and some have gone to Belize. They have gone all around the world and what has happened is that when they got involved, they were the ones who got the blessing.

Jesus said to these people, “I want to send you out and the reason I want to send you out is that I want you to grow, and this is the best way to get you involved.” The remarkable thing that is going to happen is that this next year, when you begin to make decisions to get involved in the lives of people, you are going to see your discipleship go straight up. Because you are going to find the spiritual principle is true: the more you give away the more you have for yourself. I would just challenge you when you get home this week to read through Chapter 10, all the way down to those verses. You are going to find what He is giving them are instructions and what He says is, “Let me tell you what you are going to learn.” Let me give you a couple of them. Down in verse 9, “*Don’t take along any gold or silver or copper in your belt, don’t take any bag, extra tunic, sandals, staff.*” --don’t take anything. *The first thing he wants to tell them and us is: you can trust in Me.* How are you ever going to really learn you can trust in God unless you are willing to take a risk, step out ,and involve yourself in the lives of others where you can only depend upon God?

Let me show you the *second one*. Verse 11, “*Whatsoever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay in his home until you leave.*” What you are going to find when you get involved in the lives of others is that God is already working in lives you didn’t know anything about and they are there to help you. You just go all the way down this whole thing and what you will begin to find is the lessons you learn when you get involved in others. We are going to continue to try to share with you that *what you need to do is to get outside of yourself.*

The second thing we are going to continue to emphasize for you is we are going to

try to *clarify your identity*. Who are you as a Christian? This season of the year we talk about God coming for us. I love the story of the shepherd who had 100 sheep. But he realized one was gone. He left the 99 and went for the one. The story is that God in heaven-- with all that He has in heaven-- looked down and said, "Some of my people are lost." And the whole story of Christmas is: I am now coming to find the one sheep that is lost. The question is, how does He do it now? Jesus has gone back to heaven. How does he do it now? The answer is through us. We've been elected. We are the ones He uses. Let me tell you a story that comes later in the Bible. There was a Roman Top Sergeant. His name was Cornelius. Cornelius, the Bible says, was a good man. He did good things, but he was still searching for God. He would pray every night, "Oh, God, answer my prayer." And then the Bible suddenly shifts, and it starts telling the story about a man named Simon Peter. Simon Peter didn't think he could go talk to a Roman soldier, and in the book of Acts there is this whole big story about how God changed Simon Peter, and Simon Peter then came all the way over and he was the one who was used to help Cornelius to come to faith in Christ. My question was, "Well, God, the fellow's out here praying, why don't you send him an angel?" Because God doesn't work that way. He sends people like us. He send someone like a Simon Peter to work in your life and to help you understand that's why He saved you. So He could use you. And the only way people are ever going to come to faith in Christ is that they are going to come because of people like you. The amazing thing is that you are so unique and you are so special to God, and you have such inroads into the lives of people that you can get in when nobody else can get in. God is able to use me as a pastor. But it is amazing sometimes; I will be in a crowd and somebody will say, "What do you do?" "Well, I'm a banker." "What do you do?" "I'm a stockbroker." "What do you do?" "I'm a pastor." And they say, "Oh." Like I'm sorry. So what I have to do with people I don't know is to run hard just to catch up. But they look at you. You are like them. You see there are males, females, and preachers. You are like them. You have an entree. You go to work every day. Preachers don't. Oh, yeah, you understand. Great. That's why God uses

you. And the frightening thing is that if you are so special and if you are so unique and if you have such an entree into the lives of people, what if you don't let God use you?

The remarkable thing is that you and I are the recipients of people who have passed the torch on to us. I was reading again recently about David Brainard. David Brainard was a young man in his early twenties who lived in upper New York. He was sitting in a church like this and got a burden for others on his life. His real burden was for native Americans. And so he began to go out in the woods and make friends with them. He began to live with them out in a tent, out in the cold, and stay in caves. He lived and slept in hollowed-out logs. He became a good friend with a man by the name of Jonathan Edwards, who later came to be president of Princeton University. He visited in his home and Dr. Edwards had a beautiful daughter named Ann. They ate together and vibes came, and finally they fell in love. Some of the most beautiful love letters I have ever read are between David and this girl whom he had finally asked to marry him. But he said to her, "You can't go live in a cave with me. You can't live in a log with me. You stay here, let me fulfill my call to God, and then I'll come back." But when David was out in the woods he became ill and they realized he had tuberculosis. He came back to Jonathan Edwards' s house and died as a young man. The beautiful story is that the daughter and fiancée cared for him and loved him, and the only love they were able to share was when he was on his death bed. Jonathan Edwards said that of all the honors that had come to me as president of Princeton University, the greatest honor that ever came to him was to have David Brainard in his house and to hear him pray.

