

You Are Valuable

"Fear Not" Series, December 26-27, 2020 | Matthew 10:24-33

ARE WE SUPPOSED TO FEAR GOD?

Fearing God seems natural.

After all, God is incredibly powerful; he created the universe and everything in it!

We have all heard stories about how God acted in dramatic and powerful ways in history. He flooded the earth, darkened the sky, and parted the sea.

Even many people who are not followers of Jesus have a sense that life, death, and eternity all depend on the power and pleasure of God.

In 1981, "Raiders of the Lost Ark" projected our fear of God.

"Raiders of the Lost Ark" was set in 1936, in the years leading up to World War II.

It followed Indiana Jones, an adventurous archeologist who ended up on a quest to find the Ark of the Covenant from the Old Testament before Nazi treasure hunters located it and used it for diabolical ends.

Through twists and turns, the Nazis ended up with the Ark on an island in the Aegean Sea.

Indy and his love interest were captured and tied up while the Nazis opened the Ark, expecting to discover its secrets and unlock its power.

After finding only sand inside, shadows and power began swirling around the Nazis. The shadows and power became menacing manifestations of divine power.

I'll leave out the details. Let's just say that the power of God reached out in judgment on the Nazis who tried to control him. They didn't survive. Pictures like that make us fear God.

However, we've spent an entire series studying messages from heaven that said, "FEAR NOT."

Angels appeared to one person after another.

Each time, they appeared suddenly and unexpectedly, totally startling the people seeing them.

They radiated the glory of God and the power of heaven. That was terrifying!

Each time, they said "FEAR NOT" in their message to human beings.

Jesus himself repeatedly told his followers to "FEAR NOT."

We take those words seriously. We believe the message to "FEAR NOT," and we have been trying to take it to heart this Christmas as we process a tense time in our society.

Now this passage tells us to fear God! What does that mean? And what are we really supposed to do?

DON'T FEAR "THEM."

Matthew 10:26-27 tells us to not fear "them."

²⁶ "So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. ²⁷ What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops.

Jesus was speaking to 12 of his disciples whom he had designated as “apostles.”

It happened earlier in Matthew chapter 10.

He names them and gave them new, spiritual authority and power.

He told them to go, proclaim the Kingdom of Heaven and change the world.

He gave them instructions about money and lodgings and relying on God.

He told them honestly that some people would listen while some would reject them.

His message was that it was time to start proclaiming good news about the Kingdom of God publicly.

Jesus frequently spoke in code to the crowds. They never understood him.

He saved some of his best teaching for his disciples. He would explain more fully things he said to the crowds when they were alone. He would give them additional teachings as they went from place to place.

Now that message would be shared broadly. He said to proclaim it from the rooftops.

Doing so would reveal all kinds of things.

Proclaiming the Gospel provokes a response.

Proclaiming the Gospel reveals the heart of us, his followers. We say that we belong to Jesus. But do we proclaim the Gospel or not? That reveals something about us. And how do we deal with persecution and rejection when it comes? That reveals something about us as well.

The Gospel also has the effect of revealing the things that are hidden in the world. Some people in the world will accept the Gospel when it's proclaimed. Others will reject the Gospel and are hostile to God; that comes out once the Gospel is clear.

As they worked and lived, he said to not fear “them.” He had already defined “them.”

In Matthew 10:16, he called them “wolves”: “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.”

In Matthew 10:17-18, he said that these are the people who will deliver Jesus' apostles to the authorities: “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 for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles.”

In Matthew 10:21-22, Jesus even added that these are family members who will turn against the apostles: “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 for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.”

When Jesus referred to “them” in verse 26, these are the people he meant.

He told us not to fear “them.”

Jesus' teaching makes me wonder: Do you fear someone?

You may fear them because they're persecuting you because of your faith.

But we fear people for many different reasons.

While Jesus was speaking specifically about people who persecute us because we're proclaiming the good news about the Kingdom of God, he also leads us to think about other people we fear. Does it really make sense to fear them? If we shouldn't fear the people who persecute us for our faith, do we need to fear anyone?

FEAR GOD INSTEAD.

In Matthew 10:28, Jesus told us to make a choice about whom we should fear:

²⁸ 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.

People who reject us may have great power.

Jesus was blunt that there are people who have the power to kill the body.

That was extraordinarily real in the days of the New Testament. People died because of their faith and for the sake of preaching the Gospel.

That is extraordinarily real in parts of the world today. People die because of their faith and for the sake of preaching the Gospel.

However, Jesus relativized their power. He said that they cannot kill the soul. There is a limit to the power of those who can kill the body.

Isaiah the prophet was realistic that there will be people who are against us. However, he also said that they are mortal, like we are. They are like grass! Yet because of them we forget God and fear them! In Isaiah 51:12-13, God says: "I, I am he who comforts you; who are you that you are afraid of man who dies, of the son of man who is made like grass, and have forgotten the LORD, your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth, and you fear continually all the day because of the wrath of the oppressor, when he sets himself to destroy? And where is the wrath of the oppressor?"

Jesus put their power in perspective by reminding us of God's greater power.

Jesus said to fear "him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." This is a clear reference to God the Father and to his power to judge.

If God punishes us, God has the ability to sentence both body and soul to hell. Forever.

In Revelation 20:15, God the Father sits on the throne and judges the dead: "And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

Once again, Isaiah the prophet got it right. In Isaiah 8:12-13, he called on us to not let the world deter us through fear. Instead, he said to keep our eyes on the one with the real power—God the Father—and fear him instead: "Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread."

What does fearing God mean?

