

THE MESSIAH'S ENCOURAGEMENT NOT TO FEAR PERSECUTION MATHEW 10:24–33

Introduction

Believers are often persecuted. They are bypassed, shunned, withdrawn from, isolated, talked about, ridiculed, mocked, considered strange and joked about. The persecution can go even farther, involving physical abuse and murder, depending on the society and the laws under which the believer lives. This passage is a great encouragement to the believer in facing persecution. Christ said three times, “Do not be afraid” (vv. 26, 28, 31). He was encouraging His disciples not to fear persecution. They must expect persecution, for He Himself was persecuted.

- I. Do not ignore persecution (vv. 24-25).
- II. Do not fear persecutors (vv. 26-27).
- III. Do not fear men who kill the body (v. 28).
- IV. Do not fear, for God cares (vv. 29-31).
- V. Do not deny Christ: loyalty is essential (vv. 32-33).

I. *Mathew 10:24–25 Do Not Ignore Persecution*

The fact of persecution.

1. There is the warning: the disciple is not above persecution. No disciple is above his master; no servant is above his lord. The Lord suffered persecution, so will the disciple. The disciple must expect persecution, for he shall be persecuted even as his Lord was persecuted.

Thought 1. It is impossible for a disciple to be above his master or for a servant to be above his lord. If our Master and Lord has suffered persecution, so shall we. Why? He is our Master and Lord; that is, we are His. We belong to Him. All that He is and all that He stands for is what we are and what we stand for. Whatever caused men to persecute Him, *the same is in us*. They will persecute us for the same thing and for the same reason they persecuted Him.

2. There is the privilege of persecution. The believer shares in the sufferings of Christ. Note the words, “It is enough.” God has done enough for the believer. He has exalted the believer to an unbelievable height. The believer is now *just like his Master and his Lord*. God has accepted the believer as an *equal* to His own dear Son (Rom. 8:16-17; Gal. 4:4-7; Eph. 1:5-6).

What does this mean? It means that persecution is a privilege. When we are persecuted we are walking in the highest and most noble company possible — the company of God’s dear Son.

Thought 1. Imagine! We are *called* by God's very own Son, the Master and Lord of the universe. To have God's very own Son as our Master and Lord is the highest privilege imaginable. Thus, it is a high privilege to suffer for Him. No higher call could come to a man. Christ calls us to live righteously in a world that does not want righteousness. The fact that the world reacts against us does not do away with our high calling. It only enhances our call and sets it even higher. The *evil* behaviour of the world shows just how precious and how greatly to be desired our high calling is.

Phil 1:29 *For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him. (see Acts 5:41-9:16; Rom 8:17; Heb 11:25)*

Thought 2. Living righteously in a world that does not want righteousness assures persecution.

2 Tim 3:12 *In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. (See Mat 5:10-12)*

3. There is the surety: believers are more likely to suffer persecution than Christ was.

Some believers must expect harsh persecution just as Christ suffered (1 Pet. 4:11-12). Note the words, "the members of His household." We are of His household. If the Master and Lord was abused. His disciples and servants will be abused. If the world dragged the Master out to kill Him, they will drag the servant out to be killed. Whatever the world did to the Master of the house, they will do to us. Christ was persecuted terribly. They called Him Beelzebub, the god of flies and filth, the name given to describe the chief of devils (see Mk. 3:22-23). Consider three things.

- a. The terrible wickedness of some men: to be so encrusted in wickedness that they curse the Son of God.
- b. The unbelievable patience and forbearance of Christ: that He would allow Himself to be cursed and abused.
- c. The strong lesson for us: no matter how severe the persecution, Christ has gone before us. He is our forerunner; He has already suffered the depth of indignity and ridicule.

Heb 12:3 *Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (see Heb 2:17-18, 4:15-16)*

II. **Mathew 10: 26–27 Do Not Fear Persecution**

The first word of encouragement is this: do not fear persecutors. There are two major points in this statement of encouragement.

