

“Do Not Fear!”

Matthew 10:26-31

Matthew 10 is comprised of a series of instructions from Jesus to His disciples before He sent them out to preach on His behalf. A fair amount of this instruction has to do with how He wants His disciples to respond to the reception they get from the people to whom they are sent. He warns them that because of their association with Him they are going to encounter stiff opposition. Civic and religious leaders from the Jewish community and authorities in the highest echelons of government will use the legal system to inflict pain and punishment. But some of their fiercest opponents will come from their closest relatives who are so enraged by their association with Jesus that they will even seek to put them to death.

If you were given that warning, if you were told that you were going to be the object of hatred and hostility, if you were informed that you might be publicly humiliated, beaten, or even killed for Jesus' sake, how would you feel? It's possible, perhaps likely, that you would be afraid. You might feel a sense of dread, so much so that you would be tempted to rethink your commitment to Christ.

As you know, fear is a powerful emotion. The fear of pain, the fear of rejection, the fear of loss, and the fear of being bullied can do a number on our psyches. That fear can overwhelm us and even paralyze us, distracting us or preventing us from being what God has called us to be and doing what God wants us to do.

And so Jesus, knowing this human propensity to be afraid when we anticipate experiencing hatred and hostility, has some words of encouragement that can enable us to face it with courage and overcome our fears. He says in **verse 26**. ***26 “So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.***

“Them” are the people who hate Jesus and His disciples and are out to get them. And the reason they don't need to be afraid is because the sinister plots of these opponents will ultimately be exposed and Jesus and His disciples will ultimately be vindicated. He says, ***nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.***

Last week I told you that it seems strange that Jesus would encounter such stiff, widespread opposition. After all, His life and ministry were about doing *good*—healing the sick, the blind, the deaf, and the lame; curing diseases, casting out demons, forgiving sins, and raising the dead. Furthermore, His teaching astonished the crowds because He taught with authority (7:28-29). What's not to like about Jesus? How did He become the subject of cruel conspiracies and the object of hatred and hostility?

The answer? Secret meetings by religious leaders who were jealous of His popularity and threatened by the truth that came out of His mouth. Secret meetings in which they fabricated accusations and devised plots to destroy Him. Secret meetings in which they recruited false witnesses to construct a narrative that would convince the public that Jesus was a dangerous fraud.

But Jesus said that those sinister plots would eventually be exposed. God, who sees everything that is said and done in secret, will make sure that these secrets are publicized, that the conspiracies are exposed, and that truth will prevail.

Of course we know that this happened on the Day of Pentecost after Jesus had risen from the dead and ascended into heaven. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, boldly and publicly exposed the plots of the Jewish authorities that led to Jesus' crucifixion. And in numerous

other public proclamations made by Jesus' disciples throughout the book of Acts these secret plots were exposed, vindicating the Lord Jesus and enabling the truth to prevail.

But it's not just the twisted plots made in secret that Jesus says will be made known. He tells His disciples that what *He* says to them privately He wants them to boldly and publicly proclaim. Look at **verse 27**. ***27 What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops.***

Don't forget that the disciples spent nearly every waking hour with Jesus for three years. And although they accompanied him to public events and activities where he preached to crowds of people, most of what they learned from Jesus was taught privately. And Jesus tells them that the instruction they received in these private sessions was going to serve as the basis for their public proclamation.

These are the things Jesus told them in the dark, and things that He whispered to them. Some of Jesus' most extensive and important instruction came in a dimly lit room, in what we call the Last Supper. Some of it came later that evening on a remote, dark hillside called the Mount of Olives. In these private moments with His disciples, when treachery was lurking just around the corner, Jesus likely spoke in hushed tones. But He never intended that instruction to remain private. He expected His disciples to boldly and publicly proclaim these teachings.

Housetops in ancient Palestine were the living rooms in those days, where families would lounge and enjoy the evening breezes. But housetops also made a fine platform for anyone who wanted to bring his message before a large number of people. Jesus is using "housetops" as a metaphor to tell His disciples that His words are to be given maximum publicity.

And, notice, they are *His* words. He's not asking the disciples to preach messages that originate from their own thoughts and reflections. He's telling them to proclaim *His* message, the very things they heard Him speak in their private times together.

Of course, Matthew himself was doing this when he wrote this Gospel under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He was publicizing, in written form, the very words that Jesus spoke to them in private. Peter and John and Philip and the other Apostles did this when as they were scattered throughout the world and preached the gospel. So did others who came to Christ after Jesus' death and resurrection and were sent out by Jesus—like the Apostle Paul, and Luke, and Timothy.

