

“A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. ²⁵ 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!

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. ²⁷ What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. ²⁸ 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. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ So 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. ³³ But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.” (Matthew 10:24-33)

Be Like the Master

On May 18th, I was scrolling through my Facebook page and I noticed that both my brother and one of my cousins posted about the sudden death of Chris Cornell. A little later, one of our members posted about it, too. I had no idea who this person was. Pretty soon, it was all over the internet. He was a famous singer and he committed suicide right here in Detroit. It was a sad story. But I was struck by how many people who did not know this man personally were affected by it. The same thing happened last year when David Bowie died. It happens regularly when famous people die. I suppose it’s a function of the way our society idolizes musicians and sports figures. Everyone wants to be like them. When I was young, there was a Gatorade commercial that sang, “If I could be like Mike” – meaning Michael Jordan. We humans are natural born hero worshippers. We like having someone to look up to, someone we can copy. You all know where I’m going with this, right? What better hero could we have than Jesus? He shows us what a Christian life is supposed to look like. Today, he speaks directly to that issue. He tells us to be like our master. And of course, that’s him. So my friends, **be like the master**. Be like Jesus.

I.

In what way? Jesus is talking today about persecution. Right at the end of our reading, he points out just how crucial this matter is when he tells us, **“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.”** So no matter how bad it gets, God expects us to confess our faith and stand by Jesus. But how can we do that? The key is trusting in God the way our Savior did. My friends, especially when it’s scary and hard, **be like the Master: trust in God’s promises.**

Jesus said, **“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!”** Jesus’ enemies called him the devil. They claimed that his miracles were a lie designed to trick people into believing something evil. If people said that about Jesus, what do you think they’ll say about us? Today, it works a little differently. Rather than call Jesus the devil, most people today try to reinvent him. They make him into someone who is too nice to condemn sin – except for the sin of conservative Christians. They claim that Jesus accepts everybody and he’s OK with their sin, as long as it’s not the sin of being a loveless Bible thumper. That sin, Jesus would never accept. So they call all of us who follow the real Jesus of the Bible loveless hypocrites. They silence us in the public square. They reduce us to the fringe of society and condemn us for our unenlightened point of view.

Does that surprise you? It shouldn’t. Many times Jesus tells us that the cost of following him is persecution. The devil and the unbelieving world are at war with us and they want to break our faith. If we insist on clinging to it, they are going to hurt us. And they will always have more power in our society than we do. That’s not really good news, is it? But Jesus also tells us three times today not to be afraid. He says, **“So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.”** The devil and his minions think they’re so smart. But God is always way ahead of them. He knows their plans before they themselves even come up with them. He is always ready to protect us. Even

when he allows them to touch us, it's a choice he makes for our good, not theirs. Even if he allows them to succeed here, if they close our churches and kill or imprison us, on Judgment Day all will be made known and all will be made right. Jesus Christ, the judge of heaven and earth, will know exactly who deserves what. He will vindicate our faith.

So 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.”** What's the worst they can do to us? Kill us here. Make our lives miserable here. Those things are bad and I don't want them to happen. But compared to eternity, life here is just a breath and then it's gone. How often don't we put up with short term pain for long term gain? When you have surgery, you understand that it's going to hurt. But if the surgery is successful, it'll be worth it. You'll be able to walk better or breathe better or go back to work again, hopefully for a lot longer than the surgery hurts. Our entire life here works the same way. For every second of pain we have here, we'll have endless centuries with Jesus.

Finally, Jesus points to the birds. Not one of them dies without God's permission. Then he says, **“So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”** Even the very hairs of our heads are numbered. No real harm can ever come to you. Now, you might say, “Wait a minute, pastor. We're going to pray today for a whole list of people who have cancer or in the hospital. That sounds like harm to me!” You would right – as far as this life is concerned. But everything that God does in your life here, he does to bring you home to heaven. He even sends pain and sorrow to teach us to let go of this life and to cling Jesus, the only person who can rescue us. God knows exactly when pain is good for our faith and exactly when we need to be lifted up and blessed. And he always does whichever one is best for us. In that sense, no harm will ever come to us. We will reach heaven. We will rise from the dead. We will live with Jesus in a perfect world forever. So don't be afraid of what God does while you live here. It's all designed to bring you home.

Are we afraid? Again, Jesus was talking about persecution and here in America, we don't fear being put in prison for our faith. But are we afraid of the cost of confessing Jesus? Do we want to have a nice, comfortable life? Do we avoid talking about our faith because we don't want to have a confrontation with anybody? Do we argue that faith is a private matter and it's nobody's business what we believe? My friends, isn't that fear? Isn't it disowning Christ publicly and trying to only confess him privately in our hearts?