1. The truth shall be revealed: *the truth* will someday be known. God will reveal *the truth* in the day of judgment, if not before.

- a. The cloak that the persecutors put upon their evil will be stripped off. The truth of their evil will be revealed. It will no longer be able to be disguised. Their true character will be revealed by God and shown to all who stand in that day.
- b. The cloak that the world puts upon the believer's witness will be stripped away in that day. God will reveal the truth of the believer's witness. His testimony will be vindicated, and the persecution will be seen to have been but "light and momentary troubles" in comparison to "eternal glory" that will be ours (2 Cor. 4:17).
- c. The cloak that the world puts upon the gospel will be stripped away in that day. God will reveal that the gospel is true, and true in its entirety. The gospel will be vindicated. It will be seen and known to have been true.

The believer is not to fear what his persecutors say. He can rest assured: the day is coming when the truth will be known. The accusations, the talk, the dislikes, the cloaks, the disguises, the secrets of all men shall be stripped and unveiled for all to see (Rom. 2:2, 6, 11, 16).

Thought 1. Note three lessons.

- (1) Believers will be vindicated. All the talk and abuse inflicted upon believers will be handled by Christ. The shunning, sneering, isolation, coldness, ugliness, abuse and mistreatment by neighbours, fellow employees, church members and carnal believers — all will be dealt with by God. Christ is emphatic; He speaks to the point: "Fear not persecutors: the truth is to be revealed" and dealt with.
 - (2) We are not to fear the damage of our *character and reputation* by men. What is really in our hearts and lives — what we really are despite all our shortcomings and failures and sins — is known to God. He is going to deliver and vindicate us. He is going to restore our reputation and character and see to it that we "have [the] praise of God" (1 Cor. 4:5). Therefore, we are not to fear persecutors.
 - (3) Many believers are made *spectacles* by unbelievers both within the church and the world. But the day is coming when the truth is to be known.
 - a) The true believer will be exalted with an "eternal glory" (2 Cor. 4:17).
 - b) The true believer will "have his praise from God" (1 Cor. 4:5).
 - c) The true believer will "shine like the sun in the kingdom of [his] Father" (Mt. 13:43).
2. The message must be preached. The meaning of this verse is full of meaning for the messenger of Christ. Note the words, "What *I tell you* in the dark...What is whispered *in your ear*." Christ is saying three things.
 - a. Christ gives the message that He wants proclaimed. Christ says that it is "what I tell you" that the messenger is to hear and proclaim.
 - b. Christ gives His message in the quietness of being alone with His messenger. It is "in the dark...in the ear" that Christ gives His message to the messenger. That is, Christ

gives His message when the messenger gets all alone and draws close to the Lord in prayer and study of the Word.

c. The messenger is to proclaim the message “from the roofs.” Two things are meant by this.

=> The message is urgent. It is to be proclaimed loud and clear for all to hear.

=> The message is to be buzzed about, always shared and proclaimed. In the day of Christ, people sat upon their roofs (flat roofs) in the quiet of the evening and buzzed about with conversation. This is the picture Christ is painting for His disciples.

Mark 16:15 *He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”*

Luke 9:60 *Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”*

Acts 5:20 *“Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people the full message of this new life.”*

III. **Mathew 10:28 Do Not Fear Men**

The second word of encouragement is this: do not fear men who kill the body. We are not to fear men (persecutors), but to fear God. The reason is simple and understandable: men can kill only the body; God can destroy both body and soul “*in hell*” (see *Destroy*, Mt. 10:28; *Hell Fire*, Mt. 5:22).

There are several reasons why men are not to be feared.

