

# Psalms 10:16-33

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 13 September 2015

Preacher: Paul Levy

[0:00] Matthew 10. There is so much fear in the world, isn't there? So much. Because there are a lot of reasons to fear.

! And so as you know tonight, there are Christian brothers and sisters right now, fearing for their lives in a certain part of the world. In some parts of the world, people fear not having enough food to live on. Some people in the world fear not having enough food to eat tomorrow.

In thousands of homes across the world, women fear their husbands, and children their father, and what he would do if he gets angry. And there is no shortage of men who fear their wives, their children, their mothers.

Many fear loneliness. People, perhaps all of us, fear rejection. People fear disaster and danger.

People fear death. People fear loss and sickness.

People fear depression and failure. People fear the future. People fear public speaking. We could go on and on, couldn't we? There is so much fear in the world, so much.

[1:16] And it's not just out there, is it? And it's also in here. And many of the things that I've just mentioned will be present realities for many of us. We don't just hear words like loss and sickness and depression and failure.

We don't hear just those words with a kind of sense of detached curiosity. Rather, they trigger, or they can trigger, a surge of anxiety in our own hearts. And there's so much fear within us, isn't there? So much.

And when we stop and think about it, it's quite overwhelming. It's quite striking. It is hard, I think, to imagine a world without fear. It's hard to imagine how our lives would be without fear.

As you contemplate it, it sort of feels foreign. What would it be like if we could eradicate fear? Now, of course, there's such a thing, isn't there, as a healthy fear which you never want to eradicate.

And the sort of fear that keeps a small child from, who can't swim, from jumping in the deep end of the pool. Or a driver, from driving around corners at high speed without a seatbelt on.

[2:28] But putting that to one side, what about those fears that aren't actually protecting us from danger? But nevertheless, they do distract us and they drain us. And in some cases, they grip us and they change us.

What if we could be done with all of that? Wouldn't it be great to live in a world where there was much less fear? Well, that's what we're going to think about tonight. And we're going to look at Matthew 10, verses 26 to 31.

Where Jesus speaks a lot about fear. And it's very instructive to us. Now, let me try and remind you of the context of where we're at in Matthew.

Because the context alerts us to Jesus' reason to be afraid. Matthew 10, Jesus sends out his disciples to the lost sheep of Israel.

Where they were sent to extend the ministry of Jesus himself by doing his works and proclaiming his word. And Jesus warns them, he says, it's not going to be easy. We're going to encounter some serious opposition along the way.

[3:28] In fact, since their ministry is an extension of Jesus' ministry, you shouldn't expect to be treated any differently from how Jesus is. So as verse 24 says, A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master.

And the critical line comes in verse 16. He says that I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. He says that he's sending them out as sheep amongst wolves. That is why they're going to have to be shrewd.

And they're going to have to be on their guard. Their opponents, wolves to use Jesus' term, will arrest them, you see that, interrogate them, flog them, and they'll be betrayed by the people that

they love.

They will be hated by some of them, and they'll be put to death. It's not a very cheery picture. Certainly a picture that would present the disciples with many reasons to be afraid. But in the face of those reasons supplied by Jesus himself, Jesus commands them to be fearless.

Start of verse 26. So don't be afraid of them. And then is the hostile opponents, the wolves. Don't be afraid of them. And he reiterates the command twice, verse 28.

[ 4 : 31 ] And do not fear. And then in verse 31, fear not. Three times he makes that command. Jesus tells his disciples that they must not fear.

They must go on bravely proclaiming the gospel. And that is what he's saying in verse 27. The things you've heard from Jesus, even in private, make them public. They should shout it out from the rooftops.

And though the message may be unpopular in the extreme, they should keep speaking. And they should do so even in the face of death. Now I hope you've noticed what an outrageous thing Jesus is saying.

He's just finished telling them that the opposition they face is going to be so severe, that some of them are going to lose their lives. And then he says, but don't worry about it.

It's as if he's saying, don't be scared, it's only death. It's only death. Don't be scared. And it really does sound that ridiculous.

[ 5 : 30 ] But of course, this teacher hears his name. This is the germinating seed. This is the seed that becomes a fully grown tree in the years to come. This will mark the attitude of death.

It becomes a hallmark of the Christian faith. You read the writing of the Apostle Paul's here. And Jesus speaks at this point and beyond. In the world, people tend to talk like death is the reality most to be avoided.

