

Are You Afraid?
Matthew 10:24-33
May 1, 2016

A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It 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! 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.

I wonder how many of you remember the story of the Three Little Pigs. At one point in the story, the pigs dance around singing “who’s afraid of the big, bad wolf.” Those little pigs in that story acted very bravely until the wolf really showed up. Then they found out just how brave they weren’t and just how afraid they really were.

Fear is a very powerful emotion. It can make people do or not do many things. When a fear gets so large that it begins to control a person, the fear is then called a phobia. If you have **triskadekaphobia** it means you are afraid of the number 13. You could have **galeophobia** you have an abnormal fear of cats. Some people suffer from **hippopotomonstros-esquippedaliohobia** which means they have a fear of long words.

And while these are very real fears to someone suffering from these phobias, we might snicker at someone who is afraid of a number or a cat or a long word. But fear is a very real thing and fear is what today’s Gospel reading is all about. So what’s the big deal about fear?

First, we must understand that some fears are good. Fear of going to jail helps to keep people from breaking the law. Fear of being in an automobile accident makes most people pay attention when they are driving and wear seat belts.

But the kind of fears that Jesus is talking about in the text, are the kind of fears that lead people to sin. This kind of fear not only leads someone into sin, but the fear itself is a sin. This kind of fear is rooted in not trusting God completely. This kind of fear leads people to taking matters into their own hands instead of trusting God to make all things work together for their good and His will. Here are some of the fears

which can lead a Christian into sin.

There is a fear which psychiatrists call **categelophobia**, which we would just call being afraid of people making fun of you, being afraid of ridicule. Now how could fear of ridicule be a sin? After all, no one wants people to laugh at them. And that's true. It hurts when people laugh at you.

But a Christian who is afraid of what others might say about him or her is a Christian who will probably not be able to tell someone else about Jesus. A Christian who will not talk openly about their Savior is a person who is more concerned about what other people think of them than what God thinks of them; and that's not just any old sin, it's idolatry.

Being worried about ridicule can stop a Christian from speaking the Good News of Jesus Christ, the only words that can keep an unbeliever out of hell. In today's text, Jesus tells us not to be quiet about Him, but to tell the whole world. He says: *What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs* (Mt 10:27 ESV).

Another fear which leads millions and millions of Americans into sin is called **peniaphobia**. This is nothing more than the fear of being poor. The song America the Beautiful has a line which goes, "America, America, God shed his grace on thee." And God certainly has. God has blessed America with wealth and prosperity like no other nation in history.

So what have many Americans done with these blessings? They have hoarded these blessings, squirreled them away, locked them up tight for fear someone else might take them. Americans have had so much they are scared to death of not having.

The nation, that more than any other, is a symbol of God's goodness has become a nation of greedy people. People who will cheat and steal to have just a little more. People who don't give as they should to help the less fortunate. People who won't even return a portion of what they have been given back to the one from whom it all came – God.

The last fear we'll look at is **thanatophobia**, the fear of death. Make no mistake, death is the enemy. Death is the price that all humans have had to pay since Adam and Eve first sinned in the Garden of Eden. Death is the foe that all of us will one day face. But it's wrong for a Christian to fear death. It's wrong because we know the end of the story. It's wrong because we know there is one who has conquered death and promised that same victory to all who believe.

So what is a Christian supposed to do with fear? We laugh at fear. We can stand head to head and toe to toe with any fear and spit in its eye. We can do that because we don't have to be afraid of being nobodies. We don't have to be afraid of not being big enough, strong enough, brave enough, or smart enough. We don't have to fear anything because we're not just your run-of-the-mill important folks. We're children of the King. And we have the very word of the King to fight off any fear that might come against us.

If you're lonely, or afraid of being alone and lonely, you can rest assured you are never alone. You can pick up the Word of the King and read for yourself the passage in Matthew where Jesus says: *Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age* (Mt 28:20 ESV).

If you're afraid that you may not have the right words to say to someone who asks you about your faith, you can turn to the King. You can read where Jesus tells his disciples, and you: *When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say* (Lk 12:11-12 ESV).

And if you're worried about what people might think or say when you stand up for your faith, you can hear the words of Jesus as they rang out from the Mount of Olives: *Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you* (Mt 5:11-12 ESV).

If you're concerned about your physical needs in this world, you have a King who made this promise: *I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own* (Mt 6:25-34 ESV).

Even as you face the unknown which we call death, you can rest assured in Jesus' words: *Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's*

house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am (Jn 14:1-3 ESV). **Death holds no fear for the Christian. The Christian knows that death is nothing more than an angry dog with no teeth.**

Jesus died for all sinners. If you were the only sinner to ever live, Jesus would still have died for you. Jesus loves you with a love that words cannot describe. Jesus loves you with a perfect love. In his first epistle, John writes: *There is no fear in love ... perfect love drives out fear* (1 Jn 4:18).

So brothers and sisters in Christ, know what you believe and believe what you know. No matter what the world says or does, hold on to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and fear nothing!