

“A Hierarchy of Fear” (Matthew 10:24–31)(5.17.20)

Matthew 10:24–31 (NIV84)

²⁴ “A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. ²⁵ It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household!

²⁶ “So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. ²⁷ What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. 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. ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. ³⁰ And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

The word of God for the people of God.

Title: **“A Hierarchy of Fear”**

LET US PRAY.

INTRODUCTION:

I am afraid. I confess to you that I am afraid. I am afraid for the missionary nurse who because of age and health concerns needs to come back home. Due to the travel restrictions imposed for COVID-19, they are stuck in the mission field. I am afraid for the orphanage for which they advocate; afraid there will be no one to advocate for the children when the food supply runs dangerously low.

Psalms 20:7 (NIV84) Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.

Lord, we pray that you protect and provide for this poor orphanage. Lord, we pray over our local community where our Food Pantry handed out triple the number of bags distributed in the previous weeks.

My friends, of what are you afraid? What do you fear?

I fear that the Lord Jesus will come back tomorrow. You are thinking, wait a second pastor, did we hear you correctly? Yes, I am afraid that the Lord Jesus will come back too soon. Too soon for what? Too soon for the billions that have never heard his name. Too soon for our friends and family and neighbors that have obstinately hardened their hearts against the good news of Jesus.

I am afraid for those left behind after the rapture of the Church. For all those that must suffer through the Tribulation, I am afraid. The Apostle John shares his vision in Revelation 20:4

I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

I am afraid for the goats. I am afraid for those who will hear these words from Jesus: Matthew 25:41–43 (NIV84)

⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left [the goats], ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

Yes, I am afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

BODY:

What is a soul? In the most basic understanding it is a living being. In the Old Testament and in the biblical Jewish thought, the body and soul were more of a unified entity than in modern western thinking.

The concept of soul has evolved and there is some differentiation in the New Testament. In some places, body, soul, and spirit are separate entities. In those instances, the soul is considered the unique

composite of personality, will, and emotions of each individual. In other places the soul and spirit are the composite essence of who we truly are. Yes, we are immortal with two different potential destinies. That destiny depends on our faith in Jesus. We who proclaim Jesus as our Savior must also claim him as our master. This master/servant relationship is not some abstract theoretical concept. Jesus washed His disciples' feet. Whose feet have we been washing? The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve. Who are we serving?

If Jesus is our Master, then He is to rule over us. Do we submit? Jesus gives us an intractable contract. If we love him, we will obey His commands. And, this is not begrudgingly. This garment of love and obedience is not a straight-jacket. It is not to be worn resentfully or out of a sense of duty. This garment of love and obedience that we wear **with gratitude** is the shield of freedom. When our priorities become the priorities of our Master, Jesus, then we are free of the fear of men and women. We are free of the fear of the world. We are free of the fear of disease, death, and the Devil.

Jesus is also our Teacher. Disciples are learners. We must be continually learning. It never stops. The more I learn about the Lord, the more I realize how little I know. Jesus made disciples. Are we making disciples? I am afraid that I have not paid enough attention to our Sunday School. I am afraid that I have not been effective in getting you **all** into regular Bible study. I am afraid that I have not sparked your thirst to learn of the Lord. Who among us has shouted from the rooftop, the things of God that have been revealed to us?

Jesus is to be the head of our household. This is very much like seeing Jesus as our Master, but it is maybe more relational. Do we abide with Jesus like he calls us to in John 15? Have we given Jesus headship over our daily lives? Is there some room in our house, that we keep locked away from His purview? The thing is that we do not own the house. It is Jesus' household. We are members of that household, but Jesus is the head of it.

Well, it must be all peaches and cream because we share in the household of Jesus. Wrong! The Pharisees, the religious leaders, called Jesus Beelzebub. They accused him of doing his miracles under the power and influence of demons. This was exactly opposite of the Truth. If the Son of God could be treated as Jesus was in His day, we shouldn't expect our treatment to be any better. In fact, Jesus says we should expect to be treated in a worse way. And, they crucified Him!

Then Jesus says the strangest thing. "So do not be afraid of them." Wait a second Jesus. That isn't logical. What you have suggested is frightening. "No," Jesus replies, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul." Three times in this scripture alone, Jesus says not to be afraid of what most of us fear the most; harm and death to our bodies.

A month ago, we celebrated Jesus' resurrection. Up from the grave he arose. Sin and death, where is your victory? Satan uses the fear of death, but Jesus has defeated death. How many of us truly believe this in the fabric of our faith? We proclaim in our creeds of faith that we believe in the resurrection of our bodies.

I hear you arguing in your minds, but pastor, we only live once. Life is a precious gift. Yes, that is true. But, I am only telling you what Jesus tells you. Do not be afraid of those who can **ONLY** kill the body. Jesus tells us that we must lose our lives to gain them. Paul tells us in Acts 20:24 (NIV84) However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.

By now, you are probably thinking, "We haven't assembled for church in weeks and you are starting with this very hard teaching." Yes, that is true; but, it seems to me that in these days we are living in a time of fear. People are afraid of catching COVID-19. They are afraid of a vulnerable loved one getting sick and dying. Others are afraid of our Constitutional rights being violated; worried about giving the government too much power; worried about the government at many levels impeding churches from meeting. Some people take their fear to the level of forced vaccinations; wearing the "mark of the beast;" and, they are even fearful that these are end times.

So, it is important that we have a proper perspective. We need a proper perspective on life; on who God is; on who we are; and, on the times in which we live. We read in Isaiah 8:12–14a (NIV84)

¹² “Do not call conspiracy
everything that these people call conspiracy;
do not fear what they fear,
and do not dread it.

