

OpenTheo

Matthew 10:26 - 10:31



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg delves into Matthew 10:26-31, where Jesus instructs his disciples not to fear those who persecute them. Gregg notes that while Christians believe that Jesus is referring to the devil, it's important not to fear persecution, as God is on their side. He also discusses the concept of eternal torment in hell, stating that it's one of the main reasons people believe in its existence. Finally, Gregg explores the symbolism of the verse about God numbering the hairs on one's head, suggesting that it's a sign of how well God knows and understands each individual.

Transcript

We're now continuing with the instructions that Matthew records that Jesus gave to his disciples, the twelve, when he sent them out on a brief outreach in Matthew chapter 10. And at verse 26, Jesus says, Therefore do not fear them. Now, them refers to those in the immediate context who would criticize, persecute, and even kill them if they continue in their testimony faithful to the end.

He did say that some would be delivered up to death. He said that as people had called the master Jesus, they had called him Beelzebub, they would call them worse names than that and treat them more harshly. And of these who would persecute them, Jesus says, Therefore do not fear them.

For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light, and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul, but rather fear him who is able to destroy both the soul and the body in hell.

Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin, and not one of them falls to the ground apart from your father's will? But the very hairs of your head are numbered. Do not fear, therefore. You are of more value than many sparrows.

So Jesus here is, after he says that some of them will actually die and there will be great dangers attached to a faithful witness of Christ in a hostile world, he indicates that they should not be fearful but continue to be outright and upfront in their testimony. He says,

What I tell you in the dark, speak it in the light. That is, what I'm speaking to you privately, you go speak it publicly.

Now, it's not as if Jesus was afraid to go speak publicly because he spoke publicly too and got himself in big trouble. He eventually got himself crucified for doing so. But he was not afraid to speak publicly.

Nonetheless, he did have private conversations with his disciples where he told them things that he didn't say to the public. And he gave them the commission to speak publicly, whatever they heard from him, and not to fear those who would react harshly or bitterly, hostility, or even violently to it. Now he says, You preach that on the housetops, what you hear in the ear from me, and don't fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.

Now, he has already said earlier in verse 17, Beware of men, for they will, and then he gives a description of some of the persecutions they'll bring. Now he says, Beware of them, but here he says, Don't fear them. That's an interesting thing.

How can you beware and not fear? Well, beware means to be wary, to be cautious, to don't be foolish, don't take stupid risks, take precautions, but at the same time, don't be fearful. There are many people who think that if you foresee a danger and you take precautions, that you are exhibiting fear or worry. And some have actually even said that to prepare for some kind of future crisis that you can foresee coming is a violation of what Jesus taught about faith and trusting God and all of that.

Now Jesus, of course, did teach that we should trust God and we shouldn't be fearful or anxious for anything, but he did not say we should be stupid or that we should ignore the fact that there are times coming, in some cases they're foreseeable, where there might be special needs that we should prepare for. Jesus did not deny what the Old Testament teaches, that the ant is wise because it gathers in the summer food for its winter. That is a wise thing, and we're told in Proverbs that that is something for us to imitate.

There is nothing wrong with foreseeing the coming winter and saying, Well, my farm is not going to produce any crops during the winter and I'll still need to eat, so I'd better put some of the crops from the summer's harvest away so that my family can eat through the winter. Now is that worry? Is that fear? No, it is simply wisdom. You are not afraid of the winter so long as you can wisely take precautions.

Now it may be that it is out of something like fear of what would happen if you didn't take precautions that you actually do take the precautions, but that's the wisest kind of fear. That if God gives you foresight to know that a shortage is coming or that a time is coming where there may be an interruption or a shortage of something that you may otherwise be accustomed to needing, that for you to store some of that up is really just like what an ant does and what the ant is commended for. That doesn't mean that you're

being worried or fearful, it just means that you're being cautious.

Likewise, when it comes to people, fearing people, well, we are supposed to be aware of them. We're supposed to be cautious about people, not trust them more than they deserve to be trusted. At the same time, we shouldn't fear them.

