

Matthew 10:28-31

Introduction

As Jesus prepares His disciples to be His witnesses in the world, He warns them especially of coming persecution.

“Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings... 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... if they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.”

Jesus doesn't try to hide anything from us does He? He lays it all out on the line. And all of this ill-treatment, Jesus says, will be for His name's sake (18, 22). If they treated Jesus badly, how much more will they treat His followers in the same way? *Why* does Jesus tell us all of these things? Jesus tells us these things because He wants to fortify our hearts in the truth. Jesus wants us to be able to deal with the harsh realities of the world's hatred in a way that is consistent with the realities and truths of *God's Word*. And so He tells us:

“Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves... do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you... the one who endures to the end will be saved... you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes... it is *enough* for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master.”

As we have seen, there is a whole lot of encouragement in these words. When we take hold of these words by faith, they bring comfort and strength. But still the fact remains that *fear* is one of our most powerful enemies. Fear paralyzes us. Fear robs us of joy and of hope. Fear extinguishes the light of our witness. Fear renders us powerless and useless. Fear has caused many people (including even Simon Peter) to deny Jesus before men. Fear grips, and overwhelms, and eventually it takes control of our actions, our words, and our thoughts. The fear of man is a terrible thing. Fear is one of the Christian's most powerful enemies. And so Jesus now moves in to attack and destroy the *roots* of our fear.

In verses 26-31 Jesus says three times, “have no fear of them... do not fear... fear not.” Clearly, Jesus knows that fear will be a big deal for us! “So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops.” The Gospel will overcome all resistance and conquer the world. Despite all appearances to the contrary, in the providence of God the Gospel is always advancing, never retreating. It *will* be heard, and known, and believed among all the nations. So then, let us not cower in dark corners, but rather speak in the light and proclaim on the housetops. But still, the fear of man is powerful – and especially the fear of what he can do to us. He can inflict upon us miseries of all kinds, and even death itself. And this fear

has paralyzed many a Christian. It can overwhelm and consume and control us. It can cause us to be paranoid about the future. So now Jesus goes on to say:

I. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.

I think if we're honest, many of us may fail to see the true comfort in these words – or at least to *feel* the comfort in these words. And to the extent that this is true in us, then we are lacking in faith. Let's acknowledge that we need God to help us understand and grasp what Jesus is saying *by faith*.

First of all, Jesus' point here is not that the body is unimportant – a disposable shell that matters but little. Jesus is not saying, "Who cares about the body, the only thing that matters is the soul." Paul says that we long not to be unclothed (as a disembodied spirit), but to be clothed – "to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked" (2 Cor. 5:2-4). The destiny of our souls is to be everlastingly united with our [resurrection] bodies. Therefore, I believe Jesus is simply saying this: "Do not fear those who kill the body but have no power over *you* in the life and age to come." ***Death is not the end.*** We, of all people, ought to know this. But yet so often, we live and think and feel and act as though there is a finality to death which it simply does not have. In fact, there will not even be a millisecond of time upon my own death when I am not fully conscious of the fact that I am Timothy and that I am one of God's children. There will be no "soul sleep" and no limbo. I will never, ever, not even for one moment stop thinking and feeling and knowing and existing as the person that people call *Timothy*! Paul writes:

- ✓ 2 Corinthians 5:6-9 – We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord... we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.

It is not someone else who exists after death. It is not a different kind of person. It's still *me*, same as always. Right now I am at home in the body and away from the Lord. One day *I* will be at home with the Lord and away from the body. But regardless of where I am, I will still have the same goal and aim – to live pleasing to the Lord. And death will not interrupt this goal and aim even for a single moment. "Whether we are at home *or away*," Paul says, "*we* make it our aim to please him." When it comes to who I am, death changes nothing – I will always be me.

Therefore, "Do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul." Luke puts it this way:

- ✓ Luke 12:4 – I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do.

