

Pastor Shaun Arndt
July 5, 2020
Sermon Text – Matthew 10:24-33
Pentecost 5

Afraid?

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Amen.

Dear Friends in Christ,

He has come to wake the young girl up from what He calls the “sleep” of death, but the crowd laughs at Jesus (Mt. 9). Through comments on the internet and university lecture halls, crowds of people laugh at you for being un-intellectual, anti-science for believing in an “invisible man in the sky!”

Filled with joy and excitement the children sang “**Hosanna**” to Jesus in the temple courts. And Jesus’ enemies angrily objected: **Do you hear what these children are saying?** (Mt. 21) Two prominent 21st century atheists have written in their books that it is a form of child abuse to teach children about God.

Christ taught words of everlasting life, but they said: **Who gave you this authority?** Not that different from the commonly heard chorus today: **Who are you to judge!?**

He is beaten, bloodied and nailed to a cross to die. Though we can’t know hearts or the exact numbers, yet it has been well estimated that more Christians died for their faith in the 1900s than in the previous 19 centuries combined!

It is just as the Lord said: **A disciple is not above his teacher... it is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher... If the master of the house was called Beelzebul (a name for the devil), how much more the members of his household!**

In other words, if they mocked and persecuted Christ and called him a devil, they will mock and persecute His people too! Though ironically their doing so just proves the truth of Jesus’ Words!

Sometimes it’s outright violent like the mob stoning Stephen to death or a mob that recently assaulted Christians in India. Sometimes it is in the form of insults hurled at those who take the Bible seriously—backward, ignorant, bigoted, divisive, tribal, judgmental, irrelevant, even dangerous to society.

In one way, this “milder” persecution we face in the United States is sort of the ultimate slap in the face, because the enemies of the gospel are saying you aren’t even important enough to actually physically attack or kill you for your faith. As a Christian they consider you just an irrelevant nobody to be ignored. It turns out the devil knows what he’s doing, hitting Americans where it hurts because we love to be somebody and live in a culture that is afraid of missing out.

And fear is the devil’s goal with persecution. Whether it is the fear of being made fun of, the fear of bodily harm, the fear of missing out, the fear of not being accepted or being labeled a bad guy, Satan doesn’t care, as long as that fear pulls people always from Jesus’ Word of truth and life.

And that’s why Jesus our Savior keeps telling us over and over in our lesson: **Do not be afraid... Do not fear... Do not be afraid.**

Afraid of bodily harm from persecution? Jesus says: **Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.** Death is not pleasant, but it is not the end for the believer in Christ!

The enemies who think they win by killing Christians are sorely mistaken. Revelation shows us that, far from being destroyed, believers who died for their faith **lived and reigned with Christ** (Revelation 20:4 EHV) Philippians says: **to depart and be with Christ... is better by far... to live is Christ, and to die is gain** (Philippians 1:21-22 EHV).

The Apostle Paul, who knew a thing or two about suffering persecution, explained one of the ways that such troubles ultimately serve the believer's good by teaching us to rely on Jesus and His promises for strength. And so he could write: **That is why I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties, for the sake of Christ. For whenever I am weak, then am I strong** (2 Corinthians 12:10).

Don't forget Jesus said: **it is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher.** Yes, they killed Christ our **teacher**, but He rose again on the third day! Through His saving work we get to be **like** Him in His resurrection. He will also raise our bodies to eternal happiness.

If we let a single grain of sand stand for our life in this broken world, there wouldn't be enough sand on the seashores and deserts to even begin to picture the unbroken eternal life and joys that are yours through trust in Jesus. You can never truly "miss out" on anything as one of Christ's chosen people, for what the Lord gives you is infinitely better!

Afraid of persecution? Jesus gives us still more reasons to not be. **Do not be afraid of them, because there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, and nothing hidden that will not be made known.** Jesus is talking about judgment day, the day **when God will judge people's secrets through Jesus Christ** (Romans 2:16).