We should be bold enough that even though we know men may wish to hate us and kill us and do more than that to us, we're not afraid to confront them with the truth and to continue to be faithful to our commission. That's what Jesus is saying to the disciples. You should be aware, you should know, you should be prepared to face confrontations with people like this, but don't be afraid of them.

Because why? He says, well, they can kill your body, but they cannot kill your soul. Now here, Jesus very plainly gives us a dichotomy of value. There is, in the teaching of Jesus, an element, among other things, where he teaches his disciples to change their accustomed value system.

We usually think, at least by nature, and society certainly affirms this, that the values we should seek are long life and good health and prosperity and security and all of those things. Therefore, we end up being overprotective and sometimes even overcautious about preserving our lives. And Jesus teaches the disciples, and he teaches us, that priority should be these, that we care very little about our natural lives since they are going to end one way or another anyway.

The day will come where we no longer live in these natural bodies and we will die or perhaps we'll be caught up to meet the Lord in the air if we happen to be living at the time of his coming. But in any case, we will leave behind the natural existence in favor of a supernatural existence that's forever. Now, to pass into this secondary realm of our eternal existence is not something to be feared.

As a matter of fact, it's the reward to which we are laboring and which we are looking forward to. And so, if people kill the body, they're not doing us any real harm if we are followers of Christ, because we are prepared. In fact, killing the body is simply the promotion or the transition into our reward and glory.

Now, you see, most people who are not Christians, and I'm sad to say many Christians, no doubt, have the same attitude, have nothing they want so much as to preserve their lives. They want to live long. But Jesus teaches that living long is not the ultimate goal and dying young is not the ultimate thing to be feared or avoided.

In fact, you shouldn't fear it at all. You should be happy that your soul is secure and when you die in the will of God, you will go to be with him forever and that's nothing to be feared. What you should fear is him who can kill the body and destroy the soul in Hades, Jesus said.

Now, there's a couple of things to consider about this statement. When Jesus said, fear him who is able to destroy both the soul and the body in hell, who is he speaking of? There are some Christians who believe that Jesus is talking about the devil. However, although the devil is a destroyer, there's no reason to believe that the devil is destroying people in hell, because Satan himself is going to be cast into the lake of fire and he's not going to be in a position to be destroying others at all.

He'll be himself and he'll have problems of his own. The one who is able to destroy the body and the soul in hell is God and to fear him is what Jesus said we should do. We should not fear man who can only kill us and do no more.

We should fear God who has our eternal destiny in his hands. Certainly, we should not think that Jesus is telling us to fear the devil. Far from it.

We are given authority over serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy and nothing shall by any means hurt you, Jesus said over in Luke chapter 10. But here he's talking about something else. He's talking about fearing God.

Do not fear those who persecute you. Fear God who has given you your commission. If there is a conflict, that is if those who persecute you wish to stop you from obeying God, well fear God more than you fear them.

Obey him rather than please them. Do not fear their wrath who can only kill you physically. Fear the wrath of God who can go far beyond physical death and consign you to eternal death in hell.

That's what Jesus is saying. Now, some people might think it strange that Jesus who taught us about the love of God would teach his disciples to fear God, to fear him who can kill the body and the soul in Hades. But it is not strange at all.

Actually, the fear of God is a concept which the Bible teaches from cover to cover. I shouldn't say cover to cover because I don't know that it's taught in Genesis chapter 1, but in the book of Genesis, we do find God being the one who is the fear of Isaac. That means the one that Isaac fears.

And that means he reverences. That means he worships him. And throughout the scriptures, we read that the fear of God is a good thing and that everyone ought to have it.

In fact, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and a person who doesn't fear God is just plain foolish, doesn't have any wisdom at all. So the fear of God is a concept that belongs both in the Old and the New Testament. Some people think that the fear of God would be natural enough in the Old Testament because we see such a wrath of God manifested so frequently in the Old Testament.