It's ironic, isn't it? That none of us will avoid it in the end. But in the world, people say things like this. They say, well, at least you've got your health. The thinking is, things may be very bad on many fronts, but as long as you're not on death's store, well, you're alright.

Christians don't see death that way, because Jesus did not see death that way. Christian knew that, every Christian knows that there are realities to be avoided, that are far more fearsome than death.

So it's quite possible for a Christian to say, don't be scared. It's only death. In fact, this is what Jesus commands you.

[ 6 : 37 ] Don't be afraid of their opponents, and do not be afraid of death when it counts. But you need to notice that you are far more than Jesus. Don't let sleep at this point.

You are far more than Jesus than simply a command not to fear. Alright. It's the other thing he says, that's the reason in the end for me choosing this passage to focus on. So in these verses, there's not just a fearlessness that God commands, but there is also a fear that Jesus commands.

There are my two points. I'm not really sure what one finishes and one starts. So I'll give you them now. A fearlessness that God commands, and a fear that God commands. That's point two.

So look at verse 28. The logic is fascinating. So, he says, do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both body and soul in hell.

As I've mentioned, that is a comment on death. But hell is far more worthy of our fear than death. It is far better. Far, far better. You hear this?

[ 7 : 41 ] It's far better to die young, and be safe in the judgment, than to live a ripe old age, and find yourself in hell. Do you believe that? But there's also more than that here.

Because Jesus isn't just saying hell is scarier than death, you notice. He's saying that, he's saying the people that can kill you, the people that can kill you, they are much less to be feared than the one who can destroy the soul and body in hell.

Jesus is talking about who we should fear. And Jesus is commending the fear of the Lord. And it would seem as a very close connection between the fearlessness he commands, and the fear that he commands.

And it seems that Jesus thinks that the more we fear God, the less we are likely we are to fear those who can only kill us. And that is why the really crucial thing to see in this paragraph is the reasoning behind Jesus' logic.

As I reflect on these verses, there are three things, why Jesus thinks that his disciples don't need to be afraid. Number one, Jesus wants his disciples to grasp that those who oppose him will come to judgment.

[ 8 : 47 ] That's the intent of verse 26. Where Jesus reminds us that one day all this hostility and experience will be seen to what it is. One day God is going to bring everything to light.

In his impeccable righteousness. One day there will be accountability for all people and perfect justice. But I think it's also the point, in verse 28, he's telling his disciples that though the wolves seem strong and they seem irresistible right now, in reality their God is stronger.

And one day, his irresistible justice will fall. The apostles' opponents may put them to death, but death is all they've got.

Once they've killed you, there's nothing the opponents of the gospel can do. They've fired all their ammunition. And they can take your body, but they cannot take your soul. Not so with God.

Because on the other side of death, all must face him. And he holds the power to punish his opponents in hell, are fate unimaginably worse than death.

[ 9 : 55 ] And that's the first reason not to fear other people. Because other people are weak compared to God. And the proper fear of God will put their opponents, well, it'll show them up, won't it?

Against the incomparable strength of God. And when you see something of the power of God, you see that their opposition will be seen for, well, what is it? It's a pathetic little rebellion.

That's what it is. So Jesus reminds his apostles of God's strong judgment. That's the first thing.

Secondly, Jesus reminds his disciples of God's strong fatherhood. Can you see that?

That's verses 29 and 30. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Are not one of them? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered.

Sparrows, they're not worth much, he's saying. And yet, even their lives are watched and superintended by the God who made them. How much more God will watch and superintend their lives?

[ 10 : 57 ] God knows so much about you tonight that he could even tell you the number of hairs on your head. Which admittedly is a little bit more impressive with some than others, isn't it? But you get the point.

Nothing escapes God's watchful eye. Nothing. And the one who watches over his people is a... Can you see how it's described? In verse 29, he's a father to them.

And it's very significant that Jesus uses that name from God here. The one who can destroy both soul and body in hell, you see that? Is also their father. The one they should fear is the very same one who's committed to them in tender love.

That brings me to the third conviction. The third reason why you're not to be afraid is Jesus reminds them of their great worth to the Father. So don't be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows. And here Jesus explicitly connects this truth to the fearlessness he commands.

The sovereign Father who knows every bird which falls from a tree or every hair on the head. He is the Father who loves the disciples of Jesus. And they are worth more to him than many sparrows.

[ 12 : 03 ] And they can come from his care. And you can ban from his goodness. And that is an astonishing teaching. That the God of the universe, the God who is to be feared of all others, cares personally for individuals like you and me.

