



# Whom Shall I Fear?

A Call for Courageous Kingdom Speaking

**Scripture:** Matthew 10:26-33

**Sermon Series:** *Matthew*

**Topic:** Fear, Testimony

**Matthew 10:26-33 (ESV)**

**Reader:** Legny Ramirez

<sup>26</sup> "So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. <sup>27</sup> What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. <sup>28</sup> 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. <sup>29</sup> Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. <sup>30</sup> But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. <sup>31</sup> Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. <sup>32</sup> So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, <sup>33</sup> but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

## Introduction

**Fear** is the most prominent word in this paragraph. It is the fourth word of the first sentence and Jesus uses it four<sup>1</sup> times.

Is fear always a negative emotion? Is there anything good about fear? Can fear be used a motivation to do what is right? Should fear have any place in the life of the Christian?

Jesus spoke to his **followers** the words Legny just read to us, specifically they were spoken to the twelve disciples.<sup>2</sup> He is giving them instructions on how they are to conduct themselves while on the mission he is about to send them out on. He's sending them into surrounding region to **preach** that "*the kingdom of heaven has come near*" (10:7) and to prove its presence by **practicing** the power of the heavenly kingdom by "*healing the sick, raising the dead,*

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 10:26, 28, and 31.

<sup>2</sup> See 10:24-25; see also the beginning of this discourse 10:5.

*cleansing lepers, and casting out demons*" (10:8). Thus, Jesus is speaking to those who know him and are following him.

Jesus mentions the subject of fear because he has just told them (in vs. 16-25) that the mission on which he was sending them would bring them certain persecution. They would have to suffer as they proclaimed the message and practiced the power of the heavenly kingdom. Jesus does not want to them to fail in this mission, thus he prepares them and he encourages them.

Our goal this morning is to examine what Jesus said to the Twelve and then we will consider what his words say to us today.

### Do Not Fear Them

The paragraph before us this morning begins (v.26) with Jesus saying, "***So have no fear of them,...***" The "*them*" refers back to the previous paragraph where Jesus had just warned his disciples that they would be called devils because he had been called a devil.<sup>3</sup> Jesus told them that he was sending them out "***as sheep in the midst of wolves***" (10:16). He clearly told them that they would be arrested, indicted, beaten, flogged, and hated because of their connection to him. The 'them' refers to those who would persecute the disciples and do these cruel, wrong, and unjust things to them.

Now, in the paragraph before us this morning, Jesus is fortifying his disciples with truth that will sustain them in their mission. Jesus is arming them with truth so that they will keep speaking about the kingdom of God through such intense times of persecution.

### Five Reasons to Endure Kingdom Persecution

Jesus gives five reasons to keep preaching the message of the kingdom and practicing the power of the kingdom. Jesus is saying to the his followers, Do not let persecution keep from preaching and practicing because...

- 1) ...the sins of your persecutors will be exposed and punished (v.26),
- 2) ...the message of the kingdom is worthy of being proclaimed (27),
- 3) ...you ought to fear offending God more than men (v.28),
- 4) ...God cares for and watches over his messengers (v.29-31), and
- 5) ...if you speak up for me now, I will speak up for you later (v.32-33).

## 1) The Sins of Persecutors Will Be Exposed & Punished (v.26)

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<sup>3</sup> See Matthew 9:34.

The first reason to keep speaking during seasons of persecution for the sake of Christ is that one day *the sins of the persecutors will be exposed and punished*.

**Matthew 10:26** (ESV) "So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known."

Jesus knows that during times of persecution his disciples will think to themselves just as did Job<sup>4</sup> and the psalmists<sup>5</sup> when they were enduring persecution. They in effect said, Why do the wicked get away with this kind of behavior? Why are the wicked allowed to cause harm to those who are being obedient to God? God, do something to stop this injustice! Do something to prevent my pain. I'm obeying you and yet I'm suffering for this. Do you not see what they are doing to me?

Jesus answers, yes, God does see and their sinful mistreatment of you. Their sin will one day be revealed. All of their sinful and unjust treatment will be exposed. Their cruel attack against what is good and true will be brought out into the light of the final judgement. Those who hated the good news of gospel and caused to suffer those who shared the good gospel will one day find themselves standing before the righteous Judge of all the earth and he will pass judgment on them.

