

Introduction

R. C. Sproul has become one of the leading theologians and preachers in our day, certainly among those who value the reformed understanding of salvation and of God’s sovereignty that the Bible teaches. Sproul came to Christ during his college days. Shortly thereafter he returned home for the weekend. He went to the familiar spot where he and his high school buddies always hung out. Sproul had been their ring leader and he was now filled with excitement to tell his friends about his newfound savior and the overflowing joy of knowing Christ. He just knew they would all line up to follow Christ as well. But that was not their response. Instead, they rejected not only the gospel he shared with them but also Sproul himself. They did not want anything to do with him any more. It hurt him deeply. But Sproul did not compromise. To the end of his life he was steadfast in proclaiming the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ.

What happened to Sproul when he shared with his buddies should be no surprise for those who consider the forewarning Jesus issued to his disciples when he first sent them out into the harvest. Jesus told the Twelve that they were going out as sheep among wolves. They should beware. They would not only be rejected, but they would also be gravely mistreated by arrest, flogging, and even death. Indeed, they would be hated for the sake of his name. They would be persecuted and maligned. That is enough to make any normal person think twice about going out. Who wants to be persecuted? Who wants to be killed? Who wants to be dragged before governors and kings for what you preach? Who wants to be hated by all? For that matter who wants to simply not be liked?

Anyone who has ever told another person about Jesus has no doubt experienced the one universal hurdle to getting the first word out. Even Ray Comfort, who regularly stands on the streets all around the world preaching the gospel, admits that every time he goes out, he faces the temptation to fear man. There is the fear of persecution. There is the fear of rejection. As we continue our study in Matthew, we learn how Jesus addressed this temptation head-on.

[Read Text; Pray]

Fear has always been a factor that has to be faced by those who would choose to obey the Lord. Think of the children of Israel when the Lord brought them to the land of promise. Spies were sent into the land to scope it out. They came back with a distressing report: "The people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. . . . We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are. . . . The land through which we have gone to spy out is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people we saw in it are of great height . . . and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them." (Numbers 13:28-33)

The Twelve tribes of Israel were fearful of obeying the Lord and going into the land. They cried out that their children and wives would become prey. A man of faith named Caleb confronted the Israelite fears urging the people to go. Joshua joined him imploring them not to fear the people but to trust God. Yet they were obstinate. They thought it better to be back in Egypt and even sought to stone Joshua and Caleb. After 40 years of wandering, the Lord brought the Israelites back to the threshold, this time with Joshua as their leader. And the Lord instructed him: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

In our text Jesus has his disciples on the threshold of the harvest. And Jesus himself has spied out the landscape into which he is sending the Twelve. He has reported to his Twelve disciples that the people among whom they have been charged to go are stronger and more powerful than they. And those people will be filled with rage as the disciples come to take ground. But Jesus moves to preempt any resistance on the part of the twelve disciples. As the Lord spoke to Joshua, Jesus tells them to be strong and courageous. He says, "Have no fear of them." He then sets forth four assurances which form the basis for not fearing people. As we consider Jesus' exhortation here, we will see that the message of the text is the same for every Christ follower today. We have been called to go out and make disciples. We will be tempted to fear people, but we must rather fear

God. The four assurances Jesus gave the Twelve are assurances for us as well.

I. Assurance #1. Full Disclosure Is Coming.

Jesus instructed the disciples to have no fear of people because “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.” On the one hand Jesus promises full disclosure, and on the other hand he instructs it.

A. The promise of full disclosure is this: “Nothing is covered that will not be revealed or hidden that will not be known.” Jesus points out that the mask of self-righteousness worn by those who will oppose Christ’s followers will ultimately be removed. Jesus had warned that the wolves among whom he was sending his disciples as sheep would possess an air of righteous superiority as they persecuted them. They would drag them before the courts and use governments to enforce their silence. They would denounce them in their houses of worship. They would associate them with the devil. They would be certain they were doing God a favor by opposing Jesus’ disciples.

However, Jesus assures his sheep that all this pretense will ultimately be stripped away. The true nature of the enemies of the cause of Jesus will finally be exposed. They may hide it for now. For now they may be able to conceal their motives, to have the appearance of goodness, to maintain esteem in the world. But ultimately God will lay bare the truth. He will reveal that the root in their heart which manifested itself in hostility and resistance to the disciples of Jesus was a hatred of the light, a hatred of the truth, a hatred of righteousness, even a hatred for the true God and the true gospel.