And that is why their fear of him will drive out their fear of man. Now of course, this isn't a promise, is it? That everything is going to be okay and no harm will come to Jesus' followers. We know that. It is abundantly clear actually from the context in Matthew 10 that that is not the case. But what Jesus is promising is that there is never chaos. There is no persecution that is outside of God's control.

And that is obviously a very important truth for God's people to remember, isn't it? At this point in history. Nothing can happen to his people that he has not allowed.

Nothing can happen to you if you are a follower of the Lord Jesus that God has not allowed. And though the opposition is intense and violent, though the hatred is unrelenting, nevertheless our God continues to rule.

[ 13 : 08 ] It is never chaotic. It is never unbridled. And God holds the reins of this world and he steers it as it pleases him, even allowing hostility against his people for a time.

Look at Exodus chapter 1. But he never ceases to be in control. And there is enormous comfort there, isn't there? Because the one we are wisest to fear gives us good reason not to fear others.

He is the strong judge. He is the sovereign father. He is the father who loves his children desperately. And I think this is the point we must acknowledge.

But the picture that I painted last Sunday night of the fear of the Lord is not all there is to say. I expect deliberate of that. So last Sunday night, if you were here, if you were listening, if you were in the year, it might be good to get the recording of each option.

to fit together. But I was saying, so often in the Bible, fear meets fear. Because God is terrifyingly awesome and powerful and holy and it is not uncommon in the Bible to find people fall into the ground trembling.

[14:13] In fear before God, and I spoke about that reality without much qualification, because I think it's very important. To how as Christians we approach this subject, and yet that isn't an entirely balanced picture of everything the Bible says about fearing the Lord was meant to be.

Of course, the Bible uses the language of fear in a more nuanced way. It does mean some kind of reverence or... And sometimes it is... It is not talking about trembling before God's terrifying, awesome glory.

Sometimes it means coming to Him with humility, trembling before His love and His mercy. And His fatherly kindness. And so it is here. I think it's on both those dimensions in these verses.

Of course they are indivisibly united in one person, in God our Father. Jesus speaks here of terrifying judgment. He also speaks of fatherly watchfulness. How He treasures His beloved children.

And He is to be treasured for both these things, for all these things. Look at verse 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.

[15:22] Verse 31. Fear not therefore, you are of more value than many spirits. It's very nuanced, isn't it? In the way that Jesus speaks of fear. And I want to try and think, I'll try and probe a little bit on that tonight.

Because in this paradoxical way, God urges upon us both fearlessness and fear. The fear of God and fearlessness when it comes to man.

As we think on this tonight, I want to kind of expand on this people fear problem. And the Bible's surprising solution. How is it that people fear other people?

And how is that a problem? And then what does the Bible suggest we do about it? Let's try and dig a little bit more deeply on people fearing people. We sometimes call it the fear of men.

And this is the very issue that Jesus was addressing here when He commanded a fearlessness of people. And when He commended the fear of God. Now of course, beyond the fear of persecution, which was the relevant subject for the disciples at this moment, there are also many other ways that people fear people.

[16:37] Many. So I've tried to think a little bit about this. And let me try and tell you, I don't normally do this, let me try and tell you a number of the ways that the fear of people has manifested itself in my life over the years.

Sometimes I have feared what other people might think of me. And so I have lied about something that covered my tracks.

Or I've exaggerated something to my advantage. Sometimes, because I feared not being liked by other people, or people being liked more than me, I've gone too far with the joke and I've ended up hurting someone or being rude.

Sometimes, because I feared someone's reaction, I've neglected to rebuke or correct them. Even though that would have been the most loving thing to do.

Sometimes, because I've not wanted to rock the boat, I have made decisions that have placated people. Or I have not made decisions so that people would be placated.

[17:43] Rather than really doing what is in the best interest of others. Believe me, it is painful to admit these things will ever go on. Sometimes, because I feared what someone else is thinking about me, I have become really anxious to the point of distraction.

Sometimes, I've become so anxious about the fear of others that I've failed to pray about the situation. Isn't that embarrassing? Sometimes, when I'm preparing a sermon, I think about how people might react to the things I would say and I find myself thinking I should tone it down a bit. sometimes, I've feared being thought prudish or holier than thou so I've joined in the conversation that I really should have stayed out of. Sometimes, I've feared the unknown future so I have tried

hard to orchestrate things at the expense of trusting God.

