

Sermon Series: *Jesus Said What?*



Fear God, Not Man

Boldly Proclaim the Gospel of Jesus

(Matthew 10:25-33 ESV)

²⁵ "It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household. ²⁶ So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. ²⁷ What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. ²⁸ And 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. ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.

³⁰ But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. ³² So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, ³³ but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven."

Introduction

In 1933 in his inauguration address, president Franklin D. Roosevelt famously said,

"...the only thing we have to fear is fear itself..."

Jesus does not agree. There is something—or rather someone—whom we ought to fear far more than we fear fear itself. We discover who that is in Matthew 10:28.



Matthew 10:28 (ESV)

²⁸ *And 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.*

Jesus is telling his disciples not to fear men since all they can do is kill your body. Rather, the One to fear more is him who can kill both your body *and* your soul. We probably all fear experiencing the death of our bodies. But Jesus is saying here that there is something we ought to fear more than experiencing the death of our body and that is experiencing the death of our soul in the torments of hell.

There's only one person who has the authority to condemn a soul to hell and that is God the Father. Jesus is not here commanding his disciples to fear the devil. Satan has no authority to judge the soul of anyone. God alone is the "judge of all the earth."¹ In Scripture we are never commanded to fear Satan, but from the beginning to end we are commanded to fear God. Jesus is saying here,

"Don't fear men, but do fear God."

And when I read these words in Matthew 10:28, I say to myself, "**Jesus said what?**" This is an astounding statement. "Don't fear people who can only destroy your body. Rather fear God since he can destroy your body and your soul in hell."

Why would Jesus say something like this? What is he intending to achieve by this statement? To answer these questions, we need to look at the context.

¹ Gn 18:25.

Dominant Idea: Fear

Fear is the main idea of this passage. It is the dominate theme of this text. The word is used four times; three times negatively and once positively. Jesus tells us three times what not to fear and once what we are to fear. Twice the word is used in reference to men and twice in reference to God.

(-) Negatively - who should not be feared:

Matthew 10:26 (ESV)

²⁶ *"So have no fear of them..."* and by 'them' he means "men."

²⁸ *"Do not fear those who kill the body..."* Again he means "men."

³¹ *"Fear not, therefore..."* means do not be afraid of God.

(+) Positively - whom should be feared:

Matthew 10:28 (ESV)

²⁸ *Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*

He's referring to God. God is the one whom should be feared.

Instructions for Sent Disciples

This portion of Scripture, Matthew 10:25-33, is part of the instructions that Jesus gave his disciples prior to sending them out to preach the gospel and demonstrate the power of the kingdom of God. Matthew indicates that this happened not long after Jesus officially named the Twelve disciples.² His intention is to fortify them in order to accomplish his mission. He is strengthening them for the opposition and persecution that he knew would undoubtedly come. In v.16 he said,

Matthew 10:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ *"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves..."*

Jesus knew his followers would face intense opposition. In fact, he describes the situation as a slaughter, like sheep being sent into a pack of wolves. This is a grim depiction of the hatred the world abides against the followers of Jesus. He warns them, *"You will be hated by all of army name's sake"* (Mt. 10:22). He did not want them to grow weak and fail to accomplish the will of his Father. He wanted them to faithfully endure to the end and so be saved. *"The one who*

² See the beginning of chapter 10.

endures to the end will be saved" (Mt. 10:22). That's our aim this morning—to strengthen your faith so that you boldly bear witness to the truth of the gospel throughout all circumstances of your life and unwaveringly endure to the end.

To Keep You Reaching Out

The three purposes of this church are reaching up³, reaching in⁴, and reaching out. By reaching out we mean taking the story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and, first, obediently living out that story before the eyes of the watching world, and second, by sharing it with people who have not yet heard it or do not yet believe it. We do this because Jesus commanded us to do it and we do it because its a story that is just too good to keep to ourselves.

