

Meeting With Christ

Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

Yves I-Bing Cheng, M.D., M.A.

Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

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FEAR NOT

Matthew 10:24-33

There is an expression that is reiterated over and over again in the Bible, both in the OT and in the NT. It is the expression ‘Fear not,’ or ‘Do not be afraid.’ In the gospels, ‘Fear not’ appears mostly in Matthew and in Luke. It is used by Jesus 3x in Matthew and 5x in Luke. In the gospel of Matthew, they all appear in the same passage. Let’s read this passage, Matthew 10:24-33.

Matthew 10:24. A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master.

25 It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household!

*26 Therefore **do not fear** them. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known.*

27 Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops.

*28 And **do not fear** those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*

29 Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will.

30 But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

*31 **Do not fear** therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.*

32 Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.

33 But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.

The fear of persecution

In this passage, the Lord Jesus speaks of three kinds of fear. He first says in v. 26 to His disciples, ‘Do not be afraid for nothing is covered that will not be revealed.’ What does that mean? Well, to understand this sentence, we have to read the previous sentence. Jesus says, *It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household!* The Lord Jesus was giving this warning. ‘Since you are going to be My disciples and you are going to follow Me, because they attack Me, they are going to attack you. You have to expect that they are going to say bad things about you in the same that they were saying bad things about Me.’ When Jesus was casting out demons by the power of God, His enemies were saying, ‘He is doing that by the power of the devil (Matthew 12:24).’

No disciple is above his master. If the Lord Jesus suffered persecutions, so will His disciples. All that He is and all that He stands for is what we are and what we stand for. And therefore, whatever caused men to persecute Jesus will also cause them to persecute us.

Here Jesus gives us a word of encouragement: Do not fear persecutors because the truth will someday be known. God will reveal the truth in the day of judgment, if not before. All the talk, abuse, wrong accusations, lies, and mistreatments inflicted upon believers will be handled by Christ. We can rest assured: The day is coming when the truth will be known. The secrets of all men will be stripped and unveiled for all to see. If we have confidence that God will reveal the truth, if we have faith that God will do this, then we will not fear what our persecutors say.

Many believers have suffered the damage of their character and reputation by men. They are not to fear those persecutors because they will be vindicated. What is hidden in the hearts and lives of men is known to God. If what was said about us was false, we can be sure that God will one day restore our reputation and character and see to it that we 'have the praise of God' (1Corinthians 4:5).

The fear of death

The second kind of fear is found in v. 28. It is the fear of death. Jesus says, 'Don't fear men who can kill only the body but fear God who is able to destroy both body and soul.' Man's power is limited. The worst that he can do is to kill the body. He cannot touch a person's soul. Men can only separate us from this world, not from life. We should remember that believers have eternal life. We have already passed from death to life and are in the process of living forever (John 5:24). We have eternal life in the sense that our life had been transferred from this world, the physical dimension of being, into the next world, the heavenly or spiritual dimension of being.

There is a remedy to keep us from fearing men who threaten our life: God. God is to be feared much more than men because He has the power to destroy us, both body and soul. So the contrast is between the total and final destruction in hell and the limited nature of merely physical death. And the argument is this: Compared with the fate which awaits the unbeliever, physical death is a far less fearful prospect.

The fear of injuries

The third kind of fear is the fear of getting hurt. In v. 29, the Lord 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.* Here is the picture of a sparrow that is wounded, hurt, and it falls to the ground. People used to eat sparrows. They could buy them in any marketplace in Jerusalem. They were very cheap. You could get two sparrows for a penny. They were mostly bought and eaten by poor people. But how did these birds get to the market? They were snared or shot with a stone (guns did not exist in those days). And of course, in the process of catching them, the sparrows would most likely be hurt.

So the point here is that there is an injury which causes pain and hurt. People are afraid to get hurt, and that's a normal reaction. Here again, the Lord Jesus says, 'Don't be afraid about that. You have nothing to worry about because God loves you.' God knows all the events and happenings on earth, even to the most minute detail. He knows when a single sparrow falls to the ground. He knows every hair of a person's head, even the number of hair. If God is so concerned for the sparrows that not one falls to the ground without His consent, how much more is He concerned about the most trifling details about each of us who are worth more to Him than sparrows, who are the crown of His creation? God is able to take all the injuries and pain of a believer and work them all out for his good. He can give purpose, meaning and significance to everything that happens to a person.