**Summary:** Do not fear, therefore, to keep preaching the kingdom message and practicing the kingdom power for one day your endurance will be rewarded (v.10:22) and their sinful persecution of you will be punished. Keep the final judgment in mind and therefore, do not fear them but rather keep preaching and practicing righteousness.

## 2) The Kingdom Message is Worthy of Being Proclaimed (v.27)

The second reason to keep speaking during seasons of persecution for the sake of Christ is because *the kingdom message is worthy of being proclaimed*. The gospel must be preached if the lost (including your persecutors) are to be saved.

**Matthew 10:27** (ESV) "What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops."

Jesus is telling his disciples that the gospel of the kingdom must be proclaimed to people. The great gospel story must be told. All that Jesus has taught them about the gospel as they all sat in the dark around a campfire, must be said out in the light of day. What they have heard of the gospel, softly spoken to them by Jesus in the privacy of their inner rooms, they must now take to be shouted from the housetops.

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<sup>4</sup> See Job 21:7-20.

<sup>5</sup> See Psalm 17:8-14; 73:3-12.

We heard the content of the gospel very clearly from Ben in the sermon last week. God is rich in mercy and kindness, though not a single one of us is worthy of his grace because of our treacherous sin, nevertheless, even while we persisted in our sinful rebellion, Jesus, at great personal cost,

...himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.<sup>6</sup> (1 Peter 2:24)

Through Jesus, your sins can be forgiven. Through Jesus, your uncleanness can be washed away. Through Jesus, slavery to sin is abolished. Through Jesus, your temporary pleasures of sin can be transcended by the permanent pleasures of holiness. Through Jesus, the exile of sin is ended and sweet communion with God the Father begins. Through Jesus, death is defeated and eternal life reigns.

**Summary:** This truth needs to be proclaimed in public and shouted from the rooftops. This is the gospel message that is worthy of being proclaimed and must not be silenced by persecution. If no one proclaims this message, then no one will believe<sup>7</sup> in and Jesus, thus this message must be shouted from the housetops and spoken in the light.

### 3) You Ought to Fear God More Than Men (v.28)

The third reason to keep speaking about the kingdom and spreading the power of the kingdom is because *you ought to fear God far more than you fear men*.

**Matthew 10:28** (ESV) "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 saying to his disciples, Don't fear men, because all they can do is kill your body. The authority and power of men is limited. All they can do is end your life on earth. But that is merely the end of the body. The soul endures when the body fails. Don't fail to consider your soul. Therefore, do not fear men.

Rather, *do* fear Him who has the power and authority to decide the destiny of the soul. Do fear him. Who is that? Who has the authority to send a soul to hell? It is he who is mentioned in the very next sentence (v.29). It is **God the Father who is to be feared** (see Ps 76:6-7, 11-12). God is the only one responsible for deciding the destiny of every human soul. God is the Judge of the soul and he has the authority to send a soul to heaven or into hell.

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<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 53:4; 1 Peter 3:18; Hebrews 9:28; 2 Corinthians 5:21.

<sup>7</sup> Romans 10:13-14.

Do not think that Jesus is talking about Satan. Satan does not have that kind of authority. Satan can do nothing without the permission of God the Father (Job 1-2). The devil himself is destined to be cast into hell.<sup>8</sup> Who makes that decision? Certainly not Satan, but rather one who is infinitely more authoritative and more powerful than Satan.

**Summary:** Do not fear men, do not fear the devil, but do fear God who alone determines the destiny of the soul. Jesus is telling his disciples to make it their aim to please God far above wanting to please men. When men want you to be silent about the gospel of the kingdom, remember that God would have you shout it from the housetops. So do not be silent out of fear of offending men, but rather continue to speak out of the greater fear of offending God.

