

Do Not Be Afraid!

*So have no fear of them,
for nothing is covered that will not be revealed,
or hidden that will not be known.
What I tell you in the dark, say in the light,
and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops.
And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.*

Matthew 10:26-28

Jesus gave His apostles full disclosure about this short-term mission trip, and about the rest of their lives as His ambassadors. Jesus sent His disciples out as sheep in the midst of wolves. The disciples were to beware of men, because they would actively seek to harm them. Even some of their own family members would not hesitate to turn against them. They would face persecution at the hands of men in many places.

Why shouldn't Jesus' apostles be afraid?

It's because the truth of who they are, and who the wicked are, will be fully revealed in God's time. The things that are covered up will be revealed; the things that are hidden will be known. Wolves might be able to disguise themselves today. They might be able to fool others, and perhaps even themselves, for a time. But they can't keep it up forever.

The flock of Jesus Christ will be clearly seen as His. Jesus will be fully revealed as Savior and Lord. The Gospel will be fully revealed as the power of God for salvation. The church of Jesus, His flock, will be fully revealed as His.

And, wolves will clearly be seen as wolves. Predators will be seen as predators. Those who pretend to be Christians, those who "have a form of godliness but deny its power" will be uncovered.

All of this WILL happen in the end. No matter how much confusion there is in the world, no matter how much dust the devil throws in our eyes, in the final accounting of things all will be plainly seen.

So, Jesus says, “what I tell you in the dark, say in the light; what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops.” Be bold. Be clear. Be unmistakable. Don’t let the threats of the wicked silence you. Do not be afraid of those who can only kill your body. The worst thing the world can do is kill us, and that isn’t actually very much. Lots of things kill us; everyone will die of something. Don’t let fear of death cause you to fail to be a witness to Jesus Christ.

For one thing, being afraid of something that hasn’t happened yet is just borrowing trouble from the future. “Don’t worry about tomorrow,” Jesus said in Matthew 6:34, “because tomorrow will bring its own worries; today’s troubles is enough to think about today.”

For another thing, Jesus has promised to be with us always, until the end of the age.

Be Afraid!

Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Matthew 10:28b-30

Not being afraid of those who can only kill our bodies doesn’t mean that there is no right object of fear.

There is one fear that should override all others; “one fear to rule them all,” to paraphrase J. R. R. Tolkien. The Twelve needed a right fear of God; so do we. Only God has the power to kill both body and soul in hell. Do not be afraid of those who can only threaten physical harm; be afraid of God, who can kill you physically and spiritually. The apostles were very clear about this.

“Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than God,” Peter and John said, “you must judge. We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4:18-20). When they were beaten the next day, “they left the presence of the council rejoicing that they were

counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.” (Acts 5:41-42).

Decades later Paul wrote, “necessity is laid upon me,” Paul also wrote; “woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!” (First Corinthians 9:16).

These men feared God rather than man. They weren’t terrified of Him, but that wasn’t because He isn’t terrifying. It was because they both understood the love of God for them, and obeyed what Jesus commanded them to do. They understood that if they abandoned Christ, there would be nothing left but “a fearful expectation of judgment.” In the hardest moments of their lives, the Twelve let that holy, reverent fear of God keep them steady and faithful.

Now, remember that Jesus told them, “if anyone will not receive you or your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that house or town.” He told them, “when they persecute you in one town, flee to the next.” He didn’t insist that they keep shouting in someone’s face until that person lost their temper. They weren’t to volunteer for martyrdom. But they were to be faithful regarding the Gospel. If that moment of faithfulness cost them something, so be it.

Do Not Be Afraid!

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny?

And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.

But even the hairs of your head are all numbered.

Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Matthew 10:29-31

At the same time, if we have that proper, reverent fear of God, that sacred respect and honor for Him, then we have no need of being afraid. We are assured of God’s love for us, and the perfection of His plans and purposes. To make His point, Jesus teaches us about sparrows and the sovereignty of God.

Sparrows are all over the place, and they have no particular value. The most abundant bird in the world is the house sparrow. According to the National Academy of the Sciences, there are something like 1.6 BILLION of them in the world. They live about three years, which means that every year about 500 million sparrows die and 500 million sparrows are hatched.

But not one sparrow dies apart from God the Father. That phrase “apart from your Father” doesn’t simply mean that God *sees* when a sparrow dies, or *knows* when a sparrow dies. It means that not a single sparrow dies apart from the divine decree of God. His oversight of that little bird is as thorough as His oversight of the entire universe. He delegates nothing to creatures; He controls it all. If a sparrow dies it is because its Creator had decreed every second of its life, its death as well as its birth.