This was God's means of ensuring that *truth* would prevail—truth that has its source in Jesus. And because truth will prevail, truth-tellers, even though they will experience intense opposition, will be vindicated by God one day. For that reason, they need not be afraid. Look at what Jesus says in **verse 28**. ***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' distinction between "body" and "soul" points to a fundamental dualism in human beings. "Body" has reference to the material (or physical) part of a person which is mortal and temporary. "Soul" refers to the immaterial (or spiritual) part of a person that is immortal and eternal. In this life body and soul are so closely united that they seem indistinguishable, inseparable. But Scripture teaches that the two are separated at death (Luke 23:43; 2 Cor. 5:1–10; Phil. 1:23–24), where the body remains on earth and will succumb to decay, but where the spirit of a believer goes directly into the presence of the Lord.

But the point of verse 28 is that the death of one's physical body is not nearly as consequential as the prospect of eternal punishment. That is not to say that physical death is no big deal. Every human body is uniquely and masterfully designed by God and the body of a believer in Jesus is the temple of the Holy Spirit. That makes it sacred, and it makes murder a horrible offense.

But the earthly bodies we have right now are not meant to last forever. Our souls do. And therefore the soul is far more substantial than the body. So Jesus says, do not fear the one that can kill the body. Fear the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. That One is the Lord God.

I saw video footage last Wednesday of pandemonium in Times Square, the result of a loud bang that people on the crowded streets mistook for gunfire. After what had happened a few days before in El Paso and Dayton it was a perfectly natural reaction. People thought there was another mass shooting, and they panicked.

As terrifying as it would be to encounter a gunman, or ferocious lions, or a mob, that is not nearly as terrifying or traumatizing as it is to encounter the One who will judge every human being. Because He has the power and the authority to inflict eternal punishment. And that is what is meant by the reference to hell. Jesus is not talking about a person being annihilated by God so they cease to exist; He's talking about conscious, eternal torment in a place of outer darkness, where the worm never dies and the fire is never extinguished.

That is a destiny to be feared. So also the One who has the power and authority to send a person to that place is to be feared. And Jesus, here, seems to be suggesting that this is the destiny of those who are hostile to His Son and try to extinguish His light. He is comparing the temporary loss (physical death) of those who represent Him on earth at the hands of those who oppose Him, to the eternal loss (spiritual death) of those who oppose Him at the hands of the Sovereign Lord. That spiritual death is eternal suffering, and that makes hell and the One who has the power to throw someone in hell utterly terrifying. As the writer of Hebrews reminds us, "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (10:31).

But Jesus goes on to say that this One who is to be feared above all is also One who cares deeply for His precious children. Look at **verses 29-31**. ***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" (ESV).***

After making a statement about God's fearsomeness, Jesus is quick to reassure His disciples of God's fatherly love, and He does so by contrasting their *great* worth with the comparatively insignificant value of sparrows, a cheap marketplace item sold for practically nothing (Blomberg, PAC). Jesus says that God notices even when a relatively worthless sparrow falls to the ground, and, by implication, He cares about it. After all, He created sparrows with all their intricacies.

So, too, God knows the very number of the hairs on our heads! Which is to say that if He is aware of such insignificant details, "how much more" will He not care for His own people and vindicate them? In other words, God not only knows and sees everything that happens to us, He cares. So we can be assured that He will come to our rescue and vindicate us from the suffering we have endured for His sake. And that is yet another reason we don't

have to be afraid. We are under the watchful eye of our heavenly Father and are in His loving hands.

So what does it look like to be fearless when facing stiff opposition and pain and suffering? What does it look like to not be overwhelmed or paralyzed by fear in traumatic circumstances?

If you read the book of Acts you can find dozens of examples of fearlessness and courage in the lives of Christ followers who spoke for Jesus and represented Him in the world, and yet who were the objects of hatred and hostility. I want to look at one of these examples, the Apostle Paul, because he actually explains *why* he was not afraid.

In Acts 20 the Apostle Paul is traveling by boat to Jerusalem. At a short stopover in the port of Miletus he called for the elders of the Ephesian church so he could visit with them one last time. In this farewell address Paul summarizes what his life and ministry were all about. And there is one portion of this address on which I want to focus, because he describes how he anticipates and prepares for the hardships that lie before him.

He says in **verse 22**. *“And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there.”*

By the way, this was true for Paul in every city he visited, not just Jerusalem. When he went somewhere he had no idea what was going to happen to him. He didn't know what kind of reception he would get, who he would meet, where he would stay, or how he would make ends meet.

When Paul went somewhere, almost anywhere, he just showed up...and trusted God to open doors of opportunity; to introduce him to the people He wanted him to meet; to lead him to the places He wanted him to go; to orchestrate circumstances and events to accomplish His purposes through him; and to make provision for all his needs. That's called living by faith. *Faith is willingly following the Spirit's lead, even when you don't know the outcome.* Even when you know the outcome is going to be unpleasant and undesirable.

