

PASTOR DOUG'S FAVORITE VERSES

Matthew 10:26-31

As this is Father's Day, it seemed appropriate to me that, if possible, I should speak on one of my favorite Bible verses (or group of verses) that might particularly apply to men. As it is men that my sermons tend to be oriented towards (believing that if I can but sway the hearts of the men towards Christ I can potentially sway entire families to the Savior), there was one set of favorite verses that seemed quite appropriate for the day.

Matthew 10:26-31

Of all the groups of verses in the Bible, these six verses are likely my absolute favorite. I'm sticking with Job 42:12a (for the meantime) as my life verse. But if I was asked to vote on a GROUP of verses that I would choose as my life verses (plural), it would be these.

And I will explain why in just a minute. But first...the picture...

(Bring out picture of tough looking motorcyclist holding a baby between his hands)

Many of you have seen this framed photo before: of this big, burly, tough looking motorcyclist guy holding a baby between his massive hands. Indeed, for some 15 or more years it hung behind my desk, in my church office, back when I was senior pastor at the Lancaster Evangelical Free Church. When I left that church and became involved in Burning Hearts, I put an office in the third floor of our house. This same photo now hangs behind my desk there.

And why such a photo?

Most pastors, I would guess, if they have **any photo** at all hanging in their office, or behind their desk, it is either a photo of their family, or, if it is of something spiritual...or something meant to inspire, or teach...maybe it is a picture of Christ in prayer. Or...and this is fairly common among pastors...that picture of Christ walking holding a sheep around his shoulders. That picture represents how Christ, as the good shepherd, left the 99 and went after the one lost sheep. And as Christ is our supreme example as to what it means to be a good pastor or shepherd, it represents how we also, at times, will must the 99 and go after that one church member who has fallen away, or fallen on hard times. But, anyway, those are the kind of pictures one MIGHT expect to see in a pastor's office.

But then, way back before I was ever a pastor...I was in a Christian bookstore in the Philadelphia area...and there, in a magazine rack, I saw a copy of Eternity magazine – a Christian magazine that somewhat ironically (given the magazine's name) later went out of business. On the cover of that magazine was this photo with the word ETERNITY across it. I pulled the magazine from the rack and opened it up. Inside was the same photo without the word ETERNITY. Opposite the photo was an article entitled "The Power Abusers" by Ronald Enroth. The photograph, taken by Rob Goebel, was being used to illustrate how church leaders can become monstrously big and mean, taking control over those under their care, just like the big guy in the photo had control over that little child.

I never actually read the article. I only liked the photo. So I bought the magazine. For I thought, when I saw that photo, "Now **that's the kind of picture I would want behind my desk if I were ever a pastor.**" At the time I was a museum manager and little did I know that it would be many, many years before I would ever become a pastor.

Years later, when I finally became a pastor, and when, in 1995 I finally got an office of my own, I took my Nikon FE 35mm camera and took a photo of that magazine's inside photo and sent it off to be blown up. Once I received it back I had it framed. And the rest I have already told you.

Now, WHY this photo?

And what does this have to do with Matthew 10:26-31?

And what does this have to do with Father's Day?

1. Why this Photo?

As I would later learn, this was a Pulitzer Prize winning photo, taken on April 4, 1974 at a bar in Sidney, Ohio. The photo is of a motorcyclist named Willis "Bones" Kah and his baby son named...can you guess?...named Harley Davidson. Bones was born on March 10, 1939 in Sidney, Ohio and died on June 28, 2008. His son, Harley, pictured in the photo, was his fifth child. Harley currently lives in Erie, Pennsylvania where he has a pressure washing business.

The reason I liked...and continue to like this photo...is not because Bones Kah has a marijuana pin on his vest. Nor does my liking the photo have anything to do with his presumed motorcyclist kind of look. Indeed, when I first bought the magazine I wasn't yet even into motorcycling. Nor did I like the photo because it represented church leaders who might be, as the article was entitled, "Power Abusers."

The reason I liked the photo is....well...the first thing...the **very first thought** I had when I saw that photo on the cover of that magazine was this:

NO ONE IS GOING TO HASSLE THAT KID!

Because the guy holding the kid looks like ONE TOUGH DUDE.

And as long as that kid is in his that man's hands, he has nothing at all to fear. And that is how I thought of myself in my heavenly Father's hands.

As I thought of how someday I hoped to become a pastor...and maybe have an office where people would come and sit...I knew I wanted a reminder to them that if they also are truly in GOD'S HANDS, they have nothing to fear.

So that's why this photo.

2. What does this photo have to do with Matthew 10:26-31?

I don't know about you, but I would NOT characterize my life as one of having lived in fear of others. Sure, like anyone, I'm a bit intimidated by those who are faster, or bigger, or smarter than I, but I learned a long time ago that as much as I might be intimidated by others, they are likely just as intimidated by me. So while one may be faster, another might be smarter. Or while one may be richer, another might have a better looking wife.

I think I particularly saw this as I came to know different men who were really BIG guys: be it much taller or much heavier, or just much bigger than I. I think I always sort of wished I was 6" taller than I am, but then when I would get to know guys that were 6" taller on the outside I would often find that on the inside they usually were no bigger than I and often, it seemed, even smaller.

