

No One Like Jesus: The Faithful Need Not Fear
By Jason Huff
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Job 28:12-28; 2 Corinthians 5:1-11; Matthew 10:26-33

Our final Scripture reading today comes from Matthew 10:26-33. May God add His blessing to the reading of His holy Word. “So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. Do 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. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.”

Most of you know I don't preach sermons around American holidays. We acknowledge them in our prayers near the beginning of the service. That's intentional because worship is always to be focused on the living God. We honor our parents, as God's commands tell us, yet worship is all about the praise and glory due to our Maker, Savior, and King.

Yet this week's passage hits close to the heart of all of us, but especially moms. We love our moms because they always keep an eye on us. Dads set us loose on the world, they have our backs, but moms have that “mamma bear” instinct going on. Moms don't let the cubs wander too far from the cave. As parents, we are all concerned about the best for our children. But we run to mom when we skin our knees, get sick, and struggle as kids. I am thankful for my mom, for other moms, and those who have faithfully been moms to other children.

But we fear for our kids in the modern world. Even though most neighborhoods are safer than ever before, we don't let our children play out in them because, in the age of the Internet, we know immediately about every horror story anywhere in the world. We strictly control where they are and who they're with. We are fearful to let them out of our sight. We grow up with “stranger danger” that carries into our adult lives.

Fear is now a hallmark of our society. The presidential campaigns are coated in fear – fear we're getting left behind, that someone is taking our jobs, that we aren't getting our fair share. We join gyms in fear that we don't look good enough. We fear missing out or not being in the loop, so we stare at our computers and cell phones all day long.

Now we have another set of fears – that our faith will cost us. We hear stories about bakers and adoption agencies shut down and fined, county clerks sent to jail, and we fear that simply standing up for a Christian point of view will hurt us. Over the last two weeks, we've gone through Jesus' instructions to His apostles to share news of the Kingdom of God. Last week, Jesus was very honest about the extreme trials they would eventually face on His behalf. Persecution for being a follower of Jesus was something Jesus Himself predicted.

But this week, Jesus tells the apostles – and those of us who follow Him now – not to be afraid. It seems impossible, right? But Jesus reassures us that being His faithful follower, both inwardly and outwardly, is the way to overcome fear. When we know Him as Savior and Lord and have the proper fear of God, life is no longer a series of random events to fear but experiences God has created for us so that we might know Him and His love for us far better.

Having predicted that the religious authorities of Israel would violently oppose them, Jesus tells the apostles, “So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs.”

Two things are at work here. *Jesus dispels fear through knowledge and He promises faith without mysteries.* We’ll talk about both for a minute. First, Jesus dispels fear through knowledge. When we know the truth, we still fear, but we are able to conquer it. Jesus does not say that nothing can harm us, only that we don’t need to fear things that cannot harm our souls.

Being prepared for short term pain and suffering makes it easier to experience. Think about it this way – to have a baby, there’s incredible pain. But if you don’t know about it, you might think you were dying when you were having a child. If you exercise or lift weights and experience pain, you might think, “I can’t ever do that again!” Knowing that a certain amount of pain is coming helps us to prepare for the long term.

Too much pain is bad – a sprained tendon, a pulled muscle, that’s a different kind of pain, one that tells us we need to stop. But some pain is good. It tells us that we’re doing OK. My muscles around my knee are sorer than they were when I started physical therapy a week ago, but the muscles that weren’t working right are getting better as other muscles are compensating.

There is little to fear spiritually when we realize that nothing can harm a Christian for eternity except the choice to reject God and return to sin. That knowledge is powerful, and it helps us overcome the pain of rejection. It is hard to be insulted for Christ. Society teaches us to be easily offended by other points of view, to let our feelings be hurt, and then we call people hurtful names in response. But while being insulted for our belief hurts us emotionally, it cannot make us less a child of God. Knowing it will come doesn’t make it less painful, but it does make us confident that God is not against us just because we are insulted or betrayed.

