

Focus Text

“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. And 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. 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. 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.”
(Matthew 10:26–33, ESV)

1. Proclaim Fearlessly

“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.”
(Matthew 10:26–27, ESV)

As we come out of the dire warnings of last week in Matthew 10:15-25, Jesus gives the disciples a rallying cry to continue their work of proclaiming that the Kingdom of God is at hand. Jesus is permitting them here in the first stanza to shout from the rooftops what Jesus has revealed to them. We have seen that Jesus explains the parables to His students and makes His stories known clearly to them. They aren't to keep these answers hidden in the dark but to proudly shout them as evangelists from the rooftops of Palestine. What's interesting here is that Luke and Matthew use this command in two unique ways. Luke uses this to describe God's revelation to the world, even what is spoken in private. Matthew uses this to proclaim that what was spoken to them in private should be proclaimed boldly. The concepts are similar to what is known as the private becoming public, namely, that those who have suffered for the gospel will be proven correct on the day of Judgement.

“Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops.” **(Luke 12:3, ESV)**

2. Prioritize Spiritual Over Physical

“And 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.” **(Matthew 10:28, ESV)**

Jesus then shifts the focus from earthly threats to the power of God alone. Jesus wants the disciples to remember that the one who loves and saves is also the one who condemns and judges. While Satan is permitted to cause chaos in the lives of humanity, he is not God and has no such power. The judge of the universe is Almighty God alone. The disciples are going to face wickedness, pain, suffering, and death at the hands of evil people who are ignoring their love, peace, and healing as they bring about the Kingdom of God. The disciples never kill anyone, never fight back, and live in peace in the world, yet they die. However, God will not ignore these sins, and God will be the judge of all humanity and their treatment of His children. A few years ago, a pastor friend helped me understand an important distinction. He said, “God loves all humanity, but not all of humanity are God’s children.” To become a child, you must enter the family by accepting Christ. God will put an end to evil and will punish those who harm His kids. The disciples are to operate with the understanding that the Lord is on their side and that He should be the focus of their awe, reverence, and respectful fear, because God alone can save one’s soul or condemn it. This is one of the significant tensions in our faith: God loves and saves, and also judges and condemns, for only He rules creation.

“It is not the devil but God who destroys body and soul in hell.³⁸ God is to be feared. The “fear of God” is a familiar demand in the Old Testament-Jewish tradition that permits various possibilities of accentuation.³⁹ In our text “fear of God” suggests the punishing, judging God who has unlimited power. The thought that human beings are determined heteronomously through the

fear of God is still distant. In most Jewish texts, fear of God and love of God are close together; the two converge in obedience to his will.”¹

3. Providence in Every Detail

“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.”
(Matthew 10:29–31, ESV)

As you can read from the Heremina commentary below, sparrows were considered the cheapest meat around in Jesus’ time. Mostly bone, not that filling; sparrows were a popper’s meal. Jesus reminds the disciples that even the lowest of the low will be counted and known by the Father in Heaven, and that He keeps a detailed account of all of creation. God is omniscient, meaning He knows everything, and nothing is outside of His knowledge. One common critique leveled against God is that He doesn’t see us when we suffer. Jesus makes it clear that’s false, and that God knows all the hairs on our heads. Funny enough, this text emphasizes male balding and says that not one hair that has fallen out isn’t counted in the inventory of heaven. I hope God returns my follicles to me one day. Humans are more precious than sparrows, and God is aware of the suffering of His people. In Revelation, John records that God will wipe away all our tears. God is loving and gracious, caring deeply about humanity and keeping a record of all the injustices of creation. While most cringe at the thought of God’s justice, remember that God’s condemnation of evil is a loving and kind act. Jesus reveals that the pain the disciples face will not go unnoticed in the court of Heaven, and God’s love is expressed in dealing with these injustices. Grace, and Truth, Wisdom and Purity, and Love and Justice are all a part of who God is and what He instills in humanity as His image bearers.

¹ 38 Thus, e.g., Lührmann, *Redaktion 50*; John P. Meier, *Matthew (New Testament Message 3; Wilmington, Del.: Glazier, 1981) 112*. There is no reference to the devil in the entire text. Already Justin (*Apol. 1.19*) and Irenaeus (*Haer. 3.18.5*) interpret it in reference to God.

39 Cf. Günther Wanke, “φοβέω κτλ,” *TDNT 9* (1974) 201–3, and Horst Balz, *ibid.*, 205–7. Basic possibilities of accentuation are: fear of God as obedience (the Elohist, Deuteronomy, legal Psalms, T. 12 Patr., rabbinical texts); fear of God as knowledge of God and corresponding behavior (wisdom); fear of God as trust and relationship with God (Psalms); fear of God as fear of the epiphany (apocalyptic texts).

