

Prayer

All praise be to You, Living Lord; who inspires us by the generations of those who have declared their faith without fear, and so passed on to us the treasure of faith that we so gloriously possess. Give us the courage to take our place in the line of those who publicly stand for You; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. All praise be to You Lord God. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Community Spirit

There are many places in this world where there is little community spirit because neighbours are at war with each other for different reasons. Pray for them, and for peace.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for those traumatised by the effects of war and violence*
- *Give thanks for joys of good sport*
- *Pray about the morality of sport whilst the Olympics are held*

Meditation

In the beauty of each sunset, God's mastery is displayed;
Every moving, changing, subtle shade of light
Is the infinite variation of His smile; His love,
And though we analyse it with our science,
Great painters capture it in oils or water-colour,
And photographers chase the enigmatic 'right moment',
We return, evening upon evening to view
The ever changing majesty of a sunset;
Once seen, never to be seen again,
And never quite the same on smaller screens.
For what we see displayed across our sight
Is always bigger, grander than ourselves;
We only capture what You show us of Yourself,
And there is always so much more of You to see ...

Bible Study - Matthew 10:24-30

²⁴ 'A student is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; ²⁵ it is sufficient for the student to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign his household! ²⁶ So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. ²⁷ 'What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops.

²⁸ Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; instead, fear him 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 without the knowledge of your