Because look at **verse 23**: ²³ *“I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.”*

Imagine Paul getting his marching orders from the Holy Spirit. The Spirit says, “Pack your things Paul, because I want you to go to such and such a city.”

Paul says, “Sure, whatever you say, Sovereign Lord. Is there anything I need to know in order to be prepared for this next assignment?”

And the Spirit says, “It's going to be more of the same; there's going to be a lot of opposition, you're going to get into a fair amount of trouble, and, consequently, you're going to be spending more time in jail.”

“Oh, okay”, says Paul. “I'll go get ready.”

Seriously, how would *you* feel if *all* you knew is that prison and hardships were facing you? Would you be afraid? But Paul wasn't afraid, and he tells us why in **verse 24**. ²⁴ *“However, I consider my life worth nothing to me...”*

I want to stop there for a moment, because that statement reveals a great deal about Paul's view of his life, and it was a major reason why he was not afraid. When Paul says, *“I consider my life worth nothing to me...”* he was *not* confessing to having a poor self-esteem, nor was he saying that he had a death wish. He was simply reminding his friends that his life was not his own—he belonged to Jesus and his life was in His hands. He was reminding them that the reason for his existence on this earth was not to be comfortable; it was not to

be happy; it was not to promote his own interests or satisfy his personal desires.

His singular ambition was to serve his Master, Jesus—to obey Him and to fulfill the assignment He had given him. Nothing else mattered. And if bad things happened to him along the way, so be it. His life was in God’s hands, and for him to live was Christ, and to die was gain (Phil. 1:21).

If you really believe that, there is no reason to be afraid. Because even the worst case scenario—death—is actually a win. You get to go and be with Christ, which is better by far.

But there was something else about Paul’s mindset that is revealed in verse 24 which enabled him to face his future without fear. Look at **verse 24b**. *If only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.*

Paul had been given an assignment by the Lord Jesus Himself, and he was determined to complete that assignment with diligence and excellence because he wanted to please his Lord. That was the bottom line. He wanted to please Jesus. And so even though Paul is getting older, his body is getting weaker, his pace is getting slower, he had no intention of retiring from ministry. On the contrary. He was just as determined as ever to fulfill the call upon his life. In fact, I think it’s possible to conclude from Paul’s statement here that he has a greater sense of urgency than ever about pressing on. I get that from his comparison of his ministry to a race. *“If only I may finish the race...”*

Let me ask you something. If you are trying to win a race what is the most important part in that race? Is it at the beginning of the race? The middle? No. It is at the *end* of the race, when you are nearing the finish line. Races are won and lost at the finish line.

On a flight from Amsterdam to Nairobi I sat next to Kenyan man who had just completed the Amsterdam Marathon. It was his first international competition, and his first time to travel out of his country. I asked him how he did in the race. He said that for the first 20 miles (32 km) he had a comfortable lead, and he thought he was going to win the race. But then it started to snow (he had never seen or experienced snow before) and his body started cramping and he ended up finishing fourth.

The problem with fourth place is that you don’t receive a medal or a prize. You do not receive recognition, even from your own country. And it is not enough to say, “I was leading for *most* of the race.” What really matters is how you finish the race.

Paul suggests that the same is true for ministry. At this time he was on his way to Jerusalem, knowing that prison and hardships awaited him. Some of his closest friends and ministry partners begged him not to go. But Paul said, “I must. I’m nearing the finish line of my race, and I have to finish strong. Nothing is going to deter me from completing my assignment from the Lord.”

And that mindset, that perspective, that fixation on completing the assignment Jesus had given him so that he could hear those words, “Well done, my good and faithful servant,” was another factor that kept fear at bay.

I believe the same can be true of us as well. Knowing and believing that our lives are not our own, we have been bought with a price, the precious blood of Jesus, and therefore we belong to Him. Our lives are in His hands. He is in charge, and He won’t let anything happen to us that we cannot handle and that we cannot endure. And even if we walk through the valley of the shadow of death we don’t have to fear, because He is with us.

Truth will ultimately prevail, and truth-tellers will ultimately be vindicated. Jesus will

make sure of that!

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Main Idea: *There is no need to fear men, for God is on our side and will ultimately vindicate those who are bullied for His sake.*

Do not fear men (26-31)

Truth will ultimately prevail (26b-27)

Boldly and publicly proclaim the truth (27)

Man’s judgment results in temporary suffering (28a)

God’s judgment results in eternal suffering (28b)

God will ultimately vindicate His people (29-31)

He values “worthless” sparrows

He knows everything about us

We are of great worth to God

Application—the Apostle Paul (Acts 20:22-24)

The certainty of prison and hardships

Considering his life worth nothing

Staying focused on the task