Let me tell you, there are people who walked the woods of Virginia. There are people who came up the rivers of Virginia, and you know what they came with? They came with a Bible. And your grandparents, and your great -grandparents, and your mom and dad came because somebody said, "I want to share the message of Christ." Under God, those of us who live in Virginia cannot let the gospel stop with us. The reason God has saved us is so that you and I will have the privilege of being able to share the message with others. So, we are going to challenge you this year. We are going to challenge you to be very intentional. This is how intentional we are going to become. We are going

to ask you to pray that God will help you to share the gospel of Christ with as many people as possible. But I want to focus it in on one thing. I want to ask you and pray for you that you will be able next year to help one person to come to faith in Jesus Christ. Three hundred and sixty -five days—one person. In this congregation there are about 1500 adults. Let me just cut it in a third. Suppose 500 adults in this church said, "In 365 days, I am going to be intentional, I'm going to try to help somebody to come to faith in Jesus Christ." Are you aware that in the entire United States there are less than 100 churches, of all kinds of denominations, that ever would lead 500 people to faith in Christ in one year? If one-third of the adult membership of this church would take that as a goal and pray to God and work on it, they would break out such a revival in this congregation that this church would never be the same. We have 250 teenagers in this church. Suppose just 50 teenagers said, "I'm going to win one of my friends to faith in Christ next year." And so, every Sunday, in this congregation, at least one teenager would walk the aisle and say, "I want to give my heart and my life to Christ." I want to tell you, you'd think the rapture had come. You wouldn't be able to contain yourself.

Some of us come to church. "Oh, me, another Sunday. Gotta sit in there another hour." Let me ask you something: what would church mean if you had been praying, working, sharing, developing friendships, had helped one person to come to faith in Christ? What if you had come up to me before church and said, "Pastor, my friend is going to come to Jesus today,"? Boy, would your life be different! So, I'm going to ask you to pray. I'm going to ask you to pray that this next year you will wake up every day and say, "Lord, I have made a commitment to you. I am going to pray today for whoever you send into my path. And I am going to use my home, my social life, and my business, to do whatever I can, but, Dear God, under heaven I will acknowledge You before men because I want you to acknowledge me before You."

Let me tell you where this sermon came from. One day I was invited to speak at a church. I got out of my car, walked across the parking lot and up onto the front steps. Two fellows were standing there, I said hello to one, and turned to say hello to the other. He was one of the gosh-awfullest fellows I had ever seen. I mean, literally, he looked as if he had slept under a rock. And I just kind of nodded my head and walked on in.

Just as I stepped inside the door, I said to myself, "You dog, you are going in there and tell them that Jesus loves everybody, and you won't even spend time to talk with him." I turned around and went back out, and I hadn't talked to him very long before he turned to me and said, "I'm a sight, aren't I?" I said, "Man, you sure are." I mean, he was all which-a-way. And he said, "I've lived a tough life, and this is the result. But a couple of months ago I walked in the door of a church, and I heard the most wonderful story the world had ever told me, that Jesus loved me and died for me. I remember that church. My son lived down in Beaumont, Texas, and I hadn't seen him in a long time. I wrote him and I said, 'Son, I want to know if I can come down and visit in your home with you and your family.' And on Saturday when I got there I told my son and my daughter-in-law that I'd given my life to Christ and my life had changed; 'and the reason I've come is to ask you if you'd go to church with me tomorrow.' The son said, 'No, Dad, I am not interested in that.' And I said, "Well, if you won't go, can I take my two granddaughters?" He said, 'If you get up and get them ready, it will be fine.' I got up the next morning and I didn't know anything about bathing little girls and I didn't know anything about ironing dresses and I didn't know anything about fixing hair," and he turned to me and his hands were all bent and he said, "but I did the buttons, and I did the bows, and I brushed their hair. I walked outside and stood by a bus stop and I said, 'Take us to the nearest Baptist church.' I walked up to the church. A man was standing outside and he said, 'Where do these girls go to Sunday School?'" He reached in his pocket, pulled out a letter. It was a letter from his son, and it said, "Dear Dad, we want to thank you for coming to visit us. When you took our daughters to Sunday School, by wife turned to me and said, 'You know, we ought to have been taking them.' And Dad, I wanted you to know that last Sunday Sue and I gave our lives to Christ and we are going to be baptized, and we want to ask if you will come back to Beaumont and see us be baptized." He said to me—and this is where the sermon comes from—"When I walked into that church with those two pretty little girls and the people looked at me, I bet somebody said, 'Doesn't

he look funny?’ But I don’t care what other people think, I only want to think about what God thinks.“ The fellow hadn’t been a Christian but two months, and he was already living his life out before God, not before men.

I want to ask you, have you ever made that basic decision of life? Are you going to live your life out before God and not before men? And as a believer, are you willing to go on an adventure of life and to say, “Dear God, I want to live out my life before you. I want to acknowledge you as my Savior. And positively, I want to do what I can to share the message of Christ with others.” There are people in this room today for whom God has been doing a work in your life. I am only the Simon Peter who is here to help you make the final step in what God has already been doing in your life. Some of you need to come to give your heart and your life to Christ. You need to say, “I don’t care about what men think, I only care about Christ, and I want to give my life to Him.” And some of you are believers and you need to come and join this church family and help us to acknowledge Him to the world.