### Does "Destroying the Soul" Teach Annihilationism?

There are some evangelical scholars, such as John Stott, who would argue that this verse points to a time when the soul will cease to exist. Jesus says that God "*can destroy both soul and body in hell*" (v.28). This teaching is known as annihilationism<sup>9</sup> (or Conditional Immortality<sup>10</sup>). The central tenet of this teaching is that hell is not a place of eternal conscious punishment for the wicked, but rather at some point in the future those in hell will simply cease to exist and their punishment will end. Stott had a stellar theological career, but in his later years abandoned historic Christian orthodoxy on this issue. While it is true, that Jesus says that God *can* destroy that soul (that is cause it to cease to exist), the fact is that that Bible no where teaches that he actually does this. Rather *the Bible consistently teaches us that just as communion with God in heaven lasts forever for the righteous, so condemnation apart from God in hell lasts forever for the wicked*. This truth is affirmed in the Old Testament and in New Testament.

Daniel 12:2 (ESV) ...those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Mark 9:47-48 (ESV) ...thrown into hell, where their worm does not die and the fire is *never* quenched.

Jesus describes himself as a king, sitting on his throne of judgment, who says to the wicked,

Matthew 25:41 (ESV) "Depart from me, you cursed, into the *eternal* fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:10.

<sup>9</sup> For a good overview of issue, see Robert A. Peterson, "Undying Worm, Unquenchable Fire," in the October 23, 2000 edition of *Christianity Today*, also available here: <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/october23/undying-worm-unquenchable-fire.html>.

<sup>10</sup> See <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/review/the-fire-that-consumes-the-biblical-case-for-conditional-immortality/> accessed 19 January 2024.

Then, speaking about the respect destinies of the wicked and the righteous, he explains,

**Matthew 25:46** (ESV) "And these will go away into *eternal* punishment, but the righteous into *eternal* life."

The apostle Paul affirms the same truth. When Paul explains what happens at the return of Jesus and the judgment of the wicked, he writes,

**2 Thessalonians 1:9** (ESV) They will suffer the punishment of *eternal* destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might,

In using the phrase 'eternal destruction,' Paul helps us understand that hell is place of eternal ruin, not a place of temporary ruin. The word 'destruction' does not refer to the cessation of the existence of the soul, but rather describes the cursed condition of the soul that continues to exist under the unending wrath of God.

The eternal nature of hell is also affirmed in the final book of the Bible. The voice of a mighty angel is heard proclaiming hell,

**Revelation 14:11** (ESV) "And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night..."

**Revelation 20:10** (ESV) and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

If we are to remain faithful to the Bible and "the faith once and for all delivered to the saints"<sup>11</sup> through the apostles, then we must accept what we have received in Scripture and including the parts that are uncomfortable or that we don't like. Peter is correct when writes that there are in them "many things hard to understand,"<sup>12</sup> but our faith is in our Lord Jesus.

**Summary:** Jesus did not teach the doctrine of annihilationism, rather he taught that there are two never-ending destinies of the human soul; the wicked who reject him "go away into eternal punishment," while the righteous who receive him, "go away into eternal life." Both of those destinies are eternal, conscious destinies. The Statement of Faith of this church reflects this view.

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<sup>11</sup> Jude 1:3.

<sup>12</sup> 2 Peter 3:16.

The doctrine of hell is a terrible truth that Jesus mentions more than any other person in the Bible. This eternal truth serves as the background to why Jesus is telling his disciples that they must not allow persecution to prevent them from preaching about the kingdom of heaven. There is a way of escaping the very real place of hell and entering the very real place of heaven. God has provided a way of escape through the sinless life, the atoning death, and the victorious resurrection of Jesus. Faith in and following of Jesus is the way of escape.

**Summary:** The fear of offending man would keep the disciples from speaking about the goodness of heaven and horrors of hell, but fear of offending God would keep them proclaiming both, even in the face of persecution.

#### 4) God Cares for and Watches Over His Messengers (v.29-31)

The fourth reason to keep advancing the kingdom of heaven is because *God cares for and is watching over his messengers*.

**Matthew 10:29-31 (ESV)** <sup>29</sup> Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. <sup>30</sup> But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. <sup>31</sup> Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

When we are suffering we tend to think that God is absent and does not care. The question so often asked during suffering is, Where is God? The motivation behind such a question reveals the assumption that God is at fault. He does not care. He is far away and unconcerned, because if he were near then certainly He would stop the suffering. Jesus' point in this verse is that God cares for you in deeper ways than you can possibly imagine and he is watching over you at all times.

