



### John 12:42-43

#### “Choose this Day Whom You Will Serve”

**42 Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue;  
43 for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.**

There are many people today just as there have been for the last two thousand years, who think of themselves as Christians, and yet who are tremendously fearful when it comes to making that fact public. Sometimes they will make excuses for themselves saying, “*oh my faith is very private*” or something along those lines, others are very aware that they should be openly confessing Christ but the fear of what people might do or think stops them. As a result they often go through a terrible inner struggle realizing that their fear is preventing them from something that should be doing. And as a result instead of “*being filled with all joy and peace in believing*” they are like the thorny ground hearers in the parable of the sower: “*choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life.*”

I don’t want that to be the case with any of you, I want you to have that peace, that joy, that contentment, that *abundant life*, that should be part and parcel of the life of believers, so as we look at these verses I am going to be talking about the danger, indeed the long-term *impossibility*, of a secret or unconfessed faith in Christ.

Now in the previous verses John has been talking about how the great mass of Jews, although they had seen the miracles of Christ, did not believe in Him. In fact he has said that because of their blind eyes and hardened hearts they *could not* believe in Jesus.

But hearing that from John, we might well ask the same question Paul asks rhetorically in Romans 11:1 “*did God cast away his people?*” *Did he allow them all to continue on in blindness? Did he not save any of these Jews?* And he wants us to know that even here in the midst of such unbelief, God had as Paul put in Romans 11:5 “a remnant according to the election of grace.” In fact John says that there were even believers amongst the *Rulers*, that is the elders of Israel, the Sanhedrin, which was a place where you would least expect there to be anyone who felt anything but hatred and contempt for Christ.

Even there, some believed, and the word there for “believed” is *pisteuo* – which refers to a genuine faith in Christ. Now we even know some of the names of those rulers who believed: Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. We know because eventually they did make their faith public. Joseph as you remember went to Pilate to request the body of Christ and buried Him in his own tomb and Nicodemus helped him to prepare Christ’s body for burial. We also know that after the resurrection “a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.” (Acts 6:7)

Now if I might make an application at this point, one of the things that this should remind us is that God always preserves a remnant for himself sometimes in the most surprising places. This is good to remember because if you are like me, you can become like Elijah crying out "**LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life**" But brothers and sisters, remember the Lord's promise that even the gates of Hell would not prevail against his church. No matter how violent the spiritual warfare becomes, the Lord will always preserve his remnant, that "**seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baa.**" That the Lord assured Elijah still existed even in apostate Israel. And yes, sometimes even amongst the rulers, Let me give you an example where I learned about that in a way that stunned me at the time:

Back in 1995 I was working as a contractor for a company called BNA in Washington D.C. The company was a very spiritually dark place, very few believers, lots and lots of liberals and a huge activist homosexual population

We believers got together and formed a Christian fellowship

Hub of the fellowship was wonderful Pentecostal Hispanic lady by the name of Maria, now Maria was dying of Sarcoidosis, but had such peace and joy in the Lord, she was always singing praise songs to herself, and she was absolutely open about her Christianity, she was always wearing Christian T-Shirts to work, and her bosses had tried to stop her. She was the first person who ever told me I was supposed to be in the ministry.

Well the company started doing these brown bag diversity lunches that were supposed to be open and frank discussions of "diversity issues" and surprise, surprise, surprise, the first one was on the subject of homosexuality. Maria had asked me if I was going to go, no, I guessed my opinions on the subject where not going to be well received.

Well Maria went with Karen, another woman from the Christian Fellowship, and predictably the meeting was designed to be a big love-in discussion of how wonderful everything relating to homosexuality was and how backwards and bigoted people opposed to it were. In the midst of this Maria stands up and says "here is what the word of God says about it" and reads Romans 1:18-32 and the next thing I know Karen has raced downstairs to my desk with tears streaming from her eyes and is frantically saying Andy you have to come upstairs to the lunch its horrible they're all attacking Maria and she's all alone. So I went up there, and did and said what I could. Which meant that at they started attacking me instead of Maria.

That evening as I was about to go home, my bosses boss, who was a man named Steve called me into his office [conversation with Steve] Now I didn't even know this man was a Christian, I didn't think there was anyone in management who knew the Lord. But at a critical moment he put his entire career on the line, and confessed Christ.

Remember then two things, first that God his elect all over the world, and while we may not know them, as Paul reminds us, **Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His,"** (2 Tim. 2:19a) and secondly, at a critical juncture that man made the right decision, for Christ and against the world no matter what the cost might have been. Every true disciple of Christ, sooner or later has to make that decision.

At this point however, prior to the crucifixion, John tells us that these rulers were viewing it as too costly to openly confess Christ. They did not want lose their status, they did not want to be excommunicated from the synagogue and become outcasts, to be shunned, to suffer loss for Christ. One can only imagine the terrible struggle going on in the heart of a man like Nicodemus at this point

in time. He knows his associates are plotting to kill the man He man he knows to be the Messiah, and yet he is paralyzed by fear of loss. Never is a man in greater spiritual pain than when he knows he is going against what his conscience tells him is right.

