

Do Not Fear

📖 Matthew 10:24-31

👤 Pastor Jeremy Thomas

📅 April 15, 2015

🌐 fgbible.org

📍 Fredericksburg Bible Church

107 East Austin Street

Fredericksburg, Texas 78624

(830) 997-8834

We are studying the second discourse in Matthew's Gospel. The discourse is in Matthew 10 and I've titled it "The Discourse on Kingdom Missions." The *mission* is to Israel. The *message* is repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. The *messengers* are Christ's apostles. The *marks* of an apostle are all signs, miracles and wonders. The message is proclaimed when the kingdom is near. The kingdom was near in the past and 10:5-15 refers to the past mission to Israel. The kingdom will be near in the future and 10:16-23 refers to the future mission to Israel. Of course, for Jesus' immediate audience they saw these two missions blended together into one picture. They were viewing the situation in terms of the OT Messianic calendar which taught the following sequence of events. The Messiah would appear, suffer, die and be raised again, a time of trouble would ensue, the Messiah would return to end this tribulation, judge the world and establish His kingdom with Israel as the head of the nations. That a large gap of time would elapse within this sequence of events during which Christ would build His church was entirely unknown. This phenomena of two persons or events separated by a long period of time is well known to students of the OT. The rule for interpreting a prophecy in this manner has been termed the law of double reference. Arnold Fruchtenbaum says, "This law observes the fact that often a passage or a block of Scripture is speaking of two different persons or two different events that are separated by a long period of time. But in the passage itself they are blended into one picture, and the time gap between the two persons or two events is not presented by the text itself."¹

Therefore, Jesus in Matthew 10:5-15 reveals what is now the past mission to Israel and in vv 16-23 the future mission to Israel in vv 16-23. There is no textual indication that a gap of time would exist in between. Perhaps this is designed to preserve the genuineness of the kingdom offer at that time. The coming of the kingdom was genuinely contingent on Israel's response to the kingdom offer. Had the Church been revealed between these two missions the nearness of the kingdom would have automatically been discounted. In other words, the kingdom could not be near if a long church age had to precede its arrival. Therefore the revealing of the mission to Israel in one picture preserves the genuineness of the offer, the importance of human history and the reality of human choices affecting history. So we view it as a past and future mission but only because we see that the genuine offer of the kingdom to the nation Israel was rejected. In the wake of the rejection there is the revelation

of the Church and a future genuine offer of the kingdom to the nation Israel that will be accepted and then the kingdom will come.

It's my understanding that in 10:15 when Jesus mentioned "the day of judgment" He was clearly looking beyond His suffering, dying and being raised to the future great tribulation. At that time verse 16 says Jesus' disciples will be sent out as sheep who are defenseless in the midst of a pack of wolves who are destructive. Therefore they should be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves. To be shrewd as serpents is to be wise, sensible and prudent. To be innocent as doves is to be non-confrontational. 10:17 continues the thought in plain language; they should beware of men because they will infiltrate Messianic groups in that time and then betray them to the Jewish high courts which upon declaring sentence will send them to the synagogues for scourging. In 10:18 they will even be brought before Gentile governors and kings because of their identification with the Messiah. This will be an opportunity to testify of the Messiah. In 10:19 they should not worry in that hour what kind of defense they will give because in 10:20 the Spirit will give them utterance from within that their opponents will not be able to resist or refute. In 10:21 the opposition to Messiah will be unparalleled in that time, brother will betray brother to death, a father his child, and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. In 10:22 Jesus' disciples will be hated by all because of their identification with the name of Jesus. But the one who endures to the end of the great tribulation will be delivered. The deliverer will be the Son of Man described in Dan 7 as the one bringing the everlasting kingdom of God to earth. Contextually the means of enduring to the end and being delivered is that they maintain shrewdness in their mission and avoid conflict. As 10:23 affirms, whenever persecution arises in one city flee to the next. The reason the persecution will arise in that time is providential; the time is short to take the kingdom message to the house of Israel. In fact, the time is so short that they will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes in His kingdom.