¹³ The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy,
he is the one you are to fear,
he is the one you are to dread,

¹⁴ and he will be a sanctuary;

This week I read a short book that I recommend to you. It is called *Coronavirus and Christ* by Rev. Dr. John Piper. It just came out a few weeks ago. It is only 100 small pages and can be read in two hours. While I don’t share all of Rev. Piper’s theology, he has produced many good books and sermons. His 40 years in ministry, a recent fight with prostate cancer, and having a resulting blood clot in his lungs give him a powerful perspective. Let me share some of his thoughts from this book.

“A Rock of certainty rather than the sand of probabilities.

The Rock we are talking about is better than that. Yes, better than healing.

The Bible, rightly understood, is the voice of God.”

1 Thessalonians 5:9–10 (NIV84)

⁹ For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁰ He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.

“The same sovereignty that could stop the coronavirus, yet doesn’t, is the very sovereignty that sustains the soul in it.”

In Genesis 50:20 (NIV84) Joseph tells his brothers who sold him as a slave, “As for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.

“God meant it for good. Be careful not to water this down. It does not say, “God used it for good” or “God turned it for good.” It say, God meant it for good.”

Piper continues, “What is God doing? He is doing what he is always doing, a billion things we do not know:

Psalm 40:5 (NIV84)

⁵ Many, O Lord my God,
are the wonders you have done.

The things you planned for us
no one can recount to you;
were I to speak and tell of them,
they would be too many to declare.

“God is mercifully shouting to us in these days: Wake up! Sinning against God is like this! It is horrible and ugly. And far more dangerous than the coronavirus.”

“There is no contradiction between seeing the coronavirus as God’s act and calling Christians to take risks to alleviate suffering that it causes.”

Read the Book of Acts. How did God get Jesus’ disciples on the move? He sent the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to establish the Church. Then, starting with the stoning of Stephen, the seed of the gospel was spread through martyrdom and persecution. The mission of Jesus is the mission of the Church. God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son to save the world. Every Soul is precious to the Lord.

2 Peter 3:9 (NIV84) The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

You need to know how valuable you are to God. Jesus teaches this by explaining the sovereignty and omniscience of the Father. Sparrows are extremely common and only worth half a penny each. Jesus says that a sparrow cannot die outside of God's control. Not even a sparrow's life is insignificant to the Creator of all things. Do not miss that the Father's will SHALL be done. He IS in control.

The other half of the comparison is US, human beings. Do you know how many hairs are on your own head? Do you know how many hairs are on the heads of your children? No, I don't either. You see, your heavenly Father knows you better than it is possible for you to know yourself. Jesus then affirms that each of us is worth many sparrows. Jesus concludes that we can rest assured that God has our best interests at heart. Do you want to trust your own finite limitations and fears or do you want to trust in the promises and providence of Almighty God? Do not be afraid.

Psalm 27:1 (NIV84)

¹ The Lord is my light and my salvation—
whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life—
of whom shall I be afraid?

CONCLUSION:

You probably remember that Paul had a thorn in his side. We are never told what that thorn was. He did tell us that he prayed three times to have it removed. The Lord would not remove the thorn, but said that his grace was sufficient for Paul.

There is "A beautiful poem called "The Thorn," by Martha Snell Nicholson (1898-1953). It ends like this:
I learned He never gives a thorn without this added grace,

He takes the thorn to pin aside the veil which hides His face. (repeat these two lines)

John Piper ends his book with this prayer:

Father, At our best moment, by your grace, we are not sleeping in Gethsemane. We are awake and listening to your Son's prayer. He knows, deep down, that he must suffer. But in his perfect humanity, he cries out, "if it is possible, let this cup pass."

In the same way, we sense, deep down, that this pandemic is appointed, in your wisdom, for good and necessary purposes. We too must suffer. Your Son was innocent. We are not.

Yet with him in our less-than-perfect humanity, we too cry out, "If it is possible, let this cup pass." Do quickly, O Lord, the painful, just, and merciful work you have resolved to do. Do not linger in judgment. Do not delay your compassion. Remember the poor, O Lord, according to your mercy. Do not forget the cry of the afflicted. Grant recovery. Grant a cure. Deliver us – your poor, helpless creatures – from these sorrows, we pray.

But do not waste our misery and grief, O Lord. Purify your people from powerless preoccupation with barren materialism and Christless entertainment. Put our mouths out of taste with the bait of Satan. Cut from us the roots and remnant of pride and hate and unjust ways. Grant us capacities of outrage at our own belittling of your glory. Open the eyes of our hearts to see and savor the beauty of Christ. Incline our hearts to your word, your Son, and your way. Fill us with compassionate courage. And make a name for yourself **in the way your people serve.**

Stretch forth your hand in great awakening for the sake of this perishing world. Let the terrible words of Revelation not be spoken over this generation: "**Yet still they did not repent.**" As you have stricken bodies, strike now the slumbering souls. Forbid that they would remain asleep in the darkness of pride and unbelief. In your great mercy, say to these bones, "Live!" And bring the hearts and lives of millions into alignment with the infinite work of Jesus.

In Jesus' name, amen.

You know what I am afraid of? I am afraid this time of trial will be wasted. I am afraid this time of chastisement will leave us bitter instead of better. I am afraid that this opportunity to reframe our priorities will be missed. I am afraid that when it is all over, we will just go back to business as usual. I am

afraid that we will continue to fear the things of this world; to fear disease, death, and the Devil. I am afraid that we will be afraid of those that can kill the body instead of the ONE, the ONE, who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

My friends, of what, are you afraid?

Amen and amen.

Let us pray.