Sometimes we are *forgetful* of just how good this story is and we need to be reminded. And sometimes we become *fearful* of the opposition and rejection that may come to us when we share this good news. However, this is the mission to which Jesus has called us. He has called us to go into all the world and make disciples of all people nations by baptizing them and teaching them to obey all that Jesus commanded.

The goal of this portion of Scripture is to embolden his disciples in order to accomplish his mission. The goal of these words of Jesus is to pour courage into his disciples so that they will be unshakably consistent in proclaiming the gospel of salvation. The mission is explained in verse 27.

Matthew 10:27 (ESV)

²⁷ What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops.

There are two imperatives in this passage; *say* and *proclaim*. Jesus is sending his disciples out to "**say** in the light" what he has told them in the dark. He is sending them out to **proclaim** on housetops what he has whispered to them. He is sending them out with a message to say and to proclaim. All that Jesus has taught them privately, they are now to boldly proclaim publicly.

The time to be quiet is over. The time for a silent, secret faith in Jesus has come to an end. It's time for speaking the truth. The season for shy discipleship has closed. Jesus now wants his soul-saving message shared broadly and boldly. The disciples have been long in listening, and now it's time to start speaking.

³ To God through worship and prayer.

⁴ To one another through authentic community.

Five Arguments for Boldly Sharing the Gospel

Jesus offers five reasons why his disciples should never give up proclaiming the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the face of opposition and persecution. He offers five incentives, five arguments for continued faithfulness in the face of persecution and hatred of him and God the Father.

1) Like Master, Like Servant

The first argument for boldly sharing the gospel is simply because it is good for servants to be like their master. Boldly share the gospel because when you do, you're acting like Jesus.

(Matthew 10:25 ESV)

²⁵ "It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household."

'Beelzebul' is another name for the prince of demons. It is a synonym for Satan.⁵ Just a short time before Jesus began this teaching, he had met a mute man who was oppressed by a demon (Mt. 9:32-34). Jesus cast the demon out and the man was able to speak again. But instead of praising God for the miracle, the Pharisees said, "He casts out demons by the prince of demons." The work and power of God was manifestly evident in what Jesus had done. Yet they were so sinfully stubborn that they attributed the obvious power of God to the power of Satan.

Jesus is teaching his disciples a painful fact; as the master is treated, so will the servants be treated; like master, like servants. If people observed the good works that Jesus was doing and concluded that he was an agent of Satan, then certainly the followers of Jesus should not be surprised when their good works are also condemned as evil.

Jesus is saying, "Don't stop sharing the gospel when people say you are evil. They said I was in league with Satan and so they will say about you who would follow me." This fact should not frighten us. It is a high honor when someone emulates your life. Every parent knows this.

It is good for the servant to be like his master and for the disciple to live like his teacher lived. So don't worry about being attacked and hated by people, because that's how most people responded to Jesus. Great joy comes to the servant when he accused of emulating his master. *"It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master."*



⁵ Mt. 12:24-27; Mk. 3:22-26; Lk 11:18-19.

2) The Truth Will One Day Come to Light

The second argument for boldly sharing the gospel of Jesus is that the truth of the gospel will one day come to light. Boldly share the gospel because its goodness will one day be revealed.

(Matthew 10:26 ESV)

²⁶ "So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known."

Do not stop sharing the gospel because one day the glorious goodness of this precious truth will be revealed in all its splendor. The world today may not see the gospel of Jesus as good news, but one day it will. One day the great glory of the gospel—which now is hidden—will be uncovered and revealed for all to see.

On that day, the truth will be known. On that day, Jesus will not be called "Baalzebul," but rather he will be hailed as the "Lamb of God who takes away sin." On that day, he will not be called a "false prophet," but rather "the only begotten Son of the One true and living God."

The blessed, life-saving goodness of the gospel of Jesus may be hidden to the majority of the world today, but one day that goodness will be seen. So don't stop sharing the gospel. The sin-shattering power of the gospel of Jesus may today seem unappealing to most of the world, but one day its truth will be vindicated. So don't be afraid of those who can't yet see it. Do not allow yourself to be silenced for fear of those who are blind. Proclaim the gospel boldly for one day all eyes will be opened and then the truth will be fully known.