Jesus says, “Have no fear of them.” Do not be manipulated by their hostility because the true nature of these haters will be brought to light. Rightly MacArthur declares, the disciples of Jesus “should not be concerned about what the world says now but about what God will say at the final day.” Paul informs us through his epistle to the Corinthians, “When the

Lord comes he will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and disclose the purposes of the heart." (1 Corinthians 4:5)

B. So Jesus promises full disclosure, and he also instructs it. He tells his disciples to disclose the full truth as they go out. Verse 27. "What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops." This statement corresponds to the details in the Great Commission at the end of Matthew. The disciples of Jesus are to make disciples of all the nations. They are to teach them to observe ALL that he commanded them. The Christian faith is not about secret knowledge. We must not hold back gospel truths simply because they are offensive to the world. We must stand for it all. We must not flinch, for example, to shout from the house tops that there is salvation in no one other than Jesus, that THERE IS NO OTHER NAME, NO OTHER Savior, and no other way of acceptance with God outside Jesus Christ. We should not shrink from declaring the whole counsel of God. We must warn of the fact of final judgment. We must warn that God will disclose the motives of the hearts of men. And we must not hide the reality of eternal punishment.

God's intent is to fully disclose the truth through his sheep and to fully disclose the hearts of the wolves at the judgment. And the wolves will bear their guilt. So do not fear them.

C. It is hard not to just become infuriated when I look around at all the hot air angrily and self-righteously breathed out by the world. It charges followers of Christ with bigotry. It will certainly be hard when you encounter unfairness and meanness against you because you are a Christian. Everything fleshly in you will want to react, to defend yourself, protect your reputation. But we need to watch ourselves. The assurance of Jesus is that all the confusion will be squared away by God himself. Vengeance is mine declares the Lord. So leave it to him; you disciples just keep speaking out the truth.

We must not fear people but we must have reverence for God. And the instruction of God for these circumstances are stated by Paul in Romans 12. "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. . . . Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty but associate with the lowly.

Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends in you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine I will repay, says the Lord.' To the contrary of your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; . . . Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good."

II. Assurance #2. People Can Only Kill the Body.

In verse 28, Jesus says, "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both body and soul in hell."

A. Human beings may be able to take our lives. But another human being cannot take our soul. Jesus wants his disciples to possess an eternal perspective when it comes to death. If we die as a disciple of Christ, it is the best thing that can happen to us, for we go to be with the Lord.

We must be willing to die for his cause. Paul demonstrated this willingness when he was on his way to Jerusalem. As though to persuade him not to go, Agabus came and prophesied that the Jews would bind him and hand him over to the Romans. But Paul's reply was this: "I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

B. There is a choice that must be made. Fear man or reverence God. Man may be able to end how long we appear as a vapor. But God holds our eternity in his hands. Look down the tunnel of time with me for just a moment. Up ahead I show you a Chihuahua, a wee little dog barking up a storm, like he is going to eat you alive. But further down the path of your life, here is a ravenous lion. You must make an important choice. You can be the friend of one but not the other. You see the Chihuahua and the lion are enemies. If you side with one, you become the enemy of the other. One is louder and more appears closer, but the other is far more threatening. Which will it be?

This warning alone teaches us the reality of the eternal destruction, not extinction but destruction of the enemies of God. And it warns that at some points many of us will face pressure from a hostile world to compromise on

trusting God. It may even threaten to kill us. Sadly much less than the fear of death often tests our reverence of the eternal God; it tests our obedience to him. God's plan is bigger than simply being at ease in the moment. We must keep things in perspective. James says that friendship with the world is enmity with God.

C. Friends of God may be killed in the world, but enemies of God will be destroyed both soul and body in hell. Don't fear them. Follow Him. If they take your life, they have done you no ultimate harm. They are allowing you to share in the sufferings of Christ.

Hugh Latimer was Bishop of Worcester in England as the Reformation was underway. He reports having spoken to himself in preparing to preach before King Henry VIII: "Latimer! Latimer! Remember that the king is here; be careful what you say." But then he said, "Latimer! Latimer! Remember the King of kings is here; be careful what you do not say." When Mary came to the throne, she burned Latimer at the stake. Thankfully, though, he feared not the one who could take his life but revered him who holds eternity in his hand.

Every day every Christ follower needs to resolve to live in reverence for God and not in fear of man. Edward Welch has written a book by the title, *When People Are Big and God Is Small*. It is a helpful book that reminds us in many practical ways every day in which we are tempted to live in the fear of man. We fear people will see us. We fear they will reject us. We fear that they will hurt us. I have a news flash for each one of us. They will do each of these things! What we need to do is reverence God. It is evident when we trust and obey.

III. Assurance #3. You Are of Great Value to God.

So Jesus says, do not fear. Those who oppose you are going to be exposed. And the worst than any of them can do is take your life. And that may be a lot, but it is very little compared to your soul. Now Jesus supplies a third assurance not to fear with these words: "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows."

A. Jesus could have said, "do not fear, for God cares about you." But he went to the uttermost to express the extent of that care. When I look at Matthew 10:29-31, I am blown away at the extent to which Jesus went to declare the enormity of value that Christ's disciples are to God.