In 10:24 we enter another section on discipleship. Earlier we studied passages related to discipleship; in Matt 8:18-22 where we learned the costs of discipleship, and 9:9-17 where we learned the program of discipleship. The Greek word "disciple" is from the root *μαθητης* and refers to "a student, a learner, a pupil." It refers to one who is studying under a teacher. All the great educators of the past had disciples. Socrates educated the youth of Athens; Aristotle educated Alexander the Great and so forth and so on. John the Baptist educated his disciples (Matt 9:14). Jesus educated His disciples as well. The NT speaks of three kinds of disciples of Jesus. First, the curious disciple was simply curious about Jesus' claims and teachings. They would follow Jesus around amongst the crowds because they were curious about His claims and teachings. They were curious only and not yet convinced and therefore they were not believers. One has to be convinced of the truth claims of the Messiah in order to believe in Him. Thus the first group of disciples were curious only. Second, the convinced disciple was convinced of the truth of Jesus' claims and teachings. They had already investigated with curiosity His claims and teachings and upon reflection concluded that He was who He claimed to be and His teachings were the truth. Therefore they believed in Him. Thus the second group of disciples are convinced. Third, the committed disciple was one who accepted Jesus' challenge to "Follow Me!" The master issued the challenge because the individual

showed promise of faithfulness. The challenge would require the individual to count the cost of following Him and commit themselves to His teaching and lifestyle. Those who accepted the challenge were committed disciples. Thus the third group of disciples are committed. All three groups are referred to as "disciples" in the NT and so you can't read the word "disciple" as having a monolithic meaning. The context determines which of the three uses is in view. The group in view here are the third group; committed disciples.

The predominant instruction to these committed disciples in 10:24-31 is "Do not fear." Note in verse 26 they are told, "do not fear them." In verse 28 they are told, "do not fear those who kill the body." In verse 31 they are told, "do not fear." The reason they might fear is because Jesus just declared that they will face persecution. When one is told that he will face persecution it is natural to fear. It's my interpretation that Jesus is still looking beyond His death and resurrection to the time of trouble during the great tribulation. Toussaint agrees saying, "The emphasis on fear is a factor which shows that the time of Jacob's trouble prophesied in the Old Testament is considered as being about to be fulfilled."² There are three reasons that demand a futurist interpretation. First, none of Jesus' apostles faced the kind of difficulty or persecution that is described in 10:16-23 before His death and resurrection. Second, Jesus' apostles did finish going through the cities of Israel in the early church and even went on to Samaria and to the remotest parts of the earth. Finally, these events culminate with the coming of the Son of Man in His kingdom. We are therefore on solid ground placing these instructions to Jesus' disciples as those most directly related to a mission to future Israel during the future great tribulation. Of course we can make application of the principles to Jesus' disciples then as well as today. It's true that whenever and wherever a disciple faces persecution because of identification with Jesus and His teachings they should not fear. It is passages like this that lead me not to fear. They are why I speak against false religions like Islam, false doctrines like homosexual love and a series of other controversial issues in our day. These issues must be spoken to because they are where the battle is being waged today. To not do so is to shrink back from declaring the whole purpose of God. Those who shrink back are not entering the battle and are not committed disciples. They may be curious or convinced disciples but they certainly are not committed. Committed discipleship means being fearless in preaching the word.

In 10:24 Jesus says **A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master.** This was a common Jewish proverb that can be applied many ways. Jesus uses it to show that they should not try to avoid being associated with Him. If they see that He is persecuted they might fear that they too would be persecuted. In response they may try to dissociate themselves from Him as Peter later does by denying Him. They should not try to avoid being associated with Him. In 10:25 Jesus says, **It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master.** If they retain their association with Him and He is persecuted they too should expect to be persecuted. They are being challenged to maintain the course. **If they have called** is a 1st class condition and should be translated "since." "Since **they had called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household!**" In 9:32 Jesus had healed the "mute, demon-possessed man."