Certainly a God to be feared. But they also make the mistake of thinking that God is different in the New Testament and that the fear of God is out of place somehow in the New Testament. Well, if it is, Jesus was apparently not apprised of this because Jesus told us to fear God who can kill the body and destroy the soul in hell.

Furthermore, the apostle Paul knew the fear of God. In 2 Corinthians chapter 5, he said, knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men. That means we persuade men to become Christians because we know what it means to assess properly the terror or the fear of God.

Peter said in 1 Peter chapter 1 that we should pass the time of our sojourning here in fear. He said that in 1 Peter 1.17. And so the fear of the Lord is definitely a New Testament concept as well as an Old. And Jesus himself teaches that we should fear God because he says, God can do us more harm if we are not on his good side than men can do to us if we are not on theirs.

If it's a matter of pleasing God or pleasing men, the choice is a no-brainer. You please him whose displeasure would cost you the greatest. And certainly to have him, God, displeased with you and angry at you, he who can destroy you physically and then afterwards destroy you eternally is certainly more greatly to be feared and obeyed than man who might try to intimidate you from doing what God tells you to do.

This is what Jesus says here. Now the other thing that comes out in this statement that's of interest is that Jesus says that God is able to destroy both the soul and the body in hell. Now the idea of the body being destroyed is not impossible to imagine.

We all know of people who have died and their bodies are definitely destroyed. Their bodies are gone. They're dust and ashes.

But this idea that God is able to destroy the soul in hell raises interesting questions because many of us believe that the soul is indestructible. This is something that is particularly part of Greek philosophy that man has an indestructible immortal soul. This is one of the main reasons that people believe in a hell of eternal torment.

It's not so much that they believe that God somehow gets his kicks by tormenting people forever. The opposite is true. But rather that since people have immortal souls, they're indestructible.

They must spend eternity one place or another. If it's not heaven, then there's only one alternative and that's hell. On the other hand, what Jesus says may indicate that we don't have indestructible souls because he says that God is able to destroy both the soul and the body in hell.

So it may be that God is able to actually, and God does, in hell, destroy the souls of those who go there. Now this of course would play into the hands of those who espouse

a doctrine that's called annihilationism. And they believe that when people go to hell, they're not tormented forever.

They just get annihilated. They just are destroyed. Their soul is destroyed as well as their body.

And they don't have any continuing existence. Well, I don't have time to go into all of the arguments for and against this particular proposition. But I will say this, that even if the soul is destructible in hell, that does not mean that destruction would be immediate.

It does not mean that a person would not yet suffer a great deal in hell for a very long time if their sins require it before they would be destroyed. But it's also necessary to realize that the word destroy doesn't necessarily have to mean annihilated. For God to destroy one's soul does not necessarily mean that they are annihilated merely.

When Jesus said, do not fear those who can kill the body and cannot kill the soul, but fear him who is able to destroy both the soul and the body in hell, the destruction of the body need not mean annihilation. The body can be greatly ruined and even physically killed without being annihilated. Likewise, what the destruction of the soul may mean is somewhat nebulous.

We can't be sure that Jesus is referring to some kind of annihilation of the soul. And therefore we have to just assume that whatever he is describing that God is able to do to those who go to hell, he is saying this is greatly to be feared and avoided. And anybody who does not take Jesus seriously and does not take great pains to avoid that hell is ignoring the authority of Christ.

And Jesus didn't just say things in order to hear the sound of his own voice. He was not enamored with the sound of his own voice. He spoke to us because there were things we desperately needed to know.

And one of them is that we need to not care what man thinks about us. We need to care what God thinks about us. We need to be on God's side and make sure he's on ours.

Many people live their lives just assuming that God is on their side. But that assumption is not a safe one to make because the Bible indicates that not all are on his side. And who honor him, he will honor.

And those who do not honor him, he will not honor, the scripture teaches. So we need to live in the fear of God all the day long, as we're told many times in scripture to do. Now in verse 29 Jesus says, Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your father's will.

