Matthew 10:26a So do not be afraid of them.

Did you see what I saw in this particular text? Seriously, I took a look and I have actually preached on this text at least 2 times and yet I have to tell you that only now did I find a phrase that just absolutely stuck out at me. You can tell what I saw by the text I highlighted. It is the idea of not being afraid!

So, did you note that the word “fear” as in “afraid” is used four times in this particular section? Three times it is used in the sense and with the idea of “do not be afraid” and the other use of the word is a clear and concise call to “be afraid!” Pretty interesting words especially in the context in which they occur. The context is Jesus sending out his disciples. Sending them out to preach and teach the wonders and awe of the glory of the kingdom of God. It is the beginning of their ministry and about a year into Jesus’ ministry. He sends them out and it is clear that He wants them and us to hear and get a very important lesson for our lives. Let’s just jump in and see what we can learn. Our theme will be: **TO BE..OR NOT TO BE...AFRAID!**

Now remember what I told you already. This text is one that occurs after about a year of ministry with Jesus. The disciples have been picked and given some training. Numerous miracles have taken place: water into wine, the draught of fish caught in Galilee, and from that point quite a few rather impressive miracles at the hand of Jesus. People are flocking to Jesus, they want to hear and see what more Jesus can do. Despite the fact that everything looks good, positive and upbeat, Jesus sends out his disciples and it is clear he is giving them an important task. But the task is not in the gathering of people, the people were already coming. The task is not in the fact that the disciples will now do miracles in the name of Jesus, miracles that will not continue their whole ministries. The task is in understanding the task! And Jesus lays out the task in these words: **“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!”**

What? Pastor you said the task was in understanding the task? What are we to understand? Well, the first thing to grasp is that you are not Jesus! You will not be better than him or smarter than him. You will not have a better grasp of the world or sin or how to bring people to Him than He had. And although it hasn’t happened yet, note that you will not escape the way the world treated Jesus. He was eventually despised, ridiculed, rejected and hung on the cross. In other words, you must always remember that you are the student and servant not the Lord and Master. If the world hated and rejected Jesus, don’t you grasp that such is exactly what you can expect as a follower of Jesus. What makes you think you will escape such things or that you will bring in the thousands or even the hundreds that Jesus did not? The world will stand opposed to you and it is here that Jesus says clearly, **“So do not be afraid of them.”** He is telling you your life as a Christian might be pretty tough going.

But Jesus is not finished with this lesson. **“There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What I tell in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs.”** With these words you are still being told to humble yourself and keep your position as student and servant in mind. God knows everything. He knows everything about the world and the people of the world. He knows the plans and plots of Satan and his children. He knows the deceptions and lies of the false prophets in the Church. Nothing is hidden or out of the power of God. Your job is to remain the student and servant. Your job is to speak the enlightening wisdom of God, to proclaim to the world the wonders and marvels of God’s Holy Word. To not back down from the clear and concise truth that Jesus Christ is God and Lord, that His Word is absolute truth and that it is He who defines and sets forth what will be and when…always for the good and salvation of souls!

But note the next line: **Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.”** With those words Jesus is telling us that there will be a time when such a thing will happen. You will lose your life for the name of Jesus. You will suffer and be persecuted. Jesus was not only warning his direct disciples of this, but he was especially warning all the generations of God’s children to come about what will be. Did you know that in Matthew 24 Jesus will apply these words to the coming world? In Matthew 24 Jesus tells us that before He comes again persecutions and the attacks against the faith will become so severe…verses 21 and 22: **“For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.”** I believe we may find those words true in the lives of the generations currently alive. Jesus says, **“Do not be afraid.”**

Let’s continue with the lesson. I am going to stay on the idea of not being afraid. Jesus continues: **“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.”** I don’t know about you, but I find tremendous comfort in these words. The lowly sparrow, sold two for a penny is in the hand and in the plan of God! Why should I, man, the crown of God’s creation worry? We are even told that the very hairs of your head are accounted for. Since God knows with intimate details the life of a hair, then what does that say of God’s care for you?