This man was probably both mute and deaf since the word was used for both inabilities. The cause of the inabilities, in this case, was a demon. When Jesus cast out the demon and the “man spoke the crowds were amazed, and were saying “Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel.” But the Pharisees were saying, “He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons.” The slanderous term **Beelzebul** is not used there but is related in Matt 12:24 where the Pharisees said, “This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons.” It is clear that the term was used for “the ruler of the demons” and therefore refers to Satan but the exact meaning of the term is difficult to establish. One suggestion is that it is derived from the OT Hebrew “baalzebub” which is translated “lord of the flies.” This was a term of mocking which was a takeoff of “baalzebul” which is translated “prince of Baal.” But the change in ending is left unexplained. Another suggestion is that it derived from another mocking expression “lord of dung.” Glasscock says, “Probably the best understanding is that it derives from *ba'al zibbul*, “from post-O.T. Heb. *Zebel*, manure, dung; *zibbul* meaning an idolatrous sacrifice.” Thus the term was used as a slander against the Devil (god of dung) and the Pharisees wished to associate it with Jesus. Still another view is that it is a translation of *oikodespotes* (“head of the house,” NIV). Thus, Carson says, “...the real head of the house, Jesus, who heads the household of God, is being willfully confused with the head of the house of demons. The charge is shockingly vile—the Messiah himself rejected as Satan! If so, why should his disciples expect less?”³ I can’t determine which origin is correct. What we can determine is that the Pharisees could not deny the validity of the miracles He was doing. Since they were not believing He was the Messiah they had to come up with another explanation for the source of the miracles. Since the most powerful being next to God is Satan then they were claiming that He was doing the miracles by Satan. Jesus is saying to His disciples that if they become like Him then they will be identified with Him and they too will be maligned as being demon-indwelt. They should not expect less.

In the case of such antagonism verse 26 says **Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.** It is strange that in light of such antagonism Jesus would say **do not fear them.** Glasscock says, “It is...only natural to fear those who will scourge and kill you. But Jesus was preparing His followers for those hard times by leading them to focus on the ultimate outcome.”⁴ If one focuses on the eternal perspective and not the temporal situation his fear can be contained if not eliminated. In light of eternity what they may face temporally cannot even compare. Paul said, for the sufferings of this present time cannot compare to the glories to follow. It is that principle that Jesus is telling them to employ in order to curb the natural inclination to fear those who want to kill you.

Jesus assures them that **there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.** If they allowed fear of death to control them then they might **conceal** the truth of the kingdom message. But if they conceal it now it will only be **revealed** in the future. Therefore they might as well reveal it now. **Or** if they hide the kingdom message now it will **be made known** in the future, so again, they might as well make it **known** now. The point is it would not do any good to try to keep the kingdom message secret because sooner or later it is going to come out anyway. Constable says, “This applies to the truth about Jesus that the

fearful disciple might seek to keep hidden for fear of opposition. It also applies to the disciple himself who might want to hide instead of letting his light shine. It applies also to the preceding teaching about persecution.⁵ Persecution and death are fearful prospects but they should not hinder us from speaking the truth clearly and forthrightly.

In 10:27, that Jesus intended His teaching to expand far beyond His teaching to the disciples is quite clear. **What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops.** This will inevitably put them in the line of fire. Jesus had instructed publicly among the crowds and this put Him in the line of fire but much of His teaching had been private and personal to His committed disciples. This private and personal instruction is what Jesus is referring to by the statements **I tell you in the darkness...and what you hear whispered in your ear.** Behind closed doors and in various places throughout the Galilee Jesus had entrusted many things to them that He did not entrust to others. They were to take what He had taught them privately and personally and make it public to crowds. This is what it means by the expressions **speak in the light** and **proclaim upon the housetops.** **Housetops** in ancient Israel were flat and good places from which to make a public address to a crowd. This would make them highly visible. Despite how shrewd and non-confrontational they were, making public proclamations would openly identify them with Jesus and His kingdom message.

Therefore, in 10:28 he tells them a second time not to fear. **Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.** If they **fear those who kill the body** then it will encourage them to conceal the message of Jesus and the at hand kingdom in order to preserve their physical life. To fear **those who can kill the body** is quite natural. Nobody likes to be tortured and killed. The **body** here refers to the material body that interacts with this earth or this present physical life. **The body** is subject to being killed by men but they **are unable to kill the soul.** **Soul** is used here of life that transcends this earthly existence. In other words, though one may kill the body the soul continues unharmed. Humans are limited in the scope of their power and what they can do to another human. Since this is the case Jesus' disciples should not **fear** them.

