

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
Matthew 10:24-33 – July 13, 2014

²⁴“A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. ²⁵It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household! ²⁶“So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. ²⁷What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. ²⁸Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. ³⁰And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. ³²“Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. ³³But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.

The words “**Don't be afraid**” are used three times in these Lord's instructions to his disciples. Even for the disciples, with the Lord at their side, there were times when they were afraid just as there are times today when we are afraid. Every parent has said to his or her child, “Don't be afraid; it will be all right.” Sometimes those fears are general – for example, being afraid of the dark. Other times it is a very real fear – for example, a dog chasing or something falling. Three times the Lord has to say to us, “**Don't be afraid!**” And why not? Because you are the Lord's child. Because truly the Lord does care about you and is watching over you. You are never alone!

Before we begin our discussion on fear and its application this morning, let us remember that there is another use of the word “fear” in the Bible which is not used in our text but is familiar to you. In the explanation of each of the Ten Commandments we say, “**We should FEAR and love God...**” We should be afraid of the wrath of God and not do contrary to his commandments it is true, but that word also means “awe,” “revere,” or “respect.” As Psalm 33:8 says, “**Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the people of the world revere him.**” We stand in awe of him, respect him, and give all glory to him.

Our text talks about the more common use of the word “fear,” being afraid. How are you as the Lord's disciple to act? Why are we not to be afraid? Let us answer the question,

ARE YOU AFRAID OR UNAFRAID?

I. WE NEED NOT BE AFRAID OF THOSE WHO OPPOSE US (vv. 24-28).

WE DO MEET OPPOSITION FROM THE WORLD.

The truth of the Gospel will be victorious. The Lord said his Gospel would be preached throughout the world. We see that it has been preached through all generations. We see how it is still being preached today. We need not be afraid of the opposition's strength. If Jesus faced opposition when he talked about spiritual things should we expect any less? We can expect the same kind of slander he experienced. Yet we can further the cause of the kingdom with courage and assurance. We are not afraid because it is the Lord's work we are doing and he is with us!

The truth of the Gospel is to be proclaimed openly (v. 27). The Lord instructed his disciples in what to say and how to say it. He had instructed them in “dark,” that is, privately, in secret. They had heard it “in (the) ear,” that is, personally, in a familiar way. They were to proclaim it “openly,” “in the daylight,” “from the roofs” (a natural pulpit for that culture with its low buildings and its flat roofs). The entire world is to hear and be led to believe. The story is told of a young boy who went

to a boarding school. He was accustomed to kneel by his bed when he said his evening prayers. When none of the other boys did that he thought he could just say his prayers in bed but that didn't seem right. So he got out of bed and knelt. The other boys ridiculed him and even threw things at him but he continued every evening. As time went on others began following his example and also prayed openly. His example was an encouragement to others. What kind of consistent example are you giving to others? The truth of the gospel will be revealed (v. 26). It will be revealed for all to hear. There is no need to be afraid because this is the Lord's promise.

II. WE NEED NOT BE AFRAID THAT THE LORD WILL FORGET US (vv. 29-31).

THE UNBELIEVER NEEDS TO BE AFRAID OF GOD (v. 28).

We are all afraid – at least to a certain extent – of losing our earthly lives. Think of Stephen, the first martyr. He remained firm in his faith in the face of death. Earthly death – or the fear of it – has caused some to reject Christ and his Gospel. “If I've lost my life, I've lost everything.” Losing one's life is the ultimate gain for Christ will never leave you. How many times have you denied the Lord because someone might laugh at you or make fun of you?

A person need not fear death but should fear the judgment of God in hell! There is something worse than even losing one's earthly life. That is losing one's soul to the eternal fires of hell. One cannot save one's life here, but one has the salvation of soul and body for eternity. This is God's gift of grace through faith.

THE BELIEVER HAS THE ASSURANCE OF GOD'S PRESENCE (vv. 29-31).

Look at Jesus' example. He says his Father protects even the sparrows. He watches over them, they are under his divine care. According to our way of thinking they are almost useless, but not according to God. That same God has the very hairs of our heads numbered. You have some 140,000 hairs on your head (more or less). God even knows which ones have fallen out. He knows more about you than you know about yourself. That's the infinite extent of God's care!

When we see those examples from the work of our heavenly Father, all traces of fear should vanish. We may seem small indeed in this huge world. Look down from the Empire State Building. In God's sight we are not small. We are still the crown of his creation. In his love for us he redeemed us. In his love for us he gave his son. We are his children. That can and should remove any fears we might still have. We are usually afraid of what we do not know – here we know so we can be unafraid.

III. WE NEED NOT BE AFRAID TO CONFESS CHRIST (vv. 32-33).

WE LOOK TO CHRIST FOR ETERNAL LIFE.

We need the Lord's forgiveness. The Bible makes it clear that there is salvation only through faith in Christ. It must be God's way, not ours. God's way is revealed in the Bible. We know – as he knows – that we are afraid at times. He wants us sure and certain of salvation. We can be sure because it depends on our perfect God and his perfect love for us. We look to him for our forgiveness. We pray in the Lord's Prayer, “*Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.*” We ask God – through faith in Christ – for that forgiveness. We say that we forgive those who sin against us. We say if we do not forgive, God does not have to forgive us!

Look at the comparison here. His attitude toward us in heaven will correspond exactly with our attitude toward him in the world. If we deny him as Lord and Savior, he will deny us. If we truly confess him, he will confess us before our Father in heaven. Look at these examples. We like to think of standing strong like Daniel when he was thrown to the lions. We think of the faith and testimony of Stephen as he was stoned to death. Those kinds of trials are remote for us today. There are other temptations to deny him that are much more real for us today. How about the

temptation to keep our mouths closed when his name is taken in vain or proclaimed falsely? Or, what about a temptation to let what others say, think or do influence what we say – at the expense of the Bible? Tact is always called for. Christian consideration is always required. However, compromising the Gospel at any level is wrong and cannot be condoned. If we are of the Gospel we are to live that Gospel and confess his name openly and publicly.

THE LORD HAS CALLED US AS HIS DISCIPLES.

It is a serious matter to be a witness for Jesus. It is not an optional part of Christianity. It is not just a “nice” thing to do. If we are afraid then we turn to the Lord for strength, help and forgiveness. If we are not doing all we should do we turn to him asking for forgiveness and strength. Every Christian has a place in this work every day.

It is a public thing, too. Faith that is in the heart will be obvious and evident. It is to be evident in the life of every Christian. It is a word of warning for every Christian. Confession is called for not just to God at his altar or in our prayers. Confession is called for in our daily living. Confession is called for in our daily speaking. May he take us – sometimes fearful disciples – and make us unafraid to proclaim his name in all we say and do for the salvation of many souls. Amen.

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