3) Fear God, Not Men

The third argument for continuing to boldly share the gospel in the face of persecution is because God ought to be feared rather than man. Boldly share the gospel because of the fear of God, not man.

(Matthew 10:28 ESV)

²⁸ "And 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."

Jesus is warning his disciples against the mistake of placing greater importance upon what is temporal rather than upon what is eternal. If his disciples think only about the temporal and the physical, then they will fail to rightly consider the eternal and the spiritual. If we only prefer what is more beneficial for this life here and now, then we may choose to be silent where the gospel is concerned. When people threaten to kill us because we share the gospel of Jesus, if all we're thinking about is the well-being of our bodies, then we will stop sharing the gospel, which is the means of securing the well-being of souls.

If our greatest fear is displeasing men, then we will stop sharing the gospel because there are men who have the power to kill our body if we do not obey them. However, if our greatest fear is displeasing God, then we will never stop sharing the gospel because he has the greater power to kill both body and soul if we do not obey him. Experiencing the eternal torments of the soul in hell is far worse than experiencing the momentary torments of the body at the point of death. God is to be feared more than man because man can only kill the body, while God can kill both body and soul in hell.

We live in very dangerous days. Almost no one believes in the hell described in the Bible anymore, i.e. a literal place of eternal, conscious punishment for the wicked. That hell does not exist is the underlying assumption that drives the entire agenda behind the world-wide push towards embracing assisted suicide and euthanasia. Almost the whole world assumes that death is better than a difficult life. According to Jesus, this assumption is incredibly wrong.

Why Teach Disciples the Fear of God?

Why does Jesus teach his disciples to fear God? What is he trying to achieve? Why does Jesus want his disciples to know that God and God alone has the authority to condemn a soul to hell? Does Jesus intend for his children to live in constant fear that God might send them to hell? Does Jesus want his disciples to live daily with the unsettling reality that their souls are in danger of being sent to hell? Is Jesus trying to motivate his disciples to be bold evangelists by guilt-tripping them into action with the threat of hell hanging over their heads? Is he saying something like, "If you fail to share the gospel, God might send you to hell?"

No. This is not what Jesus is doing. I know it's not because of the next verse.

4) God Loves and Cares for You

The fourth argument for why the followers of Jesus should boldly share the gospel in the face of persecution is because God loves and cares about his children, even the smallest details of your life. God highly values his children. Boldly share the gospel because God is a loving, attentive Father.

(Matthew 10:29-31 ESV)

²⁹ "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰ But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows."

Jesus is not teaching his disciples about the fear of God because he wants them to live in constant fear of eternal condemnation. These three verses prove this. Jesus wants his disciples to know that *the God who can condemn the soul to hell is the same God who has taken the time to count the number of hairs on their heads.* "The God who can destroy in hell

is also the God who cares for the sparrow."⁶ Jesus is saying, "Your heavenly Father loves you and cares for you. He cares for you in ways that you can't even imagine. He governs the smallest, unnoticed-by-you details of your life."

God's sovereign power and authority extends to the seemingly most insignificant events of life, like the death of tiny sparrows. Two sparrows are only worth—to men—one penny. A penny was worth one-sixteenth⁷ of a denarius, which was the equivalent of one day's wage of a common laborer. Jesus teaches us that God is concerned about the death of something that man values as worth only a penny. God values what we don't, how much more then does he value what we do value—human life.

Not a single bird dies apart from the governing attentiveness of God the Father. God knows and attends to every detail of our lives. He values what we consider to be worth nothing. He knows and is concerned about the smallest of events in our lives. He has numbered the very hairs on the heads of his children. He has taken time to give attention to detail that even we don't attend to. Who in this room knows how many hairs are on your head? God is more concerned about you and than even you are!