And when it comes to faith, we should be upfront with others about what we believe. *Here’s the second thing Jesus promises: the Christian faith is mysterious, but it doesn’t keep secrets.* What I mean is this – there are many things about God that we don’t understand, or we grasp just a tiny little bit. How it is that God has made it so Jesus’ death on the cross covers the cost of the sins of all believers is a profound mystery. Why every unique individual suffers in the way they do or why evil people prosper in this lifetime? Mysteries we won’t comprehend fully in our lifetime. There are many things to learn as you read Scripture, behaviors and patterns to follow that Jesus models, and why we must do them is sometimes hard to fathom.

But there are no secrets. Many religious groups promise you the hidden wisdom of their faiths and special privileges only once you are inside them. Scientology makes you pay to get levels. You can't enter a Mormon temple once they've consecrated it, and their temple ceremonies are secret. If you're not a Muslim, forget about ever visiting Mecca.

Christianity, on the other hand, has no secrets. I will never come up to you and tell you that you've got to learn the secret handshake to get into heaven or the password to get a seat at the wedding feast of the Lamb. If Jesus knows you, He will welcome you into His presence.

That's why we have a Sunday worship service that's not watered down. You'll get the same kind of teaching here as you do at our Bible Study. If we ever have enough people for a Wednesday night service, it might have more teaching, but it will be the same kind of message. Because there's no secret to the Kingdom of God. When you believe in Jesus, turn to Him, repent of your sins, and dedicate yourself to being His follower, you are part of His family.

Christianity is a lot like chess. You can learn the rules to chess in fifteen minutes. But no one, not even the world's smartest computer, has mastered chess. It's simple enough that a child can play, but grand masters spend a lifetime learning every angle, and they still get beat! In the same fashion, young children can become Christians – it's probably easier for us when we're young than when we're old! But knowing God and living as a disciple – that takes a lifetime.

When Jesus tells the apostles to claim from the rooftops the truths of the Kingdom, He promises that nothing's been lost to the ages, no secrets, no *DaVinci Code* mysteries. Everything hidden will be revealed. We can be confident in God and our faith. When we tell others about Jesus, no matter how simply, it will be enough for the Spirit to work with and bring them to Himself. The basics of the Kingdom of God are not a mystery.

Jesus then goes on. "Do 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." That sounds charming for Mother's Day, doesn't it? Nobody likes to think about an eternity apart from God. We could focus on that part of it. But in the context of this passage and what Jesus says next, He isn't saying this to terrify us into submission.

Terror doesn't bring people into the Kingdom of God, only reverence. Think about the Israelites. They were so scared of the fire and lightning up on the mountain that they demanded Moses go represent them "lest we die." They were incredibly afraid. What did that fear led to? A golden calf. They were so afraid of the living God, they made a statue to worship, something less fearsome they could control. Terrified people who do not eventually come to God full of awe and wonder and humility eventually turn away from Him to flee their terror.

Constantly in Scripture, God says to His people, do not fear. God is fearsome – He can throw body and soul into hell. He has that power. But He doesn't want us to be terrified. He wants us to fully respect His awesome holiness and might. I mentioned a few weeks ago how we felt awestruck at the power of Niagara Falls as our boat passed right by them. There was a little fear, too – even though the boats run every year, even though it's safe, you know that catastrophe lies just a couple of hundred feet away.

To come before the presence of the living God who has the power to make a universe with worlds too many to count? We should have awestruck reverence. But terror? No. God brings us into relationship with Himself. He loves us. If we come to Him with humble respect for who He is, we can be free from terror, not only from Him, but also from anyone or anything else that might try to harm us.

Jesus' next words prove it. "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows." *We can be unafraid when we realize we are completely known by God.*

I love my mom; most of us grew up with moms or someone, an aunt, a grandmother, a friend, that loved us like a mom. But I don't know what my mom ate for breakfast today. I don't know the last book she read or TV show she watched. I don't know exactly how she felt walking down the aisle at the church to marry my dad, even if she described it to me. I don't know how many Precious Moments statues she has, and I certainly don't know the number of hairs on her head (or how many I am responsible for turning gray!) Even those people we are closest to, we know so little. I barely remember what *I* had for breakfast yesterday!