1. Men can kill only the body, not the soul. Their power is limited, and they can go no further. They cannot touch a person's soul, a person's real being.
2. Men can only send us out of this world, not out of heaven. “To be with Christ...is better by far” (Ph. 1:23; 3:20-21).
3. Men can only separate us from this world, not from life. We have eternal life; death is not part of the experience of the believer. The believer does not *taste* death. Christ *tasted*, that is, experienced death for the believer (Heb. 2:9). The believer has already passed from death to life and is in the process of living forever (Jn. 5:24). He is merely transferred from this world, the physical dimension of being, into the next world, the heavenly or spiritual dimension of being (see Tim. 4:18).
4. Men can only cut us off from worldly men and the earthly redeemed, not from the love of God and the saints in glory.

Rom 8:35 *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? (see vv 36-39; Prov 29:25; Isa 51:12)*

Thought 1. Fearing men causes several things.

- (1) It causes a person to become disturbed within heart and mind: the loss of peace.
- (2) It causes a person to lose his fervour and his sense of commitment.
- (3) It causes a person to be sidetracked and to give up what he knows to be God's will: the loss of mission and meaning and purpose.

Thought 2. There are two primary reasons why we should not fear men and persecution.

- (1) God has given us a great and glorious cause: to reach men for Christ. Very practically, some men do not want to be reached; therefore they rebel and react and become our persecutors. But some do want to be saved. The fact that they are saved to live forever is so glorious that it is worth whatever suffering we have to bear.
- (2) God has given us a great hope (see thoughts, Mt. 10:26-27).

Thought 3. There is a remedy to keep us from fearing men: God. God is to be feared (see *Destroy*, Mt. 10:28).

- (1) God can destroy us, both body and soul, and put both "in hell" (see *Hell Fire*, Mt. 5:22). The word "destroy" does not mean that our body and soul would cease to exist but that they would live a worthless existence — be ruined and suffer in ruin forever (see *Destroy*, Mt. 10:28).
- (2) Christ was speaking to believers in this passage. God is to be feared much more and much sooner than men. The terror of men pales into insignificance in comparison to God's terror. Imagine this one fact alone: man's terror is but for a short time, but God's terror is *forever*. It never ends. The point is clear: before caving in to man's persecution, we need to remember the "fear of God."
- (3) The destruction of the soul comes from God, not from man. The power to destroy the soul is God's power alone. How fearful we need to be of God, even we who are believers! (See *Destroy*, Mt.10:28.)

1 Pet 4:18 And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

MATHEW 10:28 DESTROY (APOLEIA)

*"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.
Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell."
Mathew 10:28*

Loss of one's *well-being* (not loss of one's being), waste, ruin, worthless existence. To "destroy both body and soul in hell" does not mean that a person would cease to exist,

but that he would live a worthless existence. It means the loss of a person's well-being, not his being. It means that he would suffer waste and ruin forever and ever. □

MATHEW 10:28 AFRAID, FEAR (PHOBOS; VERB: PHOBEO)

“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”
Mathew 10: 28

Fear, dread, terror. In relation to God, it means to be afraid; to show reverence, to sense a reverential fear; to stand in awe because of a holy fear. It means we fear God because He is God: holy, righteous, pure, just. It means that we fear and stand in awe and reverence of God who shall reveal His holiness and execute His justice in some future day of judgment. □

MATHEW 05:22 HELL FIRE OR GEHENNA (GEENNA)

“But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.” **Mathew 05:22**

The word is used eleven or twelve times in the New Testament, and in every case it is spoken by Jesus except in the Epistle of James. It illustrates the terrible truth of the second death, of man's final separation from God. Jesus pointed to the burning, repulsive rubbish dump outside the city limits of Jerusalem and said that it was exactly what hell was like. The dump was called Gehenna. It was in the Valley of Hinnom which served as a public incinerator. Hanging over it was a layer of thick, smoldering smoke arising from what seemed to be an eternal flame. The smell and filth became a breeding cesspool for a loathsome worm that was difficult to kill (Mk. 9:44). Thus, Jesus found in Gehenna a description of just what it means to be separated from God eternally and to die the second death. Several facts are said about hell or Gehenna:

- It is the same as the lake of fire, a place of torture (Rev. 19:20; 20:10, 14-15).
- It has to do with the second death (Rev. 21:8; Jn. 8:24).
- It is Hell (Mt. 5:29-30; 10:28; 23:15, 33; Lk. 12:5).
- It is eternal fire (Mt. 18:8).
- It is the fire of Hell (Mt. 18:9; Jas. 3:6).
- It is unquenchable fire (Mk. 9:43-49).