Yes, God’s care for you. Remember that this is Jesus speaking. Jesus who will give His life as the atoning sacrifice for you. Jesus who will go through the passion, there to suffer the eternal wrath and anger of God for all the sins of all the world just so you don’t have to? Do you not grasp the wonder and marvel of what God has done for you? Do you not see his love and care, his compassion and grace in your life? Now if you are undergoing some sort of trial or tribulation and because of that you think God does not care for or love you, then you have sorely and sadly missed the wonder of what is said here. If God cares about sparrows and hairs, don’t you grasp how much He cares for you? That He will act and move, he will guide and direct your life only for your eternal good? Do you lack faith in God? Do you doubt his power or will for your soul? These words remind us that God, our God is right there for us and with us. His majestic power and his loving grace is right there in ways you cannot fully and truly appreciate or grasp. What God tells you, you are to believe! It is that simple! It is what faith is about.

But now let’s get to the hard part of this text. It is really a solemn warning to us. Jesus has just spent a great deal of time telling you to trust Him and his Father, to stick to his clear and precise word and literally to pay no attention to the world and what it is doing even if what it is doing will cost you your life. He has done that because Jesus knows that though He tells us not be afraid of such things it is our nature to be afraid. So Jesus also puts in a clear and forceful way the reminder to make sure that our fear is justly and rightly placed. He says, **“Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell…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.”**

First things first. If you are going to be afraid, at least be afraid of the right thing! Be afraid to offend and turn away from God! Be afraid of losing the precious eternal life God has graciously given because make no mistake, God will send your unbelieving, rejecting, false faith soul to hell. And hell is not just going to be a few years like this earth…hell will be eternal! So make sure you get this. If you are going to be afraid, then at least have the brains to be afraid of the Almighty, all-knowing, present everywhere God!

To be afraid of God is to be willing to endure everything and anything for the sake of his name. World, if you feel the need to kill me, go ahead, for life in this world is not the measure of things but life in the next is! World, if you are going to hate me and persecute me because of my faith in Jesus and his saving love, go ahead, it is what you did to Him and I am his student and servant. World, if you are going to try and get me to abandon God’s truth, to turn away from the fact that the Bible is, IS God’s Word and true in everything it says and reveals, then take your best shot because I will not fail to acknowledge the wonder and power of Jesus. I will stand upon His Holy name. I will confess his divinity and live his ways. My mouth and my life will be the image of Jesus in accord with the goodness of his grace and love. In other words, my fear of the Lord leads me to acknowledge Him and trust Him no matter what!

But notice you are warned not to fail to acknowledge Him. We are not speaking of those everyday sins and downfalls of our sinful nature that we wrestle with every day. We are speaking of deliberately, intentionally and persistently disowning Jesus and what He is….God and Lord!

You cannot by your life or your actions tell Jesus he is worthless! You cannot despise His Worship and praise, or refuse to give Him glory and honor in His Church because you don’t think you need it? God the Father and Jesus are the ones who gave us Church! So be in it and a part of it!

You cannot determine to be immoral, to live the way the world wants you to and not realize that in doing such a thing you have disowned Jesus. You have told him to take his ideas and thoughts on morality and right and wrong and for Him to go to hell! That is not faith on any level, no matter how you reason it out.

You cannot decide what parts of the Bible you will believe or not! To do so means that you have decided you can design your own god: that you can fix the mistakes that God made in giving His Word and wisdom? I thought you were the student and servant not the teacher and master!

You cannot, for the sake of fame or growth or popularity change the truth of Jesus or water down his truth, claiming you are His voice while denying His voice! You cannot coddle to or chase after the ways of the world and still declare you belong to Jesus!

Shall I go on with the ways that we can and often do disown Jesus? And most often it is because we fail to fear the Lord. Fail to really grasp that He is God and we are not. And if such is the case in your life, well then I plead with you to get back to what Jesus is all about. See your sin. Stop! Realize that Jesus will forgiven your sin with genuine repentance and then in full and wonderful forgiveness start anew to live your life to Jesus. To trust in HIM! To acknowledge HIM! To know his love and grace, his compassion and mercy. To realize without reservation that Jesus is God and Lord the Savior of our souls.

Dear people, if in sending the disciples to the world the first time Jesus knew the need for the potency of the words before us, how much more do we today need to hear and heed them? Do not be afraid of the world or the things of the world, not even of simple physical death! Trust in God! Believe his wonder and marvel. Know that Jesus is with you and is working for you. Amen.