

Father's Day—Sunday, June 21, 2020

Some Fatherly Advice from the Savior

Matthew 10:24-39

A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him 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 unperceived by your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's foes will be members of one's own household.

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

On this Father's Day, it only seems appropriate that we consider some good fatherly advice, and we know that this is good advice for it comes from none other than our Savior Jesus Christ. Some of the words we are about to consider might sound like wisdom which you heard from your father, or perhaps wisdom which you *wish* your father would have shared. In our Gospel lesson we hear Jesus preparing the twelve disciples for launch, or at least it was a test-launch. They were being sent out in pairs for a missionary tour around Israel, and this was to be training and preparation for the day that they would head out after Pentecost into a big world. Dads understand launches as we see childhood as one great preparation for launching into the world.

Whether it be a child's involvement in Little League baseball, the Scouts, dating or whatever, fathers can be good at offering advice that may be of value someday soon. As Jesus prepares his disciples he begins with basic instruction about their mission: preach, heal the sick, cast out demons. But as his instruction continues, he takes on a solemn tone as there are numerous warnings given. (Dads are also good at giving warnings!) A father may be heard to say, "I'm telling you this for your own good!" We don't always believe our fathers when they say this, but we should be very ready to listen to Jesus, for he truly knew what he was talking about.

His first advice in our day's reading is that **life is hard**. Fathers are good at giving that kind of counsel. Jesus knew that they would face opposition, and in time would be hated for being a follower. *If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul [a name for the devil, Satan], how much more will they malign those of his household!* The logic is very simple. If the world hates Jesus, they will hate those who carry on in his name. It is easy to delude ourselves that we will always be immune to this. We live in a free country and like to believe that the human race has gotten beyond such bigotry, but real faith will always be adding some level of conflict to a believer's life. Throughout history Christians have been called out and even mistreated for their faith, which proves Jesus' concern for us to be well founded. It is noteworthy that without giving it much of a thought we often subdue our expressions of faith in public places, not wanting to draw possible scorn or mockery.

Having laid down the warning, Jesus wastes no time in presenting a word of assurance. *So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known.* This saying is a bit cryptic and we can only look at it briefly. Jesus apparently was telling them that they were learning the truth, and soon they would know the full truth of God's plan for saving the world and for living life to its fullest. He wanted them to tell that message gladly and without hesitation. He wanted them to live by that message and to stand firm upon the promises of God. This sounds a bit similar to another popular piece of fatherly advice: "Live rightly and you will have nothing to be ashamed of!" As Christians we are to live lives of integrity for then we will give no one a valid reason to hate us.

This first portion of Jesus' teaching presents a popular fatherly theme. Life is hard. As your father may have told you, "Life is hard. Who told you otherwise?" and "Suck it up!" It takes a while to learn this lesson as the world may first present itself as an easy and safe place. I am so very grateful to be living in such a comfortable time and place. In the modern world we have developed so many comforts and overcome so many diseases and pains. This is wonderful, but it does create a problem with our expectations. With life going so easily for us, we begin to believe that life should *always* be easy and that every problem should be solved, and solved quickly. When real problems come, we are often shocked, as though such things should never occur. In one of my recent daily devotionals I mentioned a retired nurse who felt that Jonas Salk was the greatest man of the 20th century. I recently heard from her, and again

she offered a fascinating perspective on the present world situation. She spoke of her early nurse training during times of spikes in polio cases. The halls of Lancaster General were packed with victims, many of them young and many of them dying or becoming severely disabled by this horrible plague. Not long after that time she married and moved for a while to the south while her husband served in the military. One night, while her husband was away on maneuvers, she witnessed a cross burning in her neighborhood. She thought back on this and realized how far our world has come since then. Today we are so shocked by epidemics and racial violence. While these are terrible and tragic events, we should not be surprised, for the world is broken and life is hard. It has always been that way. It is helpful to have reasonable expectations about life and faith. False hopes of an easy walk with Christ is a set-up for pain and disappointment. When we are aware of the troubles that likely lie ahead, we are better prepared and spared a lot of heartbreak.