Fear and faith are incompatible

Now in the Bible, fear and faith are mutually exclusives. Fear is the opposite of belief. Believing God eliminates fear. When we believe that God is good and that He is in control of all the events and happenings on earth, the believer is not to fear. He puts his trust in the love and care of God.

Let's look at a few instances in the Bible where faith stands in opposition to fear. Take for example Mark 5:36. Jesus says this: *Do not be afraid; only believe.* 'Don't fear. Just have faith in Me.' Here, a leader of a synagogue came to Jesus and pleaded with Him to come heal his daughter who was very sick. But before Jesus could see the little girl, some men brought the news of her death. Imagine how Jairus felt at that moment. Now it was too late. All hope was gone. But for Jesus, the situation was very different. He said to Jairus, 'Don't be fearful and despairing. Just believe that I'm able to restore her to life.' Jesus made it clear to Jairus that in the face of the disaster that had hit him, he must have faith. *Only believe.* Keep up a confidence in Christ, and dependence upon Him, and He will do what is for the best. If we can believe that God's power has no limit and that He loves us, what is there to fear? Faith dispels fear. The more you have faith, the less you will be fearful. So faith stands opposed to fears and doubting, as well as to all trust and confidence in other object besides Christ.

The same observation can be made in Matthew 8:26 where Jesus said to His disciples, *Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?* You will remember that in this passage, Jesus was in a boat with His disciples. Then a terrible storm appeared suddenly. While the waves swept over the boat, Jesus was sleeping. The disciples woke Him up, shouting, 'We are going to drown. Save us!' To our surprise, Jesus said to them, 'Why are you so afraid, you of little faith?' This reply implies that the disciples ought not to have been afraid. Instead, they should have trusted Him. It was because of their lack of faith that the disciples feared that they were about to drown, and it was for their lack of faith that they were rebuked by Jesus. So here again we see that fear is an expression of unbelief.

The apostle John has it in those terms: *There is no fear in love* (1John 4:18). Fear has no place in love. These two, fear and love, are in fact as incompatible as oil and water. *But perfect love casts out fear.* And then John goes on to point to the source of that perfect love in v. 19: *We love Him because He first loved us.* Fear is cast out by the perfect love of God. The solution to fear is not a change in circumstances (even though it can provide a temporary relief) but a deep grounding in the love of God. This is where faith comes in. The more we trust God's love and care, the more fear is conquered in our lives. The reason is seen in the promises of God. God loves us so much that He will take care of us through all the trials and temptation of life, no matter what they are. If we believe that, if we truly abide in the Father's love, it follows that our soul will know no fear.

Facing our fear

This being said, we have to recognize that the experience of fear is common among all men, even if we are Christians. In fact, I will go as far as to say that in this life, fear will always coexist with faith, for in the presence of certainty who would need faith at all? Without an element of risk, there is no faith. And the risk can sometimes be scary.

Now the point is not to eliminate our fear. Feelings cannot be eliminated. They appear regardless of our will. However, even though we cannot control fear, we can learn to channel it in ways that make fear more likely to be nourishing than toxic to our spiritual life. The believer who honestly confronts his fear will often find himself growing into a faith that overcomes his fear. He comes to a point where he is able to say that God deserves his trust, no matter how things appear at the time, no matter how scary the situation seems to be.

The crucial issue that faces every Christian who endures a great trial can be summarized in these two questions: Will I trust God with my pain, my weakness, and my fear? Or will I turn away from Him in bitterness and anger? Jesus encourages us to trust Him in spite of our pain and fear, in spite of our incomplete understanding of the will of God. And He tells us why we should trust Him.

Because we have confidence in God

Three times in Matthew 10 Jesus said, 'Fear not.' He is telling us that we should not be troubled in the midst of difficulties. We should be prepared for trouble instead of being frightened by it. This fearlessness comes when we truly trust God, when we have a strong faith in Him. And here Jesus teaches us that a strong faith is founded in three things.

