

Confess Christ with Confidence!

On April 20th, 1999, a 17 year-old girl named Cassie Bernall was attending another day of her junior year at her local high school in Columbine, Colorado. Maybe you remember that date and that place for the tragedy that happened there. That day, around 11:00am, two students – Dylan Kliebold and Eric Harris – brought guns to school and murdered 12 schoolmates and one teacher.

When the shooting started, Cassie hid with many of her classmates under tables in the library. When the gunmen entered the room, Cassie – a Christian – began to pray. Eyewitnesses say that when Eric Harris approached the table and heard her praying, he asked her, “Do you believe in God?” Cassie answered, “Yes.” It was the last word she spoke before he shot her in the head.

I’m about to read some words of Jesus in Matthew 10. He talks about being persecuted for our faith...boldly confessing him before men...not even being afraid of those who can kill the body for doing so. And words like that bring stories like Cassie’s to mind, right? Real life stories of Christian who died confessing Christ rather than denying him to live. And you can’t help but put yourself in their shoes. Would I have done the same? Would I have had the courage to confess Christ like that?

It’s good to ask that question. It’s good to stop and reevaluate which is more important to you – your life or your Savior. But Jesus’ words here aren’t just meant to lead us to ponder the hypothetical, “What if?” Because confessing Christ isn’t just something you do when your life’s on the line – it’s something Jesus calls us to do in our everyday lives, with our words and our actions. And even if there’s no gun to our heads, there are still very real fears that we have that can keep us from doing that.

Jesus knew that. Which is why he said what he said in Matthew 10. So that we can Confess Christ with Confidence. 1) Fear tries to silence us, but 2) Jesus silences our fear.

²⁴ “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.

It shocks us to hear about people doing what Eric Harris did – killing someone just because they say they believe in God. It shocks us to see other evidence of how anti-Christian

our world is becoming. To be honest, it comes as kind of a surprise to us when we come face to face with people who get angry at us for what we believe.

But you know what Jesus says? It shouldn't shock us. No, if we think that living Christ-like lives and sharing Christ's truths should be easy and win us all sorts of friends...we really think that we're above our teacher, Jesus. What does he say? **A student isn't above his teacher, nor a servant his master...if the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household!** Think of the persecution Jesus faced as he lived and spoke the truth. They called him names – even called him Beelzebub, the devil himself. He got kicked out of his hometown. Some in his own family even thought he was crazy. And, of course, he was crucified. If that's how they treated the Head of the House for confessing the truth, should we members of his house expect any different as we do the same? No. You can expect the same unbelieving world to persecute you, just like Jesus.

I don't know – maybe we struggle to relate to Jesus' words here. Maybe when we hear a word like persecution, it just doesn't hit home because it's not something we experience all that often.

There was once a young Christian lady who graduated from high school and went off to big public university for college. Her pastor was worried about how her faith would hold up that first year there. So when she came back for Christmas vacation, he found some time to talk to her to see how things were going. She smiled at him and said, "Pastor, it hasn't been too hard. Actually, it's been pretty easy. No problem at all. In fact, most people don't even know that I'm a Christian." Huh. That *is* the problem, isn't it?

Friends, could the same be true of us? Maybe the reason the world doesn't persecute us much is because we aren't doing what Jesus says here – **speaking** the truth in **broad daylight** and **proclaiming from the rooftops**. If we're not being treated like our master, maybe it's because we're not doing and saying what our master did. It's not true that we live in a country where there is no persecution. What's true is that we can get by in America without persecution if we just blend in and keep quiet.

And Jesus words here really get to the heart of why we do that. It's fear. Why do I struggle as a pastor to confront someone with the truth about their sins? I'm afraid – afraid of how they'll react, afraid of losing a member. Why do you struggle with confronting a family member about the same? Fear of their anger or losing your relationship. Why is professing faith in the bible's teachings about creation or sexuality so hard? Fear of getting called backwards or intolerant. Why is it that we rarely bring up spiritual things with unchurched friends? Fear – of awkwardness or rejection.

No, thank God, for the moment, we don't have to fear losing our lives for living or sharing our faith. But isn't it sad how fear of losing much less can silence our confession?

What does Jesus have to say about that? 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.** Do you know who "the One" is that Jesus refers to here? It's not the devil. It's God. Jesus says that if our fear of peoples' anger...rejection...even killing...is keeping us silent, we're fearing the wrong thing. Shouldn't we be more afraid of God's anger...God's rejection...God's killing body and soul forever in hell because of that sin?

It's enough to leave us all terrified, isn't it? But don't forget Jesus' point in this whole section. He says it three times, so you can't miss it: Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid. Don't be

afraid. No, Jesus doesn't leave us with fear of God's punishment in hell. Jesus is the God who loves you so much that he came into this world to take your fear of punishment away. All those times our misplaced fear has led us to blend in and keep quiet – Jesus made those sins and all the rest his own on the cross. And he suffered there what you and I deserve for them to take them away. The One who has the power to send you to hell – he loved you so much that, on the cross, he sent Jesus there in your place...so that you would never have to experience it. In fact, because of what Jesus did for you, God is exactly who Jesus calls him here: Your **Father**. And you are his dearly loved child. You're part of God's family...now, and forever!

"Don't be afraid," Jesus says. And he has every good reason to say it. By what he did for you, he silenced your fear of God's punishment and replaced it with the confidence of being part of God's family.

But he also silences the fear that keeps you silent. He gives you the courage to confess Christ – live and share your faith. **Don't be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul**, he says. When you live and share the truth, what's the worst that people can do to you? They might get angry...but in Jesus, you have the love of the only One who really matters. They might reject you...but for Jesus' sake, God never will. They might even take your physical life...but they can't touch your eternal life. If they kill you, they'll just be sending you where you long to be – with God in heaven. So confess Christ with confidence!

Jesus gives you another reason you can do that. 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.** Apparently, sparrows weren't very valuable in Jesus' day. At least, not to people. But to God? God is so concerned about them that nothing happens to them apart from his say so. If that's how much he cares for a bird you can buy for a cent, how much more doesn't he care for you, whom he bought with the price of his Son's blood? Every detail of your life, even the hairs on your head, he orders for your eternal good. Won't he do the same with whatever suffering he allows you to experience for your faith? So confess Christ with confidence!

On April 20, 1999, Eric Harris thought that he was showing the world how powerless God is by shooting a girl who was praying to her God. But he could only take her body. And God wasn't powerless that day – it didn't happen apart from his will. He answered her prayer in the greatest way by taking her soul to heaven. And when Cassie Bernall opened her eyes and saw her Savior, she knew she had won.

Whoever acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven. Jesus give us the same courage to confess Christ without fear – in life, and in death. Amen.