John tells us in these verses that what rulers like Nicodemus and Joseph were doing at this time, refusing to openly confess Christ, was wrong and displeasing to God. It indicated that they loved the *doxa* or glory of men more than the *doxa* or glory of God. That means that what they wanted most was the vainglorious praise and approval of men more than the lasting praise of God, and as result of their actions they gave the glory to men, instead of to God. This sin is sometimes called man-pleasing, and brothers and sisters I feel it in my own heart. It is something hard and costly to fight against but we must if we are going to follow Christ. Because there is a cost to following Christ: As Jesus Himself said **Luke 9:23** *Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.*

**24** *"For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.*

Your faith therefore, as Gordon Keddie put it, "is a great theory until it costs you something." Dietrich Bonhoffer, wrote a book about the cost of following Christ. He called it "The Cost of Discipleship" he was writing at a time when the German church had been horribly corrupted by liberalism and then Nazism. At the point at which he was writing, most German church members simply had the name Christian, hardly anybody confessed Christ, and there was hardly any real belief any true following of Christ, Bonhoffer called this costless unbelieving Christianity where simply by being a member you assumed you were going to heaven "Cheap Grace":

*"That is what we mean by cheap grace, the grace which amounts to the justification of sin without the justification of the repentant sinner who departs from sin and from whom sin departs. Cheap grace is not the kind of forgiveness of sin which frees us from the toils of sin. Cheap grace is the grace we bestow upon ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism, without church discipline, Communion, without confession, absolution, without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.*

**He then contrasted it with real, believing, discipleship which is always Costly:**

*Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble; it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him. Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son...and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God..."*

Confessing Christ is Costly, but it is an essential part of the only faith that saves, believing in Jesus is only part of what it means to be a disciple, the other part is confessing Him OPENLY : **Romans 10:10**

*For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*

So how do we do that - *How do we confess our faith in Christ?*

It is not enough to say "I have my own very private faith" or when nobody is around I listen to CCM or go to Christian sites on the internet to Confess Christ is to do so openly (now I want you to listen to these and ask yourself, "have I done this?" at each point or am I still a "secret believer?") We confess Christ:

- *By joining a believing Confessing church*
- *By being Baptized*
- *By making a "good confession in the presence of many witnesses."*
- *By Coming to the Lord's Supper: As you do that you are publicly proclaiming your belief in the atoning death, resurrection, and future return of the Lord Jesus Christ: **1 Cor. 11:26 "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes."***
- *Through Evangelism and apologetics: 1 Peter 3:15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;*
- *Through the Fellowship of the saints: Persecution inevitably leads some to want to stay away from public worship and the other assembled activities of the church - **Heb. 10:23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.***
- **24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,**
- **25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.**

Secret Faith will not do. It is sinful and spiritually dangerous. A true faith cannot remain secret forever. Either secrecy kills the discipleship or discipleship kills the secrecy. And it is impossible to serve both world and Jesus, no man can serve two masters. And as James put it in James 4:4:

***"Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."***

Now I want to close by talking to specific groups. *First to you children -*

A day will come for you as well children, when you will have to make a decision whether you want the praise of your peers or the praise of God. You don't have to hate Jesus to make the wrong decision in that moment, all you have to do is want the praise of men more than the praise of Christ.

*Second* to those of you who work in the schools or for the government, I know how hard it is to confess Christ, and how hard it is becoming. But you must for the sake of your soul remain faithful to Him and never deny Him. And remember part of your calling is to support other believers who probably think they are alone as well. When we formed the Christian fellowship at BNA and put up the notice, people came from all over the building, and many of them said, I thought I was I was the only one here who Loved Jesus!

**Third to you military men, I know you are under so much pressure to compromise, to you're your faith secret, to become pragmatic, to go along, when you are tempted, remember the Theban Legion:**

In the year of Christ 286, a most remarkable affair occurred; a legion of soldiers, consisting of **six thousand six hundred and sixty-six men**, contained none but Christians. This legion was called the

Theban Legion, because the men had been raised in Thebias: they were quartered in the east until the emperor Maximian ordered them to march to Gaul, to assist him against the rebels of Burgundy. They passed the Alps into Gaul, under the command of Mauritius, Candidus, and Exupernis, their worthy commanders, and at length joined the emperor. Maximian, about this time, ordered a general sacrifice, at which the whole army was to assist; and likewise he commanded that they should take the oath of allegiance and swear, at the same time, to assist in the extirpation of Christianity in Gaul. Alarmed at these orders, each individual of the Theban Legion absolutely refused either to sacrifice or take the oaths prescribed. This so greatly enraged Maximian, that he ordered the legion to be decimated, that is, every tenth man to be selected from the rest, and put to the sword. This bloody order having been put in execution, those who remained alive were still inflexible, when a second decimation took place, and every tenth man of those living was put to death. This second severity made no more impression than the first had done; the soldiers preserved their fortitude and their principles, but by the advice of their officers they drew up a loyal remonstrance to the emperor.

*“Emperor, we are your soldiers but also the soldiers of the true God. We owe you military service and obedience, but we cannot renounce Him who is our Creator and Master, and also yours even though you reject Him. In all things which are not against His law, we most willingly obey you, as we have done hitherto. We readily oppose your enemies whoever they are, but we cannot stain our hands with the blood of innocent people (Christians). We have taken an oath to God before we took one to you, you cannot place any confidence in our second oath if we violate the other (the first). You commanded us to execute Christians, behold we are such. We confess God the Father the creator of all things and His Son Jesus Christ, God. We have seen our comrades slain with the sword, we do not weep for them but rather rejoice at their honour. Neither this, nor any other provocation have tempted us to revolt. Behold, we have arms in our hands, but we do not resist, because we would rather die innocent than live by any sin.”*

This, it might have been presumed, would have softened the emperor, but it had a contrary effect: for, enraged at their perseverance and unanimity, he commanded that the whole legion should be put to death, which was accordingly executed by the other troops, who cut them to pieces with their swords, September 22, 286.

Brothers they died, but they died in the right cause, and in death they were more than conquerors because they loved the Glory of Christ much more the glory of men, and they gained a reward in death that they could never have gained on any merely human battlefield. The honor they received will go on forever, and the accolade they received at death was better than any eulogy even an emperor could give to them, because the words they heard they moment after they were set free from this world of sin and death was *“Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.”*