To make it more personal, Jesus then speaks of the hairs on our heads. God has numbered them, which doesn’t mean simply that He counts them, but that He determines how many hairs we have.

“Fear not, therefore,” Jesus says. “You are of more value than *many* sparrows.” Everything that would happen to the Twelve was very, very carefully decreed by their Father in heaven. He left nothing to chance. He gave each of them His full attention, as He gives to you and I today. Nothing gets by Him.

So, that person who dismissed you when you tried to share the Gospel? That smirk, that insult? The mockery? That rejection? It’s all under God’s sovereign decree. The slap in the face, the thrown rock, the punch? All under God’s sovereign decree. The physical attacks, brutality, arrests, torture, executions – all under God’s sovereign decree.

Some believe the power of God is only manifested when He delivers someone from persecution, like He delivered Peter from prison in Jerusalem, and later on delivered Paul and Silas from prison in Philippi. But the power of God is far more often manifested in keeping us faithful in the midst of agonizing circumstances. Paul wrote about his trial before Nero, “the Lord stood by me and strengthened me.” Paul would ultimately be executed at Nero’s command, but Nero won nothing. Paul died as the Lord had decreed he would die.

Live for Jesus!

*So everyone who acknowledges me before men,
I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven,
but whoever denies me before men,
I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.*

Matthew 10:32-33

These are some of the most intimidating words Jesus ever spoke. Most of the time when I hear them referenced they are used as a threat against Christians, especially regarding evangelism: “If you aren’t willing to acknowledge Jesus before others, then He is going to deny you before the Father.” I even heard this used at a Calvary Chapel to justify their tradition of “going forward” publicly to receive Christ. I have to admit, they are effective words. They make me uneasy.

But we take everything according to context, don’t we? We don’t lift a verse or a phrase out of the Scripture and interpret it according to what makes sense to us; we keep the context of Scripture whole, and understand it as a whole.

So, does the context of Matthew 10 tell us that Jesus is severely warning His apostles not to fail Him or fall into apostasy? No. In Matthew 10 Jesus is preparing His apostles for their first short-term mission trip. Most of what He says has to do with the opposition they will face, and how they are respond. Each time, Jesus makes it clear that He will side with His apostles.

And then Jesus says,

Matthew 10:32–33 (2016 ESV) — **32** So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, **33** but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

It’s not a threat or a warning; it’s a promise. Every person who acknowledges Jesus before others will be acknowledged by Him before the Father. The fact that they would face

opposition and persecution didn't mean that God had rejected or abandoned them.

Seal this up in your heart: as you trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and follow Him as Lord, as you live for His glory, as you long for His return and His kingdom, as you look to Him to save you and sanctify you and glorify you, as you hope in Him – that is, as *you* acknowledge *Him* – *He* acknowledges *you* before the Father in heaven. He intercedes for you, praying you home. He commissions the Holy Spirit to teach and guide and strengthen you. He sends His angels as ministering spirits for your good – don't ask me, I have no idea how that works, but Hebrews 1:14 tells us that it's so.

Seal this up in your heart, too: those who deny Jesus, who hate Him, who remain in their rebellion against Him, who also mock you and hold you in contempt, who insult you, who claim to godly but deny the power of godliness, who manipulate and intimidate and demean you because you bear His name – that is, those who deny Him – are denied *by* Him before the Father. That means that Jesus highlights and emphasizes and spotlights the vast separation between Himself and them.

Now, you still might be thinking, “But there are moments that I have denied Him!” I know; I've done the same thing at times. But here's the thing. Jesus is not speaking about single actions, but the habitual pattern of our lives.

Linda and I have been married for 40 years. There are times when I have been really angry with her, and she has been really angry with me. But what has the habitual pattern of the past forty years been? Love, faithfulness, grace, mercy, affection, delight, trust, reliance, peace, contentment.

Since coming to faith in Jesus Christ, the habitual pattern of my life has been faithful acknowledgement of Him as my Lord and Savior.

Bringing it Home

We must not be afraid of the wolves. We aren't to let them intimidate us into silence; we must be faithful to the Lord. If we can escape persecution and oppression, we should. If we can't, we need to trust in the Lord to strengthen us.

We must have a holy, sacred reverence for our God. We are not to be terrified of Him, but we must be honoring and humble before Him. He loves us far more deeply than we can say. He watches over every aspect of our lives with perfect attention.

Finally, we need to examine our lives. Is acknowledging Jesus as Lord and Savior the habitual pattern of your life? If it is, you can be sure that you are being acknowledged by Him before the Father right now, and far more so on the day of judgment. How sweet it would be to stand in that holy place and hear Jesus say, "This one is Mine!"

Do you know those who deny Him? Then pity them, and pray for them, and ask the Father for opportunities to share the Gospel with them.