Now this copper coin that is referred to is in the Greek, Assyrion, which was basically a coin worth about an eighteenth of a denarius. Now a denarius was the amount of money

the common laborer earned in a day of working. And that day of working might be, let's say, a twelve hour day.

And an eighteenth of his day's wage, and what would that be? Maybe the wage of, what, a half or forty-five minutes? Was enough to purchase, as Jesus put it, two sparrows. He says, Are not two sparrows sold for one of these coins, a copper coin? And yet not one of them falls to the ground apart from your father's will. Now this tells us something about the way the economy of Israel in those days valued sparrows.

They were apparently available for sale, I assume for food. People eating sparrows, sort of uncommon idea to us. But apparently in the marketplace of Israel you could buy two sparrows for one of these copper coins.

Now one thing that's rather interesting is that when you read Luke chapter twelve and verse six, Jesus says that a person in those days could buy five sparrows for two copper coins. Now think about that a moment. You could buy two sparrows for one copper coin, or five sparrows for two copper coins.

What's that mean? It means that the way the merchants generally sold sparrows, they would sell you two for one price, and five for the price of four. If you paid for two couples, two pairs of them, you'd get a fifth sparrow thrown in in the deal. Now what's interesting about that is that that fifth sparrow was treated as something not even of any value to the merchant.

You buy four and I'll give you this fifth one for free. He's of that little value to me. And if that is true, then when Jesus said not one of these sparrows falls to the ground except for the will of your father, he's referring to all the sparrows, even the fifth one that was treated as worthless and was not valued at all by the merchant.

Yet even that sparrow does not fall to the ground unless the father wills it. That is, God is concerned about even that sparrow. God is paying attention to the needs and the fate of that sparrow, even though two may be purchased for one penny and five for two pennies.

Not one of them, even the fifth one that's thrown in as an incentive to buy more, that one even doesn't fall to the ground except through the will of God. What he's saying to his disciples, of course, is implied a little down further in verse thirty-one, do not fear therefore you are of more value than many sparrows. Now, if sparrows are so cheap and God pays attention to them and not even one of them dies without God's will and you're worth much more than they are, then it follows that you won't die apart from God's will.

God's attention is so great upon them, how much greater will his attention be to you? In fact, Jesus gives an example of how great God's attention is to us in verse thirty. He says, but the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Now, I'm not sure whether the

word numbered should mean counted, like God knows the total tally of how many hairs are on your head, or if it means that he's actually assigned a number to each one.

They're numbered, sort of like the stars are named. The scripture says twice, once in Isaiah and once in Psalms, that God gives names to all the stars. Well, there's billions of stars, but God has named each one.

And yet, all the hairs of your head, he's even given each of them a number. The hairs of your head are numbered. Now, it's interesting because you do not know how many hairs you have on your head, unless you're totally bald, in which case it's not too hard to figure it out.

But if you have a head of hair at all, even if you have a greatly receding hairline, you have more hairs than you could count, or more than you'd care to. And therefore, you don't know the details about yourself that God knows about you. God pays closer attention to you and to your needs than you pay to yourself.

He knows more about you. He not only knows how many hairs are on your head, he knows how many cells are in your body. He knows how many breaths you take when you're asleep.

He knows everything about you. And he values you far more than he values the animal creation. Sparrows, for example, which were very inexpensive and therefore not of great value in Israel, and yet God pays attention even to those animals that are of no consequence to man.

Yet God pays attention. There's not one animal that dies on this planet, but God allows it. It is his will that it happens.

Now, if that is true of sparrows, then how much more is it true of you? I do not believe that you can die, if you are a Christian at least. He's not talking to unbelievers. He's talking to disciples.

I don't believe that you as a disciple of Jesus Christ can possibly die apart from the will of the Father, just like a sparrow can't. And if that is true, then you can be fearless, because that means that when you die, it will be because God wanted you to, and it could not have been avoided even if you had compromised. So you might as well be faithful and bold and unfearing, even until death.

You may die, but you won't die without the will of the Father, and that's really all that matters. Being in the will of God, that's the whole concern for the dedicated Christian.