These days, who even pays any attention to the insults anonymously thrown at Christians on social media? It turns out God does and He will **make it known.**

Corrupt Indian police looked the other way when a group of Christians was attacked recently, but the violence they **concealed** will be **revealed** and punished before the Lord's judgment seat. Those who have labeled the faithful to be fools and tried to sabotage faith in the Lord will be called to account.

Those who persecute Christ's Church will not get away with anything. Rather than **fearing** them or being angry at them, let us pity them and pray for them that they would come to repentance and faith so as not to fall under eternal judgment.

Nor should we fear persecution will stop the Lord from gathering His elect or using His church to proclaim the Gospel. **What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim from the housetops.**

Just think how Jesus has already kept this promise! The words Jesus told Nicodemus in the **dark** of night, **God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...** those words have been **spoken in the daylight** across the globe. The words Jesus '**whispered**' to his Apostles in the upper room as He began the Lord's Supper are still proclaimed 2,000 years later, despite two millennia of persecutions. Yes, Christ will get His Word out and will gather His people.

So is there any reason to be **afraid**? Yes there is! Because Jesus says: “**Rather, fear the one who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell... whoever denies me before others, I will also deny before my Father who is in heaven.**”

This is talking about God! It is God alone who condemns to hell. And it is God who is not only **able** to, but also has every reason to cast us **soul and body in hell** for our sin—

Like the sin of our **fear** and trembling at persecution in any or all of its forms. That fear is saying to the Lord: “you are wrong when you tell me there is no reason to be afraid.” There is the sin that lies behind that fear, turning our relationships, what others think, popular opinion and our comfort, into idols we worship by loving and caring more about what others think than our God.

The Sin of self-righteousness that failed to speak the truth of God’s Word *in love*, but instead made us look down on others or lash out, being more concerned about winning arguments than winning souls.

Sins of not digging into God’s Word faithfully and regularly in worship and Bible class so that we might be equipped for the attacks leveled at our faith, many of which are flat out ridiculous when you know the Bible, but cause trouble for Christians all the time because they don’t know the Word well enough.

And the sin when we’ve been the persecutors, angrily slamming our door, because mom or dad loved us enough to confront our sin.

Afraid? Yes, as sinners who deserve God’s judgment. Yes, as people with treacherous sinful natures that could so easily lead us away from the Lord, deny Christ and lose eternal life.

Afraid? To all those who are afraid of God’s righteous punishment for sin that we deserve, to you Jesus says, ‘Don’t be afraid.’ Because also He says: “**Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground without the knowledge and consent of your Father... So do not be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows.**”

Since by God’s grace you believe the Lord is the only one to be afraid of, listen to the same Lord as He tells you **do not be afraid**. God is your dear Father, who loved you with an impossibly amazing, but entirely true undeserved love, that He gave His Son to take away your every single sin. He loved you so much the Holy Spirit filled your naturally unbelieving heart with faith in Jesus’ forgiving love.

Do not be afraid, for you are worth more than many sparrows. God cares for the sparrows, *but* God the Son did not become a bird with feathers and a beak to die on a cross for sparrows. But God the Son did become true man, sharing your flesh and blood, body and soul to live, die and rise to save us from every sin, fear and defiance of God’s ways.

Sparrows cost but a **small coin** in Jesus’ day, but for you and me, Jesus shed the priceless blood of God to blot out our sins, to remove the reason to be terrified of God’s judgment. He trades our sin for His holiness, His perfect life of confessing God’s Words and ways in thought, word and action.

Jesus, the sinless *and* sin-bearing **teacher** says, **it is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher... like his teacher!** Baptized into Christ, you are clothed with Christ and in God’s eyes you are just **like** your **Teacher** Jesus. He declares you sinless and holy in His sight. And as your soul is fed and nourished by His Saving Word, Christ will keep you faithful to Him through every attack.

So even if the whole world says you are unimportant, a nobody and not relevant, who cares?! The only One whose opinion matters, says otherwise! The Lord of Heaven and earth, **Your Father** in Heaven says you are so important to Him, so precious, that He even keeps track of every one of the more than 100,000 hairs on your head!

And He *will* wipe away every tear and fear in heavenly joy.

Afraid? In Christ, through Christ, by Christ: No! Amen.

The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.