Sometimes, I have feared amounting to very little so I've entertained dreams of making a name for myself in myriads of ways. Sometimes, I've feared losing someone and so I've become jealous or unkind or manipulative or shameful.

Sometimes, I have feared the loss of reputation so I have covered up sins or mistakes that I would have been far better sharing openly. Sometimes, I have feared being seen too radical and so I've failed to act when I should have taken a sign.

[ 19 : 09 ] Sometimes, I have feared others so much that I have feared others mucking up so I have held on to responsibilities that would have been better shared. Sometimes, I have done good deeds and good disciplines more because I wanted others to think well of me more than because I wanted to please God.

Sometimes, I have feared losing control of something so I have become demanding or impatient with people. Sometimes, I have feared the rebuke of others so I have refused to open myself up to the courageous love of those who would have offered it.

Now, I can actually go on but I'm not going to. That abbreviated list of my own people feeling is enough to establish a picture I think of what we're talking about.

And my hope is that you might be humble enough to find your own broken heart in that kind of unholy catalogue of hidden thoughts. In fact, I'm pretty confident of that.

Because it's not just me, is it? I do not think that I have just confessed to you some scandal that will see me removed from Christian leadership.

[ 20 : 20 ] I'm not talking about anything remotely close to what I think we would call a public disgrace. I'm just talking about hundreds of daily battles that I face and hundreds of common failures that I surrender to, most of which are invisible to everyone but me and some of which I'm actually not even aware of myself.

And most of the time, and I think that what I'm describing is the battle for proper fear that rages in every Christian's heart. And when you start to lay it out like that, it is a disgrace, is it not?

Is there anything on that list that I can be proud of or excuse, excuse, I don't think so. It's a list of embarrassing and indefensible failures. Those failures grieve the Holy Spirit of God, and they make my heart heavy to admit it.

And so as I reflect on this passage, what a fight for sanctification still lays in front of me. What sin still remains to be vanquished in my heart? And how deeply and profoundly I am in need of the Spirit's refining and the Son's mercy.

And maybe probably you too. And so what I hope is becoming obvious to you is that this is not some side issue in the Christian life and certainly pastoral ministry. For most of us this is massive, this is huge, this is where the game is being played.

[ 21 : 44 ] This is where the battle rages in my heart. And I'm prepared to go out of a limb and say this is where the battle is raging in your heart and in your soul too. And so is it any wonder that many Bible writers raise their voice along with Jesus in Matthew 10 and urges not to fear people?

And further to that, is it any wonder that the Bible writers join their voices with Jesus and plead with us time and time again to fear God. And this is the Bible's very surprising solution.

How will this battle be won? Where will the help come from? How will he combat this insidious disease of fear? All my instincts tell me that I should flee from these fears or that I should take them all, I should face them down in mortal combat.

combat. I should learn to slay them. Well that isn't the first thing that the Bible says. That is why I hope this sermon isn't going to be a sermon which spells out 15 steps on the problem of fear and the energy to fight it.

I hope this isn't a sermon where I wag my finger, not that I wag my finger, and tell you and myself that we mustn't fear people and we've got to stop. And that we must repent. Now of course those things are true. We mustn't fear people and we must repent.

[ 23 : 03 ] But you notice this isn't where the emphasis of the Bible falls. Surprising isn't it? The Bible urges us to fear the Lord. And the logic seems to be if we fear him more we will naturally come to fear others less.

And the logic is that the larger and the more fearsome God becomes in our minds and our hearts the smaller and less significant all those fears will be to us. So imagine a woman at Ealing Broadway station she's on the platform where the high speed train comes in to Paddington and the

freight train goes past.

She's playing with her engagement ring it drops off her finger and it rolls onto the tracks. At that moment fear serves up inside her.

She fears losing that precious ring that means so much of her perhaps as an engagement ring. she fears the reaction of the person who gave it to her. So she jumps down to the tracks and she starts looking for it.

Is the fear of losing something precious or the fear of another person's reaction irrational? No. Not at all is it? What's silly in this picture is that lady failing to see the reason for a much much greater fear.

[ 24 : 25 ] Greater fears have a way of making lesser fears shrink. And this seems to be the shape of Jesus' logic here. Earlier in the sermon tonight I wondered out aloud what would it be like if all the fears that distract us and drain us and in some cases change us and grip us were conquered.

And I said wouldn't it be great to live in a world where there was much less fear? Do you notice what the Bible's answer to that question is? It is no. No, the Bible says the problem in the world and in our hearts is not too much fear.

