

\$585 – that’s how much you are worth. “*You are of more value than many sparrows,*” says Jesus. How much more value? Well, now we know. A respected university in the Midwest added up the cost of all the elements that make up the human body, and it came to just under six hundred dollars. Yet, you and I are worth more dead than alive. A medical school will pay between two to three thousand dollars for a human cadaver.

So, if any of your friends is feeling down, suffering from low self-esteem, you can brighten their day. You can say, “Hey, cheer up, you’re worth at least six hundred dollars, maybe more!”

But if that doesn't work, and I doubt if it will, you can point them to our text here in Matthew 10. The value that Jesus places on you, and on your friend, is not, cannot be measured using adding machines. They won't work. Medical schools and universities may determine an amount of what we are worth in terms of dollars and cents. But God does this in a different way. He points us to His beloved Son shedding His blood on the cross of Calvary, and He says to us, “That is the value I place upon each and every one of you.”

We begin in this way so that this comforting assurance stays in front of us as we look at the rest of what Jesus says in our text. Because we hear some rather startling things. Brother against brother, He says, father against his child, children against their parents, all ending in violence and death. Jesus speaking here of persecution, and being hated, and fleeing from town to town. Being called Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons, and if this is what they call Jesus, we should expect the same treatment. And then, also, much talk here about fear, being afraid.

Now we really haven't seen the kind of violence Jesus speaks of here. We haven't been fleeing from town to town. And I doubt if any of your acquaintances have called you a demon lately. But we have had our share of fear. We just got over the fear of covid. And that was quite a fearful time for many people. Even when covid completely goes away, cancer will remain with us, and heart disease. There will always be floods, and tornados, earthquakes, and even fatal car crashes.

There is much to fear on a regular basis. And isn't it nice to know that they're arming IRS agents with guns these days. So be afraid, very afraid of being audited. And don't forget about a certain country that sent one or more spy balloons over our land, one of these crossing just south of here in fact. Who knows what that country has in mind for us. They are not a Christian nation. They persecute and even kill those who are Christians.

I could go on, but I won't, because Jesus puts all of these together in one lump and says very simply, “Do not fear them, not now, not ever.” He says it in this way, “*Do not fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul.*” Car crashes can kill the body. So can disease and massive storms. So can people. Every day that we live something, or someone, can kill our body. “But have no fear of these whatsoever,” says Jesus.

Now that's a pretty tall order, isn't it? It's difficult not to fear what can kill you. But think of this, that which we fear can become our master. And you only have one Master, one Lord, and He counts you of such great value that He shed His blood for you on the cross.

Jesus does not want you to be mastered by covid or disease so that these control your life by your fear of them. He does not want you to be mastered by someone or some evil nation that has the power to kill your body. If that's all these can do to you, there is no reason to fear them. And that is all these can do to you, for they are simply unable to kill your eternal soul. Only God can do that. Only God, says Jesus, can "*destroy both soul and body in hell.*" Fear Him, therefore, says our Lord.

Be afraid? Is this what He means? Be very afraid of God? There are people, many people in fact, that are very afraid of God. That which we fear is our lord and master. So, is God the Lord and Master of all those people who are deathly afraid of Him? No. They do not fear God, but only the evil that God can do to them. They are afraid that He can and will destroy both their soul and body in hell. What they really fear is not God, but hell.

But they don't know Him. They do not know Him who loves them and shed His blood for them on the cross. If they did, they would not be afraid of Him.

Fear God, yes, "fear Him who can destroy both your soul and body in hell." Not because He will. But because He will not! He already suffered hell for you – the very hell that you and I deserve because we are poor, miserable sinners. On the cross Jesus' body and soul were destroyed by hell. And then, by His resurrection from the dead, He destroyed the power of hell so that you need have no fear of it whatsoever.

Fear Him. Fear this, your God, who was willing to endure hell's agony in your place. Fear Him, not as in "be very afraid of Him," but as in "fear, love, and trust in Him" because He is your loving Savior. Fear God, not because He can destroy you in hell for disobeying Him, but because He forgives you for disobeying Him.

Yes, that's right. He is not looking to destroy you, and it's because you are His dear, beloved child. He baptized you in the very blood of Jesus that was shed for the forgiveness of your sins. God sees you through Jesus. You are covered with Jesus' blood, with His holiness, His innocence. Because you are baptized in Christ, this is always how God sees you: holy, innocent, forgiven. All of you, not just some of you. All of you are forgiven of all your sins.

That's why Jesus says not to be afraid. Remember always the value your God places on you. Your value doesn't go up or down depending on how you live. Because Jesus lived, died, and rose again for you, you are precious to God always...always. Amen.