Firstly, as we see in v. 26, faith is founded in the justice of God. People may slander me. People may tell lies about me. I can take it without fear because I have confidence in God's justice. My faith is confident in God's justice. I know that He will reveal the truth and that He will vindicate those who walk in the truth. Even if the truth is hidden now, it will someday be known.

Secondly, faith is founded in the power of God. Here we read in v. 28, 'Don't be afraid of man. His power is limited. He can only kill the body. But be afraid of God because His power is unlimited. He can kill both body and soul.' The power to destroy the soul is God's power alone. Faith is confident in God's power. Therefore we are not to fear men.

And thirdly, we see that faith is founded in the love of God. We read in v. 31, 'God cares for the common sparrows. If He cares for a bird, imagine how much He cares for you who are much more valuable to Him than sparrows. He loves you so much that He is concerned about every hair on your head.' He cares for every event, every detail, even the most minute matter in a person's life. Therefore there is no need to fear. In the Sermon on the mount, the Lord Jesus used the same argument. You are evil and you know how to love your children. Then how much more is God, who is good, going to love you who are His children.

So faith is absolutely confident about three things concerning God. It is confident about God's justice. It is confident about God's power to save. And it is confident about God's love for us. When we have that kind of faith, what is left for us to fear?

Fear God

But there is one thing we need to fear in this life. There is only one thing that frightens the man of faith. Do you know what it is? It is the fear that Christ does not acknowledge you on that day, that Jesus denies you on the day of judgment, when He says, 'Depart from Me, you evil doers. I don't know who you are.' This kind of fear is called the fear of God. This is a reverential fear in which we stand in awe because of who God is: Holy, righteous, pure, just. We fear God in the sense that we stand in reverence of God who will reveal His holiness and execute His justice in some future day of judgment.

And so in vv. 32-33, the Lord Jesus says, *Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.* To confess Jesus is to publicly declare our allegiance to Jesus and to acknowledge our dependence on Him for salvation. I am not afraid of what people who persecute me think of me. What Jesus thinks of me, that is all that counts. When we stand for Jesus in tough situations, Jesus promises that He will reciprocate in a marvelous way. He will stand up for us before the Father now and at the final judgment.

This shows that faith looks into the future. Faith looks at eternal realities. The people who criticize you today will pass away. The people who kill you will die. Everything in this world will pass away. But Jesus never passes away. God is eternal and faith sees that. That is why I am not afraid to suffer persecution for Christ. Faith takes hold of that which concerns eternity. It is concerned with only one thing: to stand up for Jesus, no matter what people think about me or do to me.

The importance of a living relationship with Jesus

The person who fails to acknowledge Jesus is actually denying Him. Christ can be denied in one of these three ways. We can deny Jesus by word. What we say with our lips either confesses or denies that Christ is our Lord. We can deny Jesus by act. How we behave either confesses or denies Christ. We can deny Jesus by silence. We have to remember that failure to speak up for Christ to protest against evil denies Jesus.

And when we deny Jesus, He will deny us. He will tell us that He never knew us, for to be denied is to be excluded from fellowship with Him. This warning reinforces the previous warning in v. 28 that there is a worse fate than human persecution, i.e., to be repudiated by Jesus Himself before the Father. So man must choose which allegiance he wants, whether it is to man in this life or to Jesus for eternity.

Here Jesus makes the astounding declaration that each person's standing before God is based on his relationship to Christ and that Jesus Himself stands in the role of arbiter of a man's ultimate destiny. Jesus is the advocate whose intercession before God will depend on one's faithfulness in confessing Him. Notice that this teaching is found in the middle of a missionary sermon to Jesus' disciples (not to outsiders). Even Christians need to know that their justification depends upon the reality of their living relation to Jesus.

Let's conclude by saying this. Fear is an inhibiting and enslaving feeling. The NT letters give us the real ground for overcoming fear: Christ Himself. Believe in Jesus Christ and you will not fear because you have security in Him. In the Bible, the Christian is constantly confronted by the task of overcoming the motive of fear by that of faith. To have faith is to be free from fear. Therefore, have faith and fear not.