The problem is the wrong kind of fear. And the problem is not that there's too much fear in the world in our hearts it's that there's actually not enough fear, not enough of the right kind of fear.

And what the Bible says is not thou shalt fear people less, but instead why don't you fear God more? Isn't that incredibly liberating? But instead of giving you a thousand small mountains to climb, the Bible says let me tell you about a fear, a fear that you can have which outstrips and dwarfs and overwhelms every fear of man that could ever possibly enter your heart.

And once again we begin to grasp that this is the Bible's surprising solution to our chronic problem with people's fear. And I think when we get hold of this there are parts of the Bible which suddenly come alive.

[ 25 : 51 ] all of a sudden we realise when Moses comes down the mountain in Exodus 20 with the tablets in his hands and he says to the people do not be afraid God has come to test you so that the fear of God will be with you and keep you from sinning.

Especially what he's saying there is you don't need to be afraid of this God as long as you fear him. Did you get that? It's surprising isn't it? And if we grasp that about the psalms the psalms begin to have a kind of descant lie which we've never heard before in the movie he's to be feared above all gods blessed is the man who fears the Lord the Lord delights in those who fear him and if we grasp this then the book of Proverbs suddenly makes sense doesn't it?

Like never before the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom fear him you saints and you will then have nothing else to fear the fear of the Lord leads to life let me read you Proverbs 29 verse 25 it's a great proverb 29 25 the fear of man lays a snare but whoever trusts in the Lord whoever fears the Lord is safe Proverbs 29 25 and if we grasp it that I think parts of the gospel that we used to scratch our heads at are now beginning to fall into place and so Luke 1 tells us that Jesus has come in mercy to those who fear him but that he also comes in order to enable us to serve him without fear and that won't seem like a contradiction to us anymore and Luke tells us that as the disciples get to know Jesus better their fear grows rather than shrinks and we'll be able to understand why and I think we'll grasp why letters like 1 Peter go on and on and on about fear is a huge theme in the letter since you have called on a father who judges each man's work impartially leave your lives here with reverent fear and then he says love the brotherhood of believers fear God honour the king he said why should submit to their husbands without giving way to fear but even you should suffer for doing right you are blessed do not fear what they fear do not be afraid but in your hearts set about

Christ as Lord that is what the Bible says from beginning to end what really produces fearlessness is fear that's what liberates us from people fear it is a proper fear of the Lord the book I've been reading that I don't actually think is very good but it has an absolutely fantastic chapter heading and this is it fear is only ever conquered by fear that's what it means and it's what the wisest Christians have been telling us for centuries John Newton wrote this it was grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved now there's a line over here I think I've only just begun to understand remember last week I spoke of many people in the Bible who met the Lord and they fell down before him what we should also know is that when they did that many were lifted to their feet by the heavenly hand and they were told not to be afraid that is the fear of the fear of the

Lord doesn't leave people afraid but as I argued last week that first view of God doesn't should leave people terrified but soon enough they come to see that he who they fear is not only he who can destroy both body and soul in hell but he's also a father who loves them deeply and their fear of him is transformed it is not left behind by you and it doesn't cease to tremble but it does become a fear that is infused with deep confidence in God a fear filled with genuine delight in God just like we saw in David last week and a fear marked by true liberation of lesser fears because as we grow in fear in him we find it harder and harder to see any good reason to fear anyone or anything else it was grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved what does all this mean for us but I really hope tonight you might be willing to go away and be honest to be honest about the extent to which the spirit needs you to still to liberate you from the fear of people

[ 30 : 33 ] I hope that you might take some time to reflect on what people fear looks like in your life make a list how people fear emerges to send me the world of good be brave to it and much more than that I hope you will go away tonight knowing that the path to liberation is not less fear but more the fear of the Lord more right fear and to that end I want to finish with one verse I want to suggest a prayer for us I know I need to pray it and I suspect you do but we could all resolve to pray that God might grow in us such a fear of him that all fears would melt away should we not pray that we might know his strong justice and his fatherly love and his earnest love for us more and more and so I wonder whether we could pray Psalm 86 verse 11 for each other this week Psalm 86 verse 11 teach me your way oh Lord that I may walk in your truth unite my heart to fear your name teach me your way oh Lord that I may walk in your truth unite my heart to fear your name that seems to me like a good prayer to pray and maybe for you too

Psalm 86 verse 11 teach me your way oh Lord that I may walk in your truth unite my heart to fear your name that's simple