First, it doesn't mean that we should live in terror. Fearing God really is different from being startled by an angel. It's also different from being afraid of someone because they can harm us.

To fear God means to **revere** him. We respect him and view him with awe.

To fear God comes out in **worship**. We acknowledge his glory and honor, particularly together and in public.

To fear God definitely means we **obey** him. We live according to the standards of holiness that he has set for us; we treat others the way he tells us to treat them; we accept the mission that he has given us to proclaim the Gospel with the authority God has given us and change the world by serving people in the power God has given us.

Psalm 111:10 tells us that fearing the Lord is smart: The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!

Jesus' teaching provokes a follow-up question: Who's in charge of your life?

Do your fears run your life? Specifically, do the people you fear run your life? Jesus doesn't want us to fear people, and he definitely doesn't want the people we fear to run our lives or make the most important decisions for us—about how we live and what we do.

Do you run your life? Do you do as you please and make your own rules? Our culture will try to convince you that making your own rules and running your own life is a good thing, but it's actually a recipe for disaster. God wrote the manufacturer's instructions on living; when we ignore the manufacturer's instructions and make our own rules instead, things break.

God is supposed to be in charge of our lives. That's what it means to fear God.

DON'T FEAR LIFE.

In Matthew 10:29-31, Jesus reminded us that God values us:

²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰ But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Jesus used a familiar word picture to remind us of how God sees us.

Jesus spoke about birds on other occasions. In the Sermon on the Mount as he was counseling us to avoid anxiety (particularly anxiety about having "enough"), he talked about little birds. In Matthew 6:26-27, Jesus said, "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?"

Birds were cheap in Jesus' day -- food for peasants. Still, he said that God the Father knows everything about little birds.

If God has care for cheap birds, then he will certainly have greater care for people.

God doesn't promise that nothing bad will ever happen to us. In Matthew 10 Jesus said specifically that bad things WOULD happen to some of us some of the time. He simply meant that nothing bad would happen to us without God knowing.

Jesus knew that he was complicating life, not making life easier.

In Matthew 10, Jesus acknowledged that following him would stretch the fabric of society.

He said that it would split families.

He said that it would tear at governments.

After the verses that we read today Jesus got much more specific.

In Matthew 10:34, he said that he knew what he was doing and that he was doing it intentionally: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword."

However, in Matthew 10:38, he added that following him involved sacrifice: "And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me."

In Matthew 10:39, he said, though, that we have everything to gain: "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

However, we hear again that God providentially cares for us.

Every detail of creation passes under the watchful, providential eye of God.

God knows us, down to the finest details.

Very specifically, God takes great care over every detail of our lives.

What does that mean right here and right now?

Jesus was telling his apostles and us that we don't experience persecution unless he allows it.

Presumably, God would only allow it if it brings him glory or advances his Kingdom in some way that outweighs our safety and his love for us.

Jesus' teaching leads us to ask: Then are there some wrong things in life I'm fearing?

Matthew 10 isn't a license to run fearless into the world doing whatever we want and taking all kinds of risks. That's not what this text says.

It does say, though, that our fear of persecutors isn't the only fear we get wrong in life.

If we live under the care of God (and we do), then many of our fears make no sense.

While we have no reason to be reckless in life, we also have no reason to live in fear.

Instead, we get to live confidently knowing that we are loved and cared for by God himself.

And that leads us to a massive, inescapable conclusion:

DO GOD'S WORK WITHOUT FEAR.

In Matthew 10:32-33, Jesus challenged us to get to work:

³² So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, ³³ but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

Speaking about our faith in Jesus is critical.

Earlier in Matthew 10 Jesus made it clear that if people hear the Gospel and reject it, they have a difficult future ahead, because they will stand before God for judgment.

Here, Jesus takes the thought even further. He lets us know that faith in him isn't just something we think in our heads and keep to ourselves. Romans 10:9-10 tells us that professing and speaking openly about our faith is a critical part of following Jesus: "because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved."

Beyond that, we are called to share the Gospel with people, we're to speak about it.

When we speak about it, we (like the apostles of the New Testament) may very well run into opposition. When we do, how we handle ourselves is important. Jesus let us know that in those moments when pressure gets real, we have to stick with the truth. We don't want to do anything to deny our faith. In Mark 8:38 Jesus says: "For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

More broadly, God is calling us to serve him.

When he sent his first apostles out, he told them to proclaim the good news that the kingdom of heaven had come near.

At the same time, he told them to do miraculous things with God's power. He talked about healings, exorcisms, and restorations. He wanted them to change the world.

He expects the same things from us. He expects us to serve people and change the world with the power and influence he has given to us. In Jesus' name.

If we fear him—revere him, worship him, and obey him—then we will do what he says.

Fearing God is actually freeing.

It sets things in order in our lives.

It says that many of the things we fear otherwise are nothing compared with God.

When we realize that these other fears aren't worth fearing after all, they tend to lose their power in our lives.

When those other fears don't control us, we are free! We're free to be ourselves. We're free to say what we really believe. We're free to do what we know God is calling us to do.

We get to live like we're singing in the shower!

I don't know about you, but I don't have a very good voice.

I sing on key; it's just my own key. I change the key freely in the middle of a song or even a line.

Consequently, singing in public is sometimes painful.

But when I sing in the shower, there's no key, no judgment, and no pressure.

I'm always on key and on time with the right words. I love to sing in the shower.

Jesus is saying that if we fear God, we are free from all our other fears.

We know we are loved totally and completely by our Heavenly Father.

We can live exactly as God wants us to.

It's like singing in the shower.