The teaching of Jesus should always be remembered. Remembrance is critical in determining a person's fate. Hell is a definite place, a real place that is specifically located. It was originally prepared for the devil and his angels. But all men who choose to follow self and evil and to reject God shall also be sent to hell eternally.

Mat 3:10 *"The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."*

Mat 5:29-30 *"If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell."*

Mat 7:19 *"Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."*

Mat 10:28 *"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell."*

Mat 11:23 *"And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day."*

Mat 13:42, 50 *"They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth... And throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

Mat 16:18 *"And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."*

Mat 18:8-9 *"If your hand or your foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell."*

Mat 23:15 *"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites: You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are."*

Mat 23:33 *"You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?"*

Mat 25:41 *"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'"*

Mark 9:43-48 *“If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.”*

Luke 3:9 *“The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”*

Luke 10:15 *“And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths.”*

Luke 12:5 *“But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.”*

Luke 16:23-24 *“In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’” □*

IV. Mathew 10: 29–31 God Loves and Cares for Man

The third word of encouragement is this: do not fear, for God cares. Christ is clear: if God cares for the common sparrow, how much more He cares for man! He cares for every event, every detail, even the most minute matter in a man's life. Therefore, there is no need to fear.

1 Pet 5:7 *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*

Psa 115:12 *The LORD remembers us and will bless us: He will bless the house of Israel, he will bless the house of Aaron.*

Thought 1. There is something very precious here, yet there is a revelation of power as well.

- (1) There is a preciousness in the thought that every sparrow — no matter how common or forgotten or ignored — is very dear to God.
- (2) There is power and care in that God knows every single sparrow on the earth. Not a single sparrow falls that He is unaware of. The idea is that the injury to the sparrow causes pain and hurt which He feels.

Thought 2. Christ is pointing out five powerful yet precious facts.

- (1) God's providence: God sees, knows, cares and oversees all the events and happenings on earth — just as He knows all about the little sparrow that is so common and forgotten.

- (2) God's knowledge (omniscience): God knows every little happening and all that is, 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 hairs.
- (3) God's power (omnipotence): God is able to control the persecution and events that happen to the believer, no matter how detailed and minute. He can control and work them out for good to such an extent that there is no need for the believer to fear.
- (4) God's love and care: God cares about every hurt inflicted upon the believer by persecutors, even to the most minute injury and hurt. The believer is not to fear but to put His trust in the love and care of God (1 Pet. 5:7).
- (5) God's purpose: God is able to take all the injuries and pain inflicted by the sin and shame of men and work them all out for the good of the believer. He is able to give purpose, meaning and significance to it all (Rom. 8:28f). Therefore the believer is not to fear.

Thought 3. The believer is of much more value than many sparrows, for he is God's adopted son (see *Adoption*, Gal. 4:5-6). Just as God has His eye on the sparrow, He has His watchful eye on His "dearly loved children" (Eph. 5:1).

GALATIANS 04: 05–06 ADOPTION

To redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who called out, "Abba, Father." Galatians 04:05-06

The word *rights* or *adoption* (huiothesia) means *to place as a son*. The picture of adoption is a beautiful picture of what God does for the Christian. In the ancient world the family was based on a Roman law called "patria potestas," the father's power. The law gave the father absolute authority over his children so long as the father lived. He could work, enslave, sell, and if he wished, he could pronounce the death penalty. Regardless of the child's adult age, the father held all power over personal and property rights.