Instead He says, **fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.** Since the scope of God's power is far greater than a human's power then obviously He is the one who should be feared instead of humans. To **fear** can mean "to be apprehensive about, frightened." It can also mean "to have a profound reverence for, respect." Probably this latter sense is meant here with respect to God. They should have a profound respect for Him such that it does not deter them from proclaiming the message upon the housetops. Jesus is not saying that He will destroy both soul and body in hell but that He is capable of doing that. The point of the verse is to contrast the ability of man with the ability of God. Men can cause only the temporal loss of life but God is able to cause the eternal loss of life. Glasscock says it well, "The implication is not that one should live in fear of going to hell but that those who are Christ's servants have no need to fear mere men, whose ability is limited only to the physical

realm. God's authority and power are greater. Therefore, they were to be courageous in completing their commission."⁶

The expression **destroy both soul and body in hell** does not refer to annihilation. Annihilation is the elimination of the **soul and body**. Some people think because of the word **destroy** that it means to eliminate. This would mean that punishment of the wicked would be only temporal and not eternal. However, the word **destroy** in the active voice means "to ruin." Here Jesus is saying that God is capable of ruining both the soul and body in hell. Other passages teach that final punishment on the wicked will be eternal (e.g. Dan 12:2; Matt 25:46). Further, the eternal ruin includes the **body**. If it was just the soul that was under eternal punishment Jesus would not have added **and body**. The addition of the **body** implies the resurrection of the wicked. Other passages teach the resurrection of the wicked (John 5:29).

The word **hell** is Gehenna. The Valley of Gehenna was at the foot of the city of David. It was the trash dump for the residents of Jerusalem. Fires continually burned there in order to consume the trash. Gehenna became a figure symbolizing the eternal punishment of the wicked in the lake of fire. It should therefore be equated with the lake of fire. It is hell proper (from ελαν, "to hide") and it was created for the devil and his angels, not for human beings (Matt 25:41). Humans end up there only because they reject the finished work of Christ. No human is there yet because the Scriptures teach that the first two people to be cast there will be the anti-Christ and the false prophet. They will remain there alone for the duration of the millennium and then all the dead will be raised, taken to the Great White Throne judgment and then cast in the lake of fire for eternal punishment. Where are the dead now? Hades (Greek) or Sheol (Hebrew). Hades is not hell or Gehenna or the Lake of Fire. Hades is either "the grave" or "the place of the dead." It may not really be so much a place as it is the concept of waiting until the day of resurrection. But one thing it is not for sure is hell, and unfortunately a lot of translations translate it hell. But in Rev 20:14 hades is cast in the lake of fire, so it's a temporal concept whereas hell, Gehenna and the lake of fire are all eternal places of punishment. So there are a few things to chew on there but what Jesus is basically saying in 10:28 is don't fear men because they can only inflict harm in the temporal realm whereas God can inflict harm in the eternal realm of Gehenna, the place of continual burning fire.

Now in verse 29 He does another comparison. **Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. Sparrows** were common in the marketplace. They were so common they escaped most people's notice. They were a poor man's meal since they only cost 1/16 of a denarius (a day's wages). They were cheap. **And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.** This is an astonishing note. A little bird falls to the ground and you think the Father doesn't notice that? You think He doesn't care about that. Of course He cares. He is intricately involved in His created order. He doesn't miss anything. You know, a bird may fall to the ground out in the middle of some national park and I assure you that does not go unnoticed. This is our sovereign God! He's astounding. His care extends to the minutest parts of His creation. What may seem trivial to you or to me is not at all trivial to God. He notices

everything! And yet how many times have you heard someone say, this isn't important to God or that isn't important to God? Do you think God really cares about this? Better watch out! If He cares about one sparrow falling to the ground I think you better re-evaluate. And note how it's phrased; it doesn't say He notices a sparrow fall to the ground. It says **not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father**. That means that for all of history, every sparrow that ever lived fell to the ground under the sovereignty of God and never did one fall to the ground outside of the sovereignty of God. Everything is under the sovereignty of God. There are no areas outside of the sovereignty of God. And what if there were something outside of His control? Wouldn't there then be loose marbles? Wouldn't there then be the possibility that God could be defeated? But there is no possibility of God being defeated. Everything is firmly under His control.