Luz, Ulrich. 2001. *Matthew: A Commentary*. Edited by Helmut Koester. *Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg.

“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” **(Revelation 21:4, ESV)**

“Sparrows were a common article on the market,⁴² by far the cheapest bird,⁴³ the poultry of the poor.⁴⁴ The Roman as is a common coin; for two as one can buy a daily ration of bread.⁴⁵ The text is thus deliberately formulated as exaggeration. Not a single⁴⁶ sparrow will become a hunter’s prey apart from the will of God. God’s power over his creatures is experienced by the church just as intensively and tangibly as his care in the promise of Matt 6:26*.⁴⁷ The move from the sparrows to human beings is almost humorous. In order to equal the value of a human being, many sparrows are needed!^{48”}²

² 42 They appear in Diocletian’s maximum tariff and are being sold in bunches of 10 pieces (Deissmann, Light, 273–74). For that reason alone one should not think of sacrifice (contra Str-B 1.582).

43 Deissmann, Light, 274. The Mishna (Kar. 1.7) states that the price of a pair of doves (a sacrificial animal!) is ¼ of a silver denarius up to 1 gold denarius.

44 Lev. Rab. 3.1 on 2:1 quotes as a proverb: Whoever rents a garden, eats birds (יִצְפְּרִים; in LXX, צִפּוֹר is often translated with στρουθίον). Cf. in addition b. Ber. 57b (meat of birds is bad for sick people); Lam. Rab. 3.6 on 3:17 (80 kinds of bird brain at a banquet).

45 Ἀσσάριον, from the Latin adjective assarius, is not a diminutive form but the common transliteration of “as” into Greek. The value is stated in the literature variously as 1/24 or 1/16 of a denarius. Daniel Sperber (Roman Palestine 200–400: Money and Prices [Bar-Ilan Studies in Near Eastern Languages and Culture 28; Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1974] 157) assumes that under Antigonos (40–37 BCE) the Jewish system of coinage was adapted to the Roman system so that one as would equal 1/16 of a denarius. In the texts of the Mishna the older system of coinage is retained. M. Pe’a 8.7 prescribes the daily ration to be given to a wandering poor person to be bread in the value of one pundion (= 2 as), so that the price for two sparrows would approximate the cost of bread for one meal.

46 Ἐν ... οὖν may be a Semitism (BDF § 302 [1]).

47 Related is y. Seb. 9.38d.22 and par. in Str-B 1.582–83 (no bird perishes without heaven). Still more closely related formally is Q = Luke 12:24/Matt 6:26* with common catchwords that appeared quite close together in Q (Luke 12:7*, 24*), διαφέρετε with the genitive, ὑμεῖς, πατήρ ὑμῶν. Did Luke 12:24* Q influence our text, or does Q contain a secondary adaptation of both texts to each other?

48 Jeremias (New Testament Theology, 184) wants πολλά to be understood inclusively: all the sparrows (of the world). Julius Wellhausen, Das Evangelium Matthaei (Berlin: Reimer, 1904) assumes a mistranslation from the Aramaic (50): You are much better than sparrows (cf. Matt 6:26*). Both are unnecessary.

Luz, Ulrich. 2001. Matthew: A Commentary. Edited by Helmut Koester. Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg.

4. Profess Christ Publicly (Application)

“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.” **(Matthew 10:32–33, ESV)**

Jesus makes yet another claim to divinity here, acknowledging that He has status with the Father and validating John 14:6, which says He is the one who opens the way for people to be saved. This final stanza is a call to boldness and resolve. Let’s be honest, the grim prognosis Jesus describes for the disciples would be enough to shake even the most stalwart followers and make them think about turning tail and running away. Jesus combats their fear with a challenge of hope and a warning of rejection. If they stand for Him as their Lord, Master, Savior, and King, Jesus will write their names in the book of Life. If they choose to walk away and reject Jesus, then they will be denounced before the Father. Salvation is simple: accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior and trust Him to guide your life. Jesus himself promised that His burden would be light and easy to bear. Simple isn’t always easy. The evil powers of the world, both human and spiritual, will reject you, and you will be hated by those who reject Christ. The question Jesus is asking is, “Will you accept me even if others reject you?” The reward for the Christ Follower is eternal and amazing, but it will mean walking a set-apart (Holy) path.

“Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” **(John 14:6, ESV)**

This week, have a conversation with your cornerman and ask if you are willing to follow Jesus in all situations. Share a story about a time when the Lord called you to trust Him even though it was difficult. Amen!