He starts with sparrows. They are cheap. Not 2 for a dollar but 2 for a penny. You've heard the phrase, a dime a dozen. Well, these are half that—a dime for 2 dozen. But God cares for sparrows. Not one falls to the ground without his intimate attention. But you are of more value than many sparrows. He is intimately acquainted with every detail of your life—who you are, what your circumstances are, what are the threats to you, and so forth.

From speaking of sparrows, he moves to speaking of God's relationship to the disciples. Jesus says, the one who cares for measly little sparrows is your Father. He is the God of sparrows. He is the Father of Christ's followers. My father was a caring man. He just had a heart for people who were down and out. I remember when his car was stolen by some guys that he had taken under his wing and tried to help. He was more concerned about them than he was the car. And that was just a glimpse into the magnitude of care he had for his children. God has creator care for sparrows. He has Fatherly care for his children.

Now then in the midst of all this Jesus brings up hair. Even the hairs of your head are all numbered. That does not mean merely that God knows how many hairs you do or do not have. It means he has got a number on each one. That amounts to about 100,000 for the average person. The God who calls all the stars by name numbers every one of the hairs of your head. In other words even your hairs are precious to him! Nobody is going to take one hair off your head apart from God!

B. Disciples of Christ, you are so valuable to God that he spared not his own son for you. God demonstrates his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. And if he spared not his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also generously give us all things?

Listen to how God expresses his love for his people through the prophet Jeremiah: "I will give them one heart and one way that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. . . . I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me. I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul." That's God talking!" It is his DELIGHT to do his people good. The certainty that derives from God's assurance here is that even if the world deals you the worst it can, God is at work for your best. If they kill you, if they do to you the worst they can do, it is the best thing for you.

For in your death you will be delivered from this corrupt and tormentous world into the very presence of God himself, the God who is your Father, who loves you, who counts every single one of your hairs, and who loves to do you good. It is for this very reason that Paul could say that for him, to live is Christ but to die is gain. For Christ's disciples, dying is gain. It is good. It is a transition into the very presence of the Father whose love is incomparable to anything we have known outside him. So fear God. Do not fear men.

IV. Assurance #4. Jesus Will Acknowledge Those Who Acknowledge Him.

A. Actually, Jesus gives assurance alongside a warning here. Some he will acknowledge before His Father and some he will deny. Some he will claim as his; others he will not know.

B. The ones he claims are those who claim him. They fear God and identify with the kingdom of heaven and with its Christ-Jesus. R. C. Sproul asks you to "imagine that you are in heaven. The books are open, the trial is about to begin, and you are standing there in fear. Everything you have ever done in secret is about to be made manifest. Your record will surely condemn you. Then, suddenly, Jesus comes and says, "Father, this one is mine." Can you imagine Christ confessing you before the Father? This is what He promised to do for all who confess Him before men."

Those who are unashamed to own Christ before the world, Christ is unashamed to own before His Father. John put it this way to those who

believe. "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins." It makes all the difference if Jesus would confess us! Who will he confess? Those who will confess him—those who will not fear to acknowledge him, those who will proclaim him.

C. One by one, people will stand before God. Many will not have confessed Christ. These Jesus will deny. Rather than being their propitiation, he will be their judge. The Father looks to Jesus and Jesus shakes his head. Not him. Not her. I do not know them. They do not belong to me. These will go away into everlasting punishment. They were unwilling to go against the grain of the world. They feared man not God. They lived their lives in light of all the world pursues and values. They loved their lives for themselves. Now they will suffer destruction, both body and soul, in hell.

I must say that it is not that none of these have ever mentioned the name Jesus. No doubt some of them will have been vocal in attesting to a Jesus, just not the true one. They would have attested to A Jesus that the world does not hate, A Jesus that only loves, A Jesus that revolves around them, A Jesus for whom they would not have to take up a cross, A Jesus who would not cost them the world. They may have done mighty works in the name of that Jesus—same name but a different person. Still ringing in our ears should be the solemn warning the real Jesus gave at the end of the Sermon on the Mount— "Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in you name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"

D. When you are faced with resistance and hostility because you confess Christ, do not fear those who hate and despise you, who might even deliver you over to death. Fear God who will destroy body and soul in hell those who do not have Christ as their advocate. And in light of their looming destiny keep confessing; keep proclaiming; keep pointing them to Jesus.

Conclusion

Do not fear to own Christ and he will not hesitate to own you. Whenever you have even thought about owning Christ through witness, you have felt the knot in your stomach; you have experienced the feeling of ominous threat. It is the flesh tempting you to fear man. The way to overcome that fear is rather to fear God. Preach these assurances to yourself. Open your mouth and your life and confess Christ.