But God knows. God knows every last thing about us. There's nothing about us that's hidden from Him. Sometimes that scares us when we think that He knows our every sin. But that's not the way Jesus sees it. God sees everything about us and He cares for us anyway. He loves us so incredibly much! There's not a detail about us that God doesn't already know. Those deep parts of ourselves that we barely know ourselves, He knows. And what's more, He made us with deep and amazing value that comes from being made in His image.

Not a bird in the air dies without God willing it. Not knowing about it, willing it. He decrees, He says, when every sparrow will fall. If He says no, then it doesn't. There is never a time when a sparrow falls to the ground and God goes, "Whoops!" You know how after every ball game they show on TV, there's that crazy disclaimer? It goes like this: "Any rebroadcast, retransmission, or account of this game, without the express written consent of Major League Baseball, is prohibited." Well, that's how it works with God. If God doesn't give His express written consent, something doesn't happen. And unlike Major League Baseball, where people break the law all the time, no one can break God's will. What He says happens.

That's a comfort. Two sparrows were worth a penny. An individual sparrow was essentially worthless. But God watches after them. If we have worth greater than many sparrows, and God watches over everything about them, how much more does He love and watch over us! God has a particular love for His children, those who He calls His own, who have faith in Him and trust Him.

On the one hand, the proper and right fear of God comes when we know that God is far beyond our comprehension and we are mere dust in His presence. On the other hand, God in His perfect mercy loves us, as fragile and frail as we are, and not only loves us but delights in us. God loved us so much that the Father sent the Son to die on our behalf so that we could experience the joy of being with Him – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – forevermore. That’s delight! And now, we get the delight of following Him because He is so good.

Perhaps the hardest question, the one that our parents asked us as little children, is this: *what are we so afraid of?* What am I afraid of? What are you afraid of? What has us so afraid that we don’t live the life God intended for us, a life of purpose, a life of meaningful and joyful service to Him and to others, a life rich with time spent with Him and with other brothers and sisters in the Lord?

We need to ask ourselves that question and not let go of it until we have an answer. What stops me from spending less time on Facebook and more time in prayer? It’s the fear that I won’t be “in the know.” What stops me from spending more time with my family, with the congregation, with the Lord? The fear that I won’t have enough time for my own interests. Painful things to admit, sure, and there are more of them. We all have them. But coming face to face with our fears and recognizing that staying afraid moves us farther away from God? That’s a good first step towards rejecting those fears and finding greater faith in our Lord.

Jesus ends this part of His instruction to the apostles with a promise and warning. “Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.” This isn’t a “God’s going to get you moment.” Peter disowns Jesus three times, and he felt the weight of these words. Yet Jesus restored Peter, and Peter became the leader of the early church.

The whole question is, *do we acknowledge Jesus before others?* Are we willing to say, “I’m a believer?” This is why we baptize in the church service and have the Lord’s Supper together. We publically confess to being Jesus’ disciples. We let the world know. We state that He is our Savior and Lord, and that we must follow where He leads.

The good news for this Mother’s Day, and for everyday, is that as long as we live, it is never too late to proclaim Jesus as Savior and Lord. If we are worried about our children or grandchildren, our family and friends, it is not too late. Whoever acknowledges Jesus honestly and faithfully before others and stands by that commitment will be acknowledged by Jesus. It’s that simple.

So today, we pray for all those who have not yet come to God, or who grew up with Jesus but have not yet returned to Him, that they too might know the joy of His presence both now and in eternity. Don’t step away from Him and risk losing it all. Don’t let your fears guide you in the wrong direction. Stay by Christ’s side, and you will not only find that you have nothing to fear, you will learn that you have gained all that truly matters in Him, your Lord and friend.