When our daughter Sarah was young we had a book about a lizard or a mouse (I don't recall) and it had this repeating line: "I may be small on the outside, but I'm big on the inside." (Ruth later corrected me that it was a mouse and the line was, "I may be small but I act tall.")

Along with this somehow, way early on in life, I learned that the same kind of fears that anyone has pretty much EVERYONE has. And so, when you walk into a room and don't know anyone and you maybe feel a bit intimidated...well, I've learned that most of the people in the room had that SAME EXACT FEELING when they walked in the room. And my counseling of people through the years has only supported this notion that we are all pretty much alike.

And so even the big, burly, tough-looking motorcyclist guy is likely just as intimidated by you as you are by him. Coming to this realization was helpful to me when Ruth and I first got married and I began to work for the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America. These were WEALTHY WOMEN who came from wealthy families and who drove very expensive cars and wore expensive clothing. They were what they used to refer to as "old money." Comparatively, Ruth and I had NOTHING. But I immediately felt like I could fit in with these women for I did not need to feel intimidated by them, nor they by me.

Going door to door and talking to strangers each week could be seen by almost anyone as a FEARFUL thing to do. For I don't know the people whose doors I am knocking on. But...did you ever think about this...when they come to the door they don't know who I am? There is good reason to consider that we are BOTH IN THE SAME BOAT. So why should either of us be afraid?

Well, in the text here, Jesus is talking about people who are not just in a house, or about wealthy women who oversee a museum. He is talking about people who can and may actually DO YOU HARM.

Matthew 10:16-26

THAT is the context of Jesus saying to his disciples (and by extension, to us as well), "Do not fear those who **kill the body** but cannot kill the soul."

Now, honestly, in my 33 plus years of pastoring, counseling, marrying and burying, I haven't run into a single person whose life IN THE UNITED STATES was truly threatened because of their faith. Some from other countries – like Pastor Britto in India – have been beaten and threatened with death. But that was in India...not in the U.S. Sure, here and there in the U.S. someone may have been ridiculed because of their faith. Going door to door I've had a few doors shut in my face. And there have been those whose relatives didn't want to hear a single word about God, Jesus or the Bible. But no one has faced death...at least not anyone that I have ever known.

So the application of these words "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul," has been hard to make to us here in the United States.

But this much can ABSOLUTELY BE SAID and that is **if we aren't to live in fear of those who would might actually do us HARM (which IS the point of the text), then most certainly we should not live in fear of those who will NOT DO US HARM.** Right?

And that brings me back to the picture...

Because here is this big, burly guy and he's holding this little kid. And, again, the thought that was in my mind was "NO ONE IS GOING TO HASSLE THAT KID." And if we are in the arms of God we are, as the old song went, "Safe in the arms of Jesus."

And that is how I have seen my life. And that is how you should see your life as well.

But then see the rest of these verses...

vss. 29-31

Here Jesus tells his disciples that God is over EVERYTHING and his knowledge and care extend down to even the smallest of things: like birds that fall to the ground or the number of hairs on our heads (and that, like birds, may also fall to the ground!). If someone reading these verses walks away with the idea that **God is over even the smallest most seemingly unimportant details of their life**, I think they have walked away with a **correct understanding** of what Jesus was saying.

The Deists of the 18th century (which included a number of this country's founding fathers) believed that God created this world according to laws that he had made. And that, like a wind-up clock, he wound up the universe and then walked away, leaving it to run according to those laws that he had made. But every time our founding fathers committed their ways to God in prayer they were inconsistently appealing to that Creator God to involve himself once more on their behalf. So, our many of our Founding Fathers were INCONSISTENT DEISTS.

Well we're not Deists at all. For we believe that God did not just wind up this universe and walk away. And these words by Jesus in Matthew 10 underscore that fact. **God is INTIMATELY AWARE AND INVOLVED in our lives.** And he is looking out for us. So we need not FEAR what might be coming down the pike.

3. So what does this have to do with Father's Day?

Men...fathers...11 times in the Old Testament scriptures there is a phrase that we find again and again addressed to men. It's just four words in the English language:

BE STRONG AND COURAGEOUS

And while I have no problem seeing this as a challenge to try and grow stronger physically, this is really about strength of CHARACTER far more than it is about strength of BODY.

Promise Keeper used to sing a song that went

Be bold, be strong

For the Lord thy God is with thee.

Be bold, be strong

For the Lord thy God is with thee.

Do not be afraid; do not be afraid; do not be afraid,

For the Lord thy God is with thee.

That's the challenge to us men!

That's what our wives need to see in us;
That's what our children need to see in us;
And that's what our world needs today...

Not men who will **bend and fold** at the slightest hint of opposition,
but men who will rise to the occasion and live like godly men in an
age when manhood has been put down because of its confusion with

- sexual exploitation
- sexual perversion, and
- misogyny

So be BOLD men! Be bold and be godly. And remember that as long as God has you in his hands, no one is going to hassle you!

But remember this as well: that same one who holds you SAFELY in his hands can also, if he wanted to, CRUSH you with those same hands. The same one who knows the number of hairs on your head is able to do us harm. That's why Jesus said we should fear him.

*So "Rise up o men of God (and) have done with lesser things;
Give heart and soul and mind and strength
To serve the King of kings."*