

Matthew 10:28-33 “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.”

Dear fellow witnesses of the Savior:

Some of us remember the old Soviet Union and the name Nikita Khrushchev, former premier during the Cold War. While he was no friend of the United States, he did finally begin to denounce some of the atrocities committed by former Russian dictator Joseph Stalin. Once, as Khrushchev condemned Stalin at a public event, he was interrupted by a shout from a heckler in the audience: “*You were once a colleague of Stalin. Why didn't you stop him?*” Khrushchev roared, “*Who said that?*” An agonizing silence followed as nobody in the auditorium dared move a muscle. Then Khrushchev said quietly, “*Now you know why.*”

The point is well taken. Fear can paralyze us. It can freeze us in our tracks from taking action or speaking up when we should. Jesus speaks to us today about our fears as his disciples. **“Don't Let Fear Interfere.”** (1) ***Don't fear following and sharing Jesus,*** and (2) ***Trust him to protect you.***

1

Jesus says, ***“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.”*** In order for us to understand this whole section, we need to know about whom this verse is speaking: ***“Be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”*** Most times people think this is talking about the devil. After all, he's in hell. But it's not. It's talking about God. The devil can't send anyone anywhere. Only God can send someone to heaven or hell. Jesus is saying, therefore, ***“Don't be afraid if those who can kill your bodies hate and harm you. They can't hurt your soul. Instead, people should be most concerned about God can send them to hell forever.”***

Those are strong words. They really get our attention. Do you know why Jesus spoke them? He spoke them because he was preparing to send his disciples out to share the good news of salvation. It would be wonderful if the message of Jesus was always as welcomed by people as a coupon for free ice cream on a hot summer day. Unfortunately, the Christian message doesn't always elicit a pleasant response.

Jesus is saying, ***“God's the One we should be concerned about pleasing. Our goal is to serve him and share his message. You'll get push back from the world, you'll even get bullied by the world, but their bark is worse than their bite. They can't touch your souls.”*** Once again, ***“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.”***

Isn't it true that often we don't see Jesus so much to be our Leader and Master of our souls, but rather our maid? We do our own thing, sinning away as if it's no big deal, and when we mess up big time and it comes back to bite us, we expect Jesus to clean up our mess as if he's our maid. Or, Jesus becomes the fireman in our lives who has to put out our fires because we've been carelessly playing with matches.

2

How blessed we are, friends, that Jesus is actually willing to do that! He forgives us and fixes our messes all the time. But if we continue to thumb our noses at God and his Word, if we take him for granted, things can go south, spiritually speaking, very quickly. So Jesus warns us, teaches us. Don't

be afraid of the world. But do be afraid of turning away from our Savior. That would end badly. Once again, ***“Be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”***

I know we normally think that falling from faith can't happen to us. But it did happen, even to the disciples, who spent months and years right there together with Jesus. What happened? Judas betrayed Jesus. Peter denied Jesus. The rest of the guys ran off into the night. The words of Jesus ring in our ears: ***“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.”*** If I'm disowned or despised by my neighbor because I'm a Christian, that's one thing. It hurts, but I can keep praying for him and finding ways to show Christian love to him. But if I'm disowned by Jesus for disowning him, I've got a bigger problem -- a nightmare in hell that will never end.

Of course, that's the last thing Jesus wants to have happen to us. He died to forgive us and give us heaven. That's why he came! So he reassures us with these comforting words: ***“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.”*** He's telling us at least two major things with these words: #1 - God really loves you and values you! And #2 - God has the power to help you when you are harassed here on earth as you serve him.

Our fears are telltale signs that sometimes we forget just how powerful God is. Jesus says that right now the Lord knows exactly how many hairs are on your head (some of us make it easier on him than others). He also says not a sparrow can die that God doesn't know about. A sparrow in New Zealand just died -- and one here in NFDL. It's all under God's purview.

So if God knows and is concerned about hairs and sparrows, how much more isn't he concerned about you? His whole purpose for creating you was so that you might be filled with eternal joy as you live together with him in paradise. As much as we disappoint him, the Lord loves us and wants us to be by his side eternally. Jesus took care of the details. Our Leader, whom we often treat like our maid, is our greatest Servant.

So what's our response? Well, on this weekend, we can ask, ***“What can I do for my nation? How can I help my country that is struggling in so many ways?”*** More than ever, talk about Jesus. Stand up for Jesus. Stand up for his message of salvation, a message of forgiving love. Stand up for his moral standards -- and don't be afraid when you do. Freed from fear, we are liberated to proclaim Christ and his saving Word to precious souls. And how we will rejoice when our Lord acknowledges us before his Father in heaven! ***“Father, meet my sister/brother!”*** And he will say, ***“Come, welcome home, my child. Welcome to the banquet...where fear will never interfere again!”***

Amen.