I think you know the answer. I think you know that this is exactly why Jesus told us to fear the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell. It's pure sin to put our comfort and popularity ahead of sharing our faith. It's pure sin to allow fear to silence and paralyze us. Yet, we weak and sinful human beings fall into that sin again and again. What will we do? Nothing. We can't earn our way out of this mess. We can't try harder and do better so that God forgets our failures of the past. We can only make it worse. But we don't have to find the way out of our mess. Jesus already did. He was the one perfect gospel witness that ever lived. Jesus always acknowledged his Father before men. Jesus never hesitated to speak the truth no matter what it cost him. He did that for us, not as an example, but in our place. So God counts us as being just as perfect as Jesus was. Jesus died and paid for all our fear and all our silence and all our failures to confess him. His blood swept all that sin away. Jesus rose to tell you and me very simply and very clearly: all our sin is forgiven. We are even forgiven for failing to confess him. Jesus rose to tell us that we will not suffer hell. We will live with him in heaven. We will rise from the dead. We will enjoy that perfect world with Jesus because he has taken all our sin away.

II.

So why then does Jesus make such a big deal out of confessing him? If we're forgiven, what difference does it make if we sin? If we're going to heaven anyway, we can just keep our mouths shut and not risk the consequences here and tell God we're sorry later, right? No. Faith in Christ changes us. It becomes a force in our lives. It strives, day by day, to be more like Christ. The new man inside us – our true self – wants to be like Jesus. Because we're always fighting the old man, Jesus reminds us what a Christian life looks like and he commands us to live that way. That's especially true when it comes to confessing our faith in a hostile world. My friends, **be like the Master: proclaim God's message.**

Why was Jesus persecuted? Because people didn't like his message. They didn't like hearing that they were sinners. If Jesus would've shut up, they would've left him alone. But he wouldn't stop talking. He wouldn't stop making them feel bad by telling them what the Bible actually says. In the end, they had to kill him because they hated his message so much. Jesus' point to us today is that if they hated him and killed him,

they will hate all of us who proclaim the same message. In every age, Jesus and the gospel have enemies. They will persecute us if they have the chance.

Jesus is calling us to proclaim the gospel knowing that it's going to cost us. By the grace of God, here in America the persecution is more social: mockery, being excluded from the in crowd, maybe losing jobs, instead of violence. But unbelievers don't want to hear about Jesus and they will try to make us pay. Jesus calls us to trust God's promises and proclaim him anyway. He says, **“What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs.”** Jesus is being a little poetic here. He pictures Christians gathering in dark allies and then he whispers his message to us. Then we go out and shout it from the roof tops. He isn't speaking literally here. My son showed my confirmation class a funny video last year about a man who did roof top evangelism. He stood on the roof and shouted at people as they walked by on streets and claimed that he had witnessed to thousands of people that way. Of course, in the video, they just ran away from him. That's not what Jesus is saying. So what is he telling us?

Jesus whispers to us in the dark when he quietly teaches us the gospel away from the crowds. So every time we sat on our parents laps and they read Bible stories to us and every time we sat in Sunday school or Lutheran elementary school and learned about Jesus, that was him whispering to us in the dark. Finally, you can even say that this is Jesus whispering to us in the dark because the world around us isn't paying much attention. Every Sunday, people run or walk by our windows without even looking in. We quietly hear about Jesus and grow in our faith here. In fact, that might be one reason why we aren't famous or well known. Jesus is giving us space and time to learn and grow and teach and encourage one another so that we're prepared for our mission.

But then he tells us to take that message out there. We cannot remain unknown or invisible. When we go out, we proclaim the whole message, even the parts that people don't want to hear. Jesus tells us to shout it all from the roof tops. We need to personally talk about Jesus and we need to bring the world inside these wall to hear about Jesus. We make no bones about the fact that we're sinners and we deserve nothing but death and hell. But we point to Jesus who saved us. We point to Jesus who forgave us. We point to Jesus and we trust the Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of those who hear. That's our mission.

Why do we do that? Because our sin is forgiven. Because God has washed away all our failure in the blood of Jesus. Because the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell has promised that we will live with him in heaven. Because God sees Jesus when he looks at us and calls us perfect. Because God has put a new man in our hearts and that new man wants to be like Jesus. My friends, be like the Master. Trust in God's promise to care for you even in the face of the fiercest persecution this world can offer. Proclaim his message, day after day, simply and naturally, to the people God brings into your life. Amen.