1. **God values birds, but he values humans infinitely more.** Humans value birds very little. *"Two sparrows are sold for a penny."* Birds are the creation of God, which he spoke into existence. And yet not a single bird loses its life apart from the will and attention of God. Not one bird dies without God's consent and knowledge. Every time I see a bird dead on the road while I'm running I remember this verse. God attends to every single bird that falls to the ground. And yet, humans are the very special creation of God. Birds are not *"made in the image of God,"* but humans are. Thus, humans are much more valuable to God than are birds. God specially formed mankind from the dust of the earth. He did not do that with birds. He simply spoke them into existence. Thus, God values humans infinitely more than he values birds.
2. **Since God watches over the life of birds, therefore he certainly will watch over your life.** Not one bird dies *"apart from your Father."* God is near and knows of the death of every bird. If God watches over the life of the less valuable, then certainly he will over the life of those that are more valuable. Do not fear, in times of persecution, God is near. How near?

3. **God is near and he cares.** He's near enough to count your every hair. God is closer than you think and he cares about you more than you think. If you were to count the hairs on my head, you'd have to be close to me. Jesus is here saying that God is so close to you that he keeps track of your hairs. And He also cares more about you than you care for yourself. You don't even care enough about you to count your hairs, but God does. He loves and attends to you more than you do to yourself. Don't think he far away and does not care. This is not true, even when it feels like he is far from you, the truth is that he is not.

**Summary:** Disciples, do not let persecution stop you from preaching the good gospel message of kingdom or practicing the power of the kingdom, God is near and he is watching over you.

## 5) Speak for Jesus Now, He Will Speak for You Later (v.32-33)

The fifth and final reason to keep preaching the kingdom message and practicing the power of the kingdom of heaven is because *if you speak up for Jesus now, he will speak up for you later*.

**Matthew 10:32-33 (ESV)** <sup>32</sup> So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, <sup>33</sup> but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

Jesus here gives a promise to his disciples. He is saying, Don't let persecution stop you from speaking about me and my kingdom, for if you speak for me now, I will speak for you later. If you testify of me on earth, I will testify of you in heaven. Speak for me and my kingdom before men today, I will speak for you before my Father and his angels tomorrow.

If you do not deny me during the trials of persecution, then I will not deny you during the trial of the Final Judgment. If you say you love me before you enemies, then on the last day I will say I love you before your enemies. However, if you do not speak for me now, then I will not speak for you later. If you do not proclaim my name and my kingdom before men, then I will not claim your name before my Father in his kingdom. If you are silent about me during the trials of persecution, then I will be silent about you during the trial of the Final Judgment.

### **Forgiveness When We Fail**

We've all failed at this at some. Don't let this paralyze you. Peter failed in this way too. Peter denied he knew Jesus on the night of his arrest. But Jesus forgave him and restored him.

When I was in the tenth grade, in Mr. Overturf's Spanish class, one day he was making fun of Christians, and I knew I should have in that moment confessed my faith in Jesus and endured his mockery, but I was silent. In my silence I sinned and I knew it. However, I asked Jesus to forgive me and he granted it.



After that day, I made sure the Jim Overturf knew that I was a Christian and not ashamed of Jesus. Over the next two years I took every Spanish class he taught. When I graduated, he said to me, "You know Cravens, you're no so bad." Coming from him, I took that as a compliment.

Señor Overturf, si me estás escuchando, le doy gracias a Dios que me hayas enseñado español.

With God there is forgiveness. If you have failed to acknowledge Jesus before men yesterday, then today ask for forgiveness, and he will give it. Then, think about the day when you stand before God the Father in heaven to give an account of your life. What do you want Jesus to say about you on that day. Do you want him to say, "I'm sorry Mr. Cravens, but in your life you never spoke for me, so today I will not speak for you." Or would you prefer to hear, "Well, if it isn't Todd Cravens. Throughout your life you told people that you knew me. So today, I will say, "Yes, Father, I know him and have prepared a place for him. Welcome home." The latter is what I want to hear.