That's not all. Look at verse 30, **But the very hairs of your head are all numbered**. Every single one. Humans estimate that a human head has about 100,000 hairs. God knows precisely how many hairs you have on your head at any given moment. We lose hairs every day and yet every moment God knows exactly how many hairs you have. As you get older you get less because God gets tired of keeping up with it. ☺ All kidding aside, this is a remarkable feature of our God. He's omniscient. That means in addition to knowing everything about Himself, God knows all things actual and possible in creation. That involves all of the changes that are taking place every moment throughout the entire universe. This is our omniscient God! In verse 29 He's sovereign over all nature down to every sparrow that's ever fallen to the ground. In verse 30 He's omniscient over man down to every hair on your head. Don't tell me God doesn't care. That's the whole basis of the exhortation not to fear in 10:31. **So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows**. And so if God cares for every sparrow that falls to the ground how much more do you think He cares for His committed disciples? He cares for all humans generally since they are made in the image of God and He cares for all believers because they are His children and He cares most intimately for His committed disciples because they are involved in the task of taking the truth to the world. These are general explanations. Ultimately I have no explanation for why He cares for us so much other than to say that is what He is like. He cares for each of us individually even to the point of keeping a constant count of the number of hairs on our head. If that is the case, why do you fear men? There is no reason to fear men. This ought to give you boldness to speak the truth in love; a tremendous courage to speak truth in the face of opposition. And if you face persecution do you think God notices? Do you think God cares? Of course He notices. Of course He cares.

In conclusion, there are some difficult sayings here but by way of review, in 10:24ff Jesus is looking past His death and resurrection to the time of Jacob's trouble when the final mission to Israel will be on the table, a period unparalleled by antagonism to Jesus' name and the message of the kingdom. To comfort His disciples in that time He states the proverb in verse 24; "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master." Jesus was not asking His committed disciples to be greater than He was. It would be enough for them to be like Him. In time He would be persecuted unto death. Surely if they were like Him they too might be persecuted to death. If they had called

Jesus “Beelzebul,” willfully identifying the head of the house of God as Satan, the head of the house of demons, then surely they too would be maligned. In 10:26 the injunction not to “fear them” might seem strange in the light of such antagonism, but “there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.” If they tried to conceal Jesus’ name and His kingdom message in order to avoid persecution it would come to light anyway sooner or later so they might as well proclaim the message. In 10:27 He says, “What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops.” It might seem like it would put them in the line of fire if they took what He taught to them privately and personally and made it public and to the crowds; and surely it would. But in 10:28, “Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” They should remember that those who oppose them are not as strong as the One who supports them. The statement is made not so they will fear hell but so that they will realize the power of the one who is for them. In 10:29, “Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.” Men do not always value things in the same way God values things. Yet if God takes note of each sparrow when it dies, how much more does He care for you? Even to the point of keeping the exact number of hairs on your head. So do not fear. The time this will be directly applicable will be the scariest time on earth. No period of history will rival the antagonism to the Messiahship of Jesus and His kingdom message; scourging, torture and execution will be common place. But those Jews who go out on the mission to Israel in those days should not fear men. God cares for them

By application what can we say? First, to be a committed disciple is to be a student of the Scriptures. Removed by almost 2,000 years this involves careful, detailed, patient and prayerful study. The process begins with observation, “What do I see?” moves to interpretation, “What does it mean?” and finally to application, “What does it mean to me?” One cannot be a committed disciple without being totally committed to the study of Scripture. Second, do not be afraid to speak the truth in love. Governments, organizations, the IRS and any number of special interest groups will put pressure on you not to speak the truth, especially today as it relates to politicized issues like homosexuality and the threat of Islam. In some countries they will remove your 501c3 status if you speak about these things. That is probably coming here soon! In others they will put you to death. Do not fear them because the worst they can do is kill the body and send you face to face with the Lord. Do not fear because Christians are not to function in an atmosphere of fear but in an atmosphere of total security in Him. Third, your heavenly Father cares for you and takes notice of everything about you. Do not think there are things that are unimportant. There are things that are of more importance than others but all things are important. You are very important. Regardless of what you might think you are very important and He takes notice of everything about you.

¹ Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah*, 1984, p 4.

² Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, p 142.

³ D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 253.

⁴ Ed Glasscock, *Matthew*, p 232.

⁵ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mt 10:26.

⁶ Ed Glasscock, *Matthew*, p 234.