Jesus is not teaching his disciples about the fear of God—that he has the power to condemn souls to hell—because he is trying to motivate them to sharing the gospel out of guilt or by threat. No. God loves them and cares for them. He's not teaching them to fear God in order to cause them to share the gospel out of a motivation to keep their own souls secure. No, their souls are already secure because of their faith in Jesus.

He's teaching them about the fear of God in order to motivate them to boldly share the gospel out of love for those who are lost. If God loves his children so much that he has numbered the hairs on their heads, and if this God is the same God who has the power to condemn souls to hell, then how can we who have experienced his great love withhold the saving message from those who stand on the brink of God's condemnation? This is what Paul means when he writes,

(2 Corinthians 5:11 ESV)

¹¹ Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.

Why would you fail to share the good news of the gospel of Jesus so that those who are lost could escape God's condemnation and come to know the love of God the Father? How could we who know the gospel be silent when the sharing of that gospel of Jesus is the only means whereby those who are lost can be brought into a loving relationship with God? If God is

⁶ R.T. France, *Matthew*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary, ed. Leon Morris, Vol. 1 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 190.

⁷ D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 255.

concerned about the death of little sparrows, then do we dare think that he is indifferent to the death of the lost? No, he is not.

(Ezekiel 33:11 ESV)

¹¹ Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?

How then can we be silent? We must warn people that if they fail to obey the gospel, then God will condemn to hell?

(2 Thessalonians 1:8 ESV)

⁸ in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

God loves and cares for his children. He reigns sovereignly over all the details of the lives of his children. You, who are already his children, do not fear losing your relationship with your Father who loves you and counts the hairs upon your head. But do fear displeasing him by failing to share the soul-saving message of the gospel of Jesus Christ with those who are lost and without God on this lonely planet.

5) A Heavenly Reward Awaits You

Lastly, Jesus offers a final inducement to boldly proclaim the gospel. The fifth reason to boldly share the gospel of Jesus is because a heavenly reward awaits you. If you acknowledge Jesus before men on earth, then Jesus will acknowledge you before God in heaven.

(Matthew 10:32-33 ESV)

³² So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, ³³ but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven."

If, while we live on this planet, we are not ashamed of Jesus, then when we leave this planet and stand before God to be judged, Jesus will not be ashamed of us. If we stand up for Jesus in this life, then Jesus will stand up for us in the next.

However, if we are ashamed of Jesus in this life, then he will be ashamed of us when we stand before God. If we fail to claim his name in this life, then he will not claim us in the next. If we deny Jesus in life, then he will deny us in death.

I suspect there will nothing sweeter than seeing Jesus stand before all the hosts of heaven and before God the Father and hearing him say, "Father, he's with me. He was not ashamed of me

then, therefore I am not ashamed of him now. He acknowledged me before the world, I will acknowledge him before all of heaven.”

Similarly, I suspect there will be nothing more bitter than seeing Jesus stand before all the host of heaven and before God the Father and hearing him say, “Father, I don’t know him. He was ashamed of me before men, therefore I am ashamed of him now. He said he didn’t know me before men. I don’t know him. I have never known him. Depart from me you accursed lover of wickedness into the eternal fires of hell where you will join the devil and his angels.”

Which would you rather hear?

Followers of Jesus, speak the soul-saving, life-changing, sin-shattering gospel of Jesus boldly. Proclaim the saving grace of Jesus to all people. What you have studied in private, say in public. Don’t worry about having the right words. The Holy Spirit will help you in those moments when you have opportunity to speak.

Proclaim the gospel of Jesus boldly, because when you do, you’ll be living like your Master.

Proclaim the gospel of Jesus boldly, because one day its glorious truth will be revealed for all to see.

Proclaim the gospel of Jesus boldly, because men can only kill your body, but they cannot harm your soul.

Proclaim the gospel of Jesus boldly, because God loves you, cares for you, and governs the smallest details of your life and lost and lonely people need to know his love too.

Proclaim the gospel of Jesus boldly, because if you do, a heavenly reward awaits you—Jesus himself introducing you to God the Father and personally welcoming you into his kingdom.