## Conclusion

What is Jesus through this paragraph of Scripture saying to us today?

First, **are you his disciple?** Are you a follower of Jesus? Have you heard his voice calling you into a relationship with him? Jesus spoke these words to his disciples. Are you one? Do you bear the name of Jesus? Have you received his Holy Spirit? Have you welcomed him into your life? Have you confessed your sins, asked Jesus to forgive your sins, and surrendered to him the master bedroom of your heart? If not, then why not? Will today be the day you become a disciple, a follower of Jesus?

Second, just as Jesus sent the Twelve on a mission to proclaim the gospel and practice the power of the kingdom of heaven, so he has sent on the same mission all subsequent followers. Jesus has commanded us to "**make disciples of all nations**" (Mt 28:20). We who are his disciples are still today are on the same mission. We are to proclaim the same gospel and practice the same power of the kingdom of heaven.

Third, **opposition and persecution will surely come, but we cannot be silent.** Jesus has commanded us to speak, share the gospel, and spread the kingdom of heaven. We must not allow persecution to stop us. God will one day deal with those who wrongly persecute us. God will one day disclose the sin of all those who would cause to suffer or seek to silence the children of God. Entrust your enemies to God, and keep speaking the gospel of Jesus.

Fourth, the **message of the gospel is the only message that saves sinners, thus, it is worthy of being proclaimed today.** The gospel of Jesus crucified and resurrected needs to be

proclaimed from the rooftops, which today means that it needs to be proclaimed in places where people can hear; internet, Podcasts, Instagram, Facebook, in books, over lunch, during a coffee break, or whenever the Spirit of the Lord leads you, even if that means walking down the beach and saying, "Believe in Jesus," to person you're walking past.<sup>13</sup> The gospel of Jesus is the only message that can save the human soul.

Fifth, ***don't fear men, but rather do fear God***. Do not fear offending men, who can only cause death to your body, rather do fear God who can cause the death of body and soul in hell. Don't fear offending people with limited power, rather fear offending God who has infinite power. Seek to please God above all and you'll be fine, but if you seek to please men, then you will find yourself in a mess.

Sixth, ***don't think when you're suffering that God is not near and that he does not care***. He is there. He sees everything and he is sovereign over everything, from the day of your birth to the day of your death. He cares more deeply for you than you care even about your yourself. Believe this and don't let the lies of the devil keep you from speaking about Jesus, his relationship to God the Father, his kingdom, and his power. He loves you and he is watching over you. Your life is valuable to him and ways you cannot understand.

Seventh, ***do not be afraid of speaking up for Jesus***. If you are not ashamed of his name now, then he will not be ashamed of you later. If you confess his name today, then he will confess your name later when you stand before God. Do not deny his name. Affirm your love for him before those who persecute you and Jesus will affirm his love for you before his Father.

If you have failed, in any of these things, just consider for a moment the kindness of God. He forgives those who ask him. He is merciful to those who humbly go to him. He holds our life in his hand and he is gracious to us every day, even though we do not deserve one more day of innumerable graces. He is faithful to us even though we have been unfaithful to him. He is forgiving to us when we have been unforgiving to others. His goodness is overwhelming.

Why wouldn't we want to shout this truth from the housetops? Why wouldn't we want everyone around us to know God's goodness? How can we be silent about his love? Consider his goodness and worship him as we sing together. Sing these words to God in love and adoration.

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<sup>13</sup> Testimony of a girl as told by John Piper in the sermon "Why We Should Have Courage to Speak About Christ," from 18 June 2007 available at <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/why-we-should-have-courage-to-speak-about-christ> accessed 19 January 2024.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What is the main point of Jesus in speaking these words to his disciples?
2. Can you offer a quick summary of the gospel?
3. What about the gospel is most attractive to you?
4. Have you ever failed to speak up for Christ? If so, what kept you from it?
5. What does Jesus mean by teaching us that we ought to fear God?
6. What from this passage most strongly communicates God's care and concern for his people?
7. What in this paragraph provides you with the strongest motivation to speak up for Jesus?
8. Name one specific way that you can speak for Jesus this week.