

Don't be Afraid

Matthew 10:21-33

Pastor Jim Rademaker

If you will follow God's plan, you will be healthy, wealthy, and wise - your relationship with your spouse will improve - and your children will rise up and call you blessed. People like it when you tell them that God wants them to be rich and successful!

Jesus had a far different message for the faithful. What's it going to be like going out into the Lord's harvest field? How will people respond to the message about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection for them? *"Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name's sake."* The road of discipleship is anything but easy, for the real Jesus isn't very popular, and many in this world want to silence Him and anyone who dares speak in His name.

There's a command given in the Bible more often than any other. It's not "Do not kill". It's not "Love God" or "Love your neighbor"? The most common command in Scripture (*by N.T. Wright's count*) is, "Do not fear." Don't be afraid.

How often, we're afraid. Afraid of what's going to happen to us. Afraid of making a mistake. Afraid of taking a risk. Afraid of what someone's going to think of us or say about us. Afraid during a pandemic or a demonstration, or where the economy might go. Afraid of a possible diagnosis. Afraid of what's happening in our world. Afraid to talk to others about Jesus. Afraid others won't like us. Afraid of being persecuted. There's a lot of fear going on inside of us.

When [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. And then, He sends the twelve to proclaim the kingdom of God at hand. To repent and believe in Jesus. *"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves ..."* (Mt 10:16) Sounds like plenty reason to fear, doesn't it? What sheep wouldn't be scared to death in the midst of a pack of wolves!

Today's Gospel is a great comfort for His followers all over the world. To us, in our own world. Jesus tells us that the opposition of the world is no surprise to God. God is not up in heaven going, "O no! The world is persecuting My people. Whatever will I do?" No! God knows all about our situation. He understands that the world makes it hard to be a Christian. It can be a tough road to travel. As Paul writes to the Corinthians, "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles." (1 Cor 1:23) And so, don't be surprised when you face opposition for talking about Jesus. Instead, expect it. It's the norm.

The temptation is to what? To stay quiet. To compromise God's teachings in order to be liked by others. It's easy for us to talk about God's love and forget about His justice. It's easy to talk about Jesus as our buddy and forget about the day when He will come as judge. We're afraid to go into the Lord's harvest field because we're afraid of how people might react and what they might do to us.

In the face of such persecution, Jesus tells us what? "Do not fear." "Why not Jesus? Isn't there good reason to be afraid?" Why *shouldn't* I be afraid? We wish Jesus would say what? "Do not fear, because I will *spare you* from suffering." But that's not the case. Instead, He warns us that we *will* suffer. In fact, those who are most faithful to Him often suffer the most - just as it was for Jesus Himself.

Instead, Jesus tells us, *"Do not fear because everything done in secret will be made known to all."* In the end, the truth will come out. All the accusations against you because of your faithfulness to Christ will be shown to be false. The real Jesus will be shown to be true after all. Don't fear. Why? Because in the end, the truth will come out. The truth will set you free!

Secondly, don't fear. Why? Because the worst thing people can do to you is kill your body. They have no power over your soul. What does Jesus say? *"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."* Don't fear others, fear God! This world is not all that there is. There is a Judge who has the authority and power to send both soul and body to the eternal punishment of hell! As Proverbs 9:10 says, *"The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"*.

Because of our sin, you and I are sentenced to eternal punishment! But if you're a follower of Jesus, that is not your destiny. For you, God has prepared, from before the foundation of the world, an eternal dwelling place with Him! So, don't be afraid. Why? Because in the end, it will all turn out okay. More than okay. It will be glorious!

Don't fear, because in the end, the truth will come out. Don't fear, because you know the end. And finally, don't fear because *you're more valuable than many sparrows*. Jesus says that two sparrows are worth only a penny. They're basically worthless, to us. But not to God. He takes note of every sparrow that dies. Even beyond that, at any given moment, God knows the number of hairs of your head. He knows you and every part of you intimately and perfectly. And He loves you! Even if you are persecuted, suffer, and die, God knows. So "Do not fear."

(Sam Wellumson)

"Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows." Jesus' words don't mean that evil will never happen to us. Instead, it means that when difficulties or persecution or even martyrdom comes, we are still under the Father's care. It means that He is with us even through death. The Father will never overlook us. He will never abandon us. One day we will leave this world of persecution and we will be forever with Him!

And so, Jesus warns His followers to remain faithful. Even so, what do the twelve do? They all abandon Jesus. At one point, Peter even denies that He knew Him. Yet, in spite of their weak confession, Jesus does what? He takes them all back. And in spite of their failures, Jesus blesses their ministry and the Word of God spreads out over the known world!

The history of the early church tells us of the faithful Apostles. Of the eleven who remained faithful to Jesus, only John the Evangelist dies of natural causes. The others all died as martyrs to their faith in Jesus Christ. They persevered to the end. (James Batchelor)

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

In many ways today, our world is a scary place. That's a lot we can be afraid of. As followers of Jesus, sent into His harvest field, sent to save bodies and souls from an eternity in hell and bring them to eternal life, in the face of this world which often wants nothing to do with Jesus or His followers, it's easy to be afraid.

Jesus' message to you today, *"Don't fear"*. Why not? Because in the end, the truth will come out. The truth of the Gospel will stand the test of time. Don't fear, because you know where you're going. You know where this all ends - with the Lord in glory! Don't fear, because you're more valuable to God than many sparrows!

... and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. Faithful to the end. How will that happen? The following hymn helps point us in the right direction.

*I look not back; God knows the fruitless efforts, the wasted hours, the sinning, the regrets.
I leave them all with Him who blots the record, and graciously forgives, and then forgets.*

*I look not forward; God sees all the future, the road that, short or long, will lead me home.
And He will face with me its every trial, and bear for me the burdens that may come.*

*I look not round me; then would fears assail me, so wild the tumult of earth's restless seas,
so dark the world, so filled with woe and evil, so vain the hope of comfort and of ease.*

*I look not inward; that would make me wretched; for I have naught on which to stay my trust.
Nothing I see save failures and shortcomings, and weak endeavors, crumbling into dust.*

*But I look up - into the face of Jesus, for there my heart can rest, my fears are stilled;
and there is joy, and love, and light for darkness, and perfect peace, and every hope fulfilled!*