Therefore, adoption was a serious matter. Yet, it was a common practice to ensure that a family would not become extinct – by having no male children. And when a child was adopted, three legal steps were taken.

1. The adopted son was adopted permanently. He could not be adopted today and disinherited tomorrow. He became a son of the father – forever. He was eternally secure as a son.
2. The adopted son immediately had all the rights of a legitimate son in the new family.

3. The adopted son completely lost all rights in his old family. The adopted son was looked upon as a new person – so new that old debts and obligations connected with his former family were cancelled out and abolished as if they never existed.

The Bible says several things about the believer's adoption as a son of God.

1. The believer's adoption establishes a new relationship with God – forever. He is eternally secure as a child of God. But the new relationship is established only when a person comes to Christ through faith (Gal. 3:26; 4:4-5).
2. The believer's adoption establishes a new relationship with God as father. The believer has all the rights and privileges of a genuine son of God (Rom. 8:16-17; 1 Jn. 3:1-2).
3. The believer's adoption establishes a new dynamic experience with God as father, a moment by moment access into His very presence (Rom. 8:14, 16; Gal. 4:6).
4. The believer's adoption gives him a very special relationship with other children of God – a family relationship that binds him with others in an unparalleled spiritual union (See Eph. 2:11-18; 2:19-22; 3:6; 4:4-6; 4:17-19. See Acts 2:42; Mt. 12:46-50.)
5. The believer's adoption makes him a new person. The believer has been taken out from under the authority and power of the world and its sin. The believer is *placed as a son* into the family and authority of God. The old life with all of its debts and obligations are cancelled and wiped out (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 3:23-27; 2 Pet. 1:4; Eph. 4:22; 4:24.)
6. The believer's adoption is to be fully realized in the future at the return of Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:19; Eph. 1:14; 1 Th. 4:14-17; 1 Jn. 3:2).
7. The believer's adoption and its joy will be shared by all creation on a cosmic scale (Rom. 8:21). There is to be a new heavens and earth (2 Pet. 3:12-14; Rev. 21:1-7). □

V. *Mathew 10: 32–33 Loyalty is Essential*

The conclusion is that loyalty is essential. Note a crucial point: Christ is talking about confessing Him in the most difficult moment imaginable – while being persecuted. We are sometimes called upon to confess Christ by those who reproach, sneer, mock, curse, question, slander, abuse and avoid us because of our witness for Christ.

Mark 8:38 *“If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.”*

Rom 10:9 *That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

2 Pet 2:1 *But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them – bringing swift destruction on themselves.*

1 John 2:22-23 *Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist – he denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.*

Thought 1. Note three double things here.

- (1) There is a double confession: our confession of Christ before men, and the Lord's confession of us before His Father.
- (2) There is a double day of glory: the Lord's day of glory when He hears us confess His name before men, and our day of glory when we hear Him confess our name before His Father.
- (3) There is a double privilege: our privilege in confessing the Lord before men, and the Lord's privilege in confessing us before His Father.

Thought 2. Christ can be denied or disowned in three ways:

- (1) We can deny Christ by word. Our words either confess or deny Christ. Our ordinary conversation either witnesses for Christ and righteousness or for evil and unrighteousness. Our words either confess or deny that Christ is our Lord.
- (2) We can deny Christ by act. How we behave either confesses or denies Christ. We are not to be conformed to the world but transformed by the renewing of our mind (Rom. 12:1-2; see 2 Cor. 6:17-18; 1 Jn. 2:15-16).
- (3) We can deny Christ by silence. Failing to speak up for Christ to protest evil denies Christ. Silence is probably the greatest denial of Christ committed by believers.

Thought 3. Denying Christ is the most dangerous thing we can do. Why?

- (1) Because there is a day coming when we will need Christ to confess us before God.
- (2) Because Christ has already foretold what He will do if we deny Him: He will deny us. He will tell the truth – He never knew us (Mt. 7:23; 25:41). ■