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Fighting Fear in Times of Persecution; Matt 10:26-33

GPBC

7.14.19

Introduction – In vv24-25, Jesus warns His disciples to be prepared to face persecution. If He Himself is mistreated and falsely accused and hated, then His disciples will face the same response at times. As followers of Christ we should expect no less than what our Master experienced and received when He was here with us.

In Acts 14:22, Paul had been stoned and left for dead but miraculously recovered, and he warned the believers there saying, “through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” In other words, as we live this life, here in this fallen world, as we are making our way to heaven, life will not always be easy and comfortable. Indeed, we will face many tribulations, even severe persecution at times, as we bear witness to Christ and the Gospel.

In 2 Tim 3:12, some of Paul’s last recorded words, he warned Timothy, who was pastoring the church at Ephesus, saying, “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” When Paul wrote those words he was referring to the stoning he received in Acts 14.

The biblical and historical and even present day witnesses abound. Believers often face persecution. It can range from being shunned to losing opportunities or possessions to brutal mistreatment, and even to death. So it is natural that one of the inclinations we will experience if we know some level of suffering is to be expected is the feeling of fear. When faced with threat and pushback and even harsh opposition, it’s easy to retreat and shrink away from fear of what the consequences may be to stand firm in the faith. Jesus knew that in facing persecution, we would also face fear, and so He encourages His disciples to fight fear when facing persecution. Let’s look at 3 faith-filled truths to put fear to flight.

- I. There is No Need to Fear Because Everything Will be Revealed (vv26-27)
 - a. There is no need to fear threats or malice or slander or wrongdoing or mistreatment and harm because there will be vindication for the people of God.

- b. Evil will be exposed. Truth will prevail. Justice will reign. Lies will be exposed. God's Word will endure.
- c. Don't give in to the hatred and angered responses of those who reject the Lord. Often we hear the saying that those who stand for the truths of Scripture are on the wrong side of history. Jesus promises His disciples here in this verse that when all is said and done, the will of God will be the right side of history!
- d. Know in your hearts that God's Word will stand the test of time, it will stand the test of opposition. The Gospel will go forward. The true church will endure. The faithful believers will persevere. Why even the gates of hell cannot prevail against the Lord!
- e. So don't fear but rather take heart. Be courageous. Be bold. The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. Spread the truth. Shout the gospel. Don't shrink or retreat or be silenced or cower away. Let the truth be known.

II. There is No Need to Fear When God is Your Father (vv28-31)

- a. V28 – the fear of man is a misplaced fear because there is only so much man can do. As Peter and the apostles replied in Acts 5:29, “we ought to obey God rather than man.”
 - i. Man can threaten. Man can make your life miserable. Man can even kill. But man can't touch your eternity.
 - ii. God is to be feared, not man. God holds all power. God is in control of His creation. God is sovereign over everyone and everything. God holds eternity.
 - iii. No matter how vicious man may be or how dire our circumstances may become, let them not take our eyes off of the Lord!
 - iv. It's just not worth it to keep this life if it will cost you the next life. This life is temporary. Eternity is forever!
 - v. Have no fear for how this life may end, fear where the next life will be spent. For what does it matter if you gain the whole world and forfeit your own soul.
- b. The fear of man is misplaced but the fear of God is right and good because if you are in Christ, God is your Father.
 - i. Vv29-30 – a sparrow is just about worthless. I mean it's only worth a half of a penny. A half cent. That's nothing. Who cares

about a half cent? Every day 1,000s of sparrows die and no one cares. No one takes notice.

- ii. God cares. God cares about the half cent. He watches over every square inch of His creation. He is aware of what happens to every sparrow on the planet. He cares enough to keep tabs on what we would see as meaningless and worthless.
 - iii. And that's just His awareness of birds. When it comes to you, He is not only aware of you, He is intimately aware of you. He knows every single thing there is to know about you. Right down to the ever-changing number of hairs on your head. He cares enough to not let the small things go unnoticed.
 - iv. If you care about someone, you get to know them. Look how much your heavenly Father cares for you!
 - v. V31 – Fear not, therefore!
 - vi. You are of more value than many sparrows! God created sparrows to fly and sing, but their flight and their song ends when they end. God created you to sing His praise and glorify Him and enjoy Him and be thrilled by Him and rejoice in Him and commune with Him forever and ever!
- c. Fear not what man may do to you, for we have a heavenly Father!

III. To Fear Man and Not Fear the Lord is a Fearful Thing (vv32-33)

- a. Where we stand here and now in this life is an indication of where we will stand in the life to come!
- b. When Jesus said in v22 the one who endures to the end will be saved, that's exactly what He meant. It wasn't a metaphor. He wasn't speaking only to the 12 or only to the Jew. Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I will also deny before my Father who is in heaven. We deny Jesus when we hide our association with Him.
- c. What do we desire more? The praise and approval and acceptance and applause of man, or the joy and glory of eternity with the Father?
- d. Who do we fear more? The reaction of man or the acceptance of God?

- e. The fear of man will cost you your soul. The fear of God will lead to eternal joy and bliss in the presence of God.
- f. Are we living for this life or are we living for the life to come?
- g. It all comes down to this: how precious is Christ to us? How greatly do we treasure Christ? Does He really and truly mean everything? Nothing shows whether or not we treasure Christ quite like persecution.

Conclusion – There are a couple of things in this life that reveal our faith, when faith really becomes real. One of those is death. I've preached the funeral for 3 of my grandparents and Summer's great-grandparent, and nothing brings faith to the forefront like standing over the grave of a loved one. When those we love the most breathe their last breath in this life, nothing else matters at that moment except faith in Christ. He is our hope of life eternal. And then there is our own death. If we happen to be conscious when we draw our final breath in this life, only one thing will matter – only one – is Jesus our treasure?

But there is one more thing that reveals the realness of our faith in this life. When we face persecution for the faith. Is Jesus our treasure, is Jesus our all, is Jesus our everything so much so that we cling to Him when friends betray, when family shuns, when sacrifices must be made, when our very life is on the line? Is our faith real enough to withstand the greatest trials and storms?

Martin Luther sang it well in A Mighty Fortress – let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also, the body they may kill, God's truth abideth still, His kingdom is forever!

Fear not dear believer when trials and tribulations and hardships and suffering and persecutions come your way – in Christ, you have received an eternal kingdom that will never fade!!