Did you notice the words "*after that*"? After they kill the body, Jesus says, they have nothing more that they can do – to *you*. In other words, *after* they've killed the body, you'll still be there. You'll still be knowing and thinking and feeling and living as the same person that you always were. And yet those who were persecuting *you* a millisecond ago, will now be utterly powerless to harm you any further. We must stop giving to death the kind of finality that death does not have. God has created us with immortal souls. And after death, we will be no different in our souls than we were before death. In other words, we will not think, and feel, and know as anyone

different than we have always been since the day of our conception and birth. In light of these things, listen to what Jesus said to the thief on the cross:

- ✓ Luke 23:43 – Truly, I say to you, today **you** will be with me in Paradise.

Who will be with Jesus in Paradise on that very day? The very man who was then hanging on the cross – one and the same.

- ✓ 2 Peter 1:13-15 – I think it right, as long as *I* am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of *my* body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after *my* departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.
- ✓ 2 Timothy 4:6 – For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.
- ✓ Philippians 1:21-24 – For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

These are the kinds of things that we may believe *until* it comes to the *thought* of persecution and martyrdom. And then the *fear* in our hearts reveals that our faith is not what we thought it was. Okay, so I'm not supposed to fear men because they have power "only" to kill the body, but cannot kill the soul. But right now I'm in the body, and so I'm vulnerable to persecution and to the hatred of men. **And yet Jesus says that *even now* we are not to fear them.** It sounds good, doesn't it? No being afraid. No being held in the clutches of fear. *Freedom* from fear! Freedom to testify boldly for Christ in word and deed without fear of the hatred and persecution that Jesus says we'll receive for His name's sake. It sounds so good, but it still seems impossible to attain – so out of our reach. And it *will* remain out of our reach, unless we can come to believe and obey what Jesus says next. "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul..."

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

The key to not fearing men is in *fearing* God. It may sound crazy, but the *only* escape available to us from the fear of men is in the fear of God. Notice first of all that Jesus tells us to fear him who can destroy both soul *and* body in hell. But wasn't the body already destroyed at death? Well, it died, but it was not permanently destroyed. One day even the bodies of those who have been lost at sea will be resurrected (Rev. 20:13) – even the bodies of unbelievers (Rev. 20:4-6).

- ✓ Daniel 12:2 – And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake [be resurrected], some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.
- ✓ John 5:28-29 – Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

Hell will be a place of both spiritual *and* physical torment – torment of both soul *and* body. So once again, we see that Jesus' point here is not that the body is unimportant, or that the only

thing that matters is the soul. For it is both the soul and the body of the unbelieving that God will destroy in hell. The point is that after man has killed the body, he has nothing more that he can do. God, on the other hand, has power and authority to cast a man (body and soul) into hell. This is why the writer of Hebrews says:

✓ Hebrews 10:31 – It is a *fearful* thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

The physical death of the body is not that big of a deal and should not be feared – except as that which leads to a worse and more terrible fate! Chrysostom wrote around the end of the fourth century: “[Jesus] does not hold out to [His disciples the hope of] deliverance *from* death, but encourages them to *despise* [death]” (quoted in Bruner). John Calvin says that Jesus’ words are intended to provoke and arouse his disciples to “despise death.” To despise death is to dismiss it as something of very little importance and not at all even worthy of our concern – much less our fear. Rather, it is the destruction of the body and soul in hell that is the big deal and should always be feared as the worst and greatest danger of all. There is no greater peril in this life or the next. So long as we have not learned to despise death at the hands of men as a light and trivial thing, we can know that we have not learned the true fear of *God*. When we are paralyzed or overwhelmed by the fear of men so that our testimony is compromised or we are unwilling to publicly confess the name of Christ, it shows very clearly that we do not truly *fear God*.

But now we have to ask: Is Jesus just calling us to exchange one terror for another, even greater terror! Instead of being paralyzed by one fear, are we to be paralyzed by another, even greater fear? No! Not at all!

✓ Proverbs 9:10 – The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

This fear, by the way, is not simply respect and reverence without a good dose of real trembling. To “tame” the Scriptures in this way is to rob ourselves of freedom from the fear of men. No one truly fears God who does not *tremble* at the mere thought of His power and authority to *destroy* both body and soul in hell.

✓ Psalm 119:118-120 – You spurn all who go astray from your statutes, for their cunning is in vain. All the wicked of the earth you discard like dross, therefore I love your testimonies. *My flesh trembles for fear of you, and I am afraid of your judgments.*

This was written by one who understood the gospel of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone! How can this be?