Jesus' next piece of advice is the kind of wisdom which is not taught frequently enough. He told his disciples of **what they should fear**. This is a terribly neglected topic as we want to be positive and full of encouragement. We may tell our children of fears that are not genuine. "Don't fear failure," we may tell them, "because you have all the skills needed for success." This is true. Failure, especially in a career pursuit, is a big fear for a young person as they begin their adult life, but it is not really worthy of all the attention it is given. We tell youth to not be frightened by false fears, and this is good. Jesus, however, tells us that there are forces in this world which we *should* genuinely fear! *Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.* As I like to state it, guard your spirit.

In these days there has been much attention focused upon our police. Theirs is a difficult and stressful job, and we often fear for the safety of those who wear the police uniform. This may be a well-founded fear, but there is a much greater fear which should be part of every police officer's conscience. Guard your spirit! This is advice which I give to all the police that I have ever worked with. An officer regularly works with difficult and dangerous people, some who are a physical threat, some who have committed horrible crimes, some who are compulsive liars and can never give an honest answer, and all sorts of other troubled folks. An officer works in a criminal justice system which often seems short on justice. While physical harm is a possibility in a police officer's life, the greater danger is damage to the soul. How easy it is to become negative and cynical. How easily one can slip into a superior attitude and begin to see the troubled people that they work with as "lowlives" and as lesser human beings. I have never met the Minneapolis officer who killed George Floyd, but I feel as though I have met him already, and I believe I know his problem. When we pray for our police, let us pray for much more than just their physical safety! Let us pray for their souls and for spirits damaged in a difficult ongoing conflict. And having warned of the spiritual diseases which can infect an officer's life, let me also be clear that *every* walk of life has its own spiritual dangers. How might your life's work and present

situation challenge or corrode your spirit? Give this some thought. Let us all guard our spirits!

Jesus has given quite a strong warning, but as He always seems to do, this is followed by a comfort and word of wisdom. Jesus assures us that our heavenly Father's eye is always upon the smallest sparrow, and is certainly watching over us. Let us keep our eye upon God, and God's eye will certainly be upon us. Keep your walk strong and do not fear only those who can harm the body. To state it in a contemporary way—there are a lot worse things to fear out there than the virus!

The last section of teaching in our lesson surrounds matters of loyalty. **Stay loyal.** Always and proudly proclaim Jesus as Lord. Jesus said, *Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.* Confirmants and high school students understand this teaching immediately. Living in a goldfish bowl they know how easy it is to pick up and to drop friends, and engage in all kinds of betrayals. Jesus warns us—If you chose me as your friend but act toward others as if you do not know me, I will act like I don't know you on the Last Day. This is a sobering warning for all ages. Are we truly acknowledging Jesus before others, or do we keep our faith half a secret? Take this verse with you and be uncomfortable with it for a while.

Jesus exhorts us to loyalty. We are to be ever loyal to Him, and ever ready to stand by that loyalty in a divided world. Jesus tells us that His coming to the world, even though He is the Prince of Peace, will bring increased conflict and division. It is frequently lamented that we live in a divided nation, and many speak of a longing for unity. Jesus makes it clear that being one of His followers will *add* new conflicts into our lives. Let us be ready for those conflicts. Let us be ready to disagree in love.

As Jesus winds down his teaching he makes a bold concluding statement. *Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.* Let us be careful of our loyalties, and may Christ always be first on our list. Let us beware of just how easy it is to fall into the ways of this world, and let us keep kingdom priorities in our lives.

Jesus gives quite a strong dose of warnings and these teachings can feel overwhelming. We may think to ourselves, "How can I follow all these teachings and face all these foes in the world?" This is a reasonable fear! But let us remember a simple and obvious truth about fatherly advice. Dads give good advice, and better yet they are there to walk with us and encourage us as we seek to honor that instruction. And so it is with our Lord!

Thanks Dad. And thank You Jesus, for some great counsel. A blessed Father's Day to you all.