✓ Isaiah 66:2 – But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and *trembles* at my word.

Clearly, this fear and trembling is not intended to lead us into terror and paranoia (which is what the fear of man produces), but rather into *trust* and *obedience*.

- ✓ Psalm 147:11 (cf. 33:18) – The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.

This *same* God who has power to destroy people (both body and soul) in hell, is also the God with whom there is forgiveness.

- ✓ Psalm 130:3-4 – If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.
- ✓ Revelation 14:6-7 – Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal *gospel* to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. And he said with a loud voice, “*Fear God* and give him glory, because the hour of his *judgment* has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.”

Conclusion

One commentator sums things up so very beautifully: “From the Baptist’s Fire Sermon in chap. 3 to Jesus’ Sermon on Mission here in chap. 10, the reality of a judgment in which chaff gets burned and in which hell is hot is put before the conscience of *disciples*. Only a serious fear of God and of what God is capable of doing... will carry a disciple through a world in which people are so imposing” (Bruner).

- ✓ Proverbs 29:25 – The fear of man [the one who can kill the body] lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD [the one who can destroy both body and soul in hell] is safe.

By the will of God, we are all immortal souls. After death, we will be no different in our souls than we were before death. We will think, and feel, and know as the same person that we have always been since the day of our conception and birth. Even after death, I’ll be the same person I’ve always been. And the first thing that I will be conscious of after I have died is that I will be standing before the one who has power and authority to destroy me, both body and soul, in hell.

- ✓ Matthew 25:41, 46 – Then he will say to those on his left, “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels... And these will go away into eternal punishment.”

Compared to this, the physical death of the body at the hands of men is *nothing*.

It is something to be despised as both light and trivial and utterly inconsequential.

Calvin exhorts us: “Acknowledge that you have received immortal souls, which are subject to the disposal of God alone, and do not come into the power of men. The consequence will be, that no terrors or alarms which men may employ will shake your faith. For how comes it that the dread of men prevails in the struggle, but because the body is preferred to the soul, and immortality is less valued than a perishing life?” Remember, “Only a serious fear of God and of what God is capable of doing... will carry a disciple through a world in which people are so imposing”. And remember that those who fear God for His power to destroy a man (both body and soul) in hell are also the very ones who are *free* to trust and obey Him *no matter* what men may do.

Teaching our Children

Q. Jesus has been warning us that many people will persecute and hate us because we are Christians. How could this news cause us to feel and respond?

A. We could easily start to *fear* men and be *afraid* of how they might treat us.

Q. But what does Jesus tell us not to do?

A. Jesus tells us *not* to fear men!

Q. What does Jesus say is the worst thing than any person could ever do to us?

A. The worst thing that any person could ever do to us would be to kill our body.

Q. When our bodies have died, will we still be the same person that we have always been?

A. Yes! Even after our bodies have died, we will still be the same person we have always been.
(See Scriptures on page 2 and top of page 3)

Q. After our bodies have died, can any man hurt us? Can any man kill our soul?

A. No. After our bodies have died, there is nothing more that any man can do to us.

Q. What did Jesus say that God can do to a person *even after* he has died?

A. God can destroy that person (both body and soul) in hell.

(See Scriptures on bottom of page 3 and top of page 4)

Q. Compared to what God can do, is the death of our bodies really any big deal?

A. No! Compared to what God can do, the death of our bodies is nothing at all to worry about. It is a trivial and unimportant thing.

Q. Whom did Jesus say we should fear, God or man?

A. We should fear God!

Q. If we truly fear God (who can destroy both body and soul in hell), will we have any fear of man (who can only kill the body)?

A. No. When we truly fear God, we will be completely set free from the fear of men.

(See Proverbs 29:25 on page 5)

Q. What does it mean to fear God?

A. ~ To fear God means that we tremble before Him and are afraid of His judgments (See Psalm 119:118-120 on page 4).

~ This should not cause us to be terrified and run away from God. Instead, it should cause us to gladly *trust* in Him and seek by His grace to *obey* Him – no matter how men may treat us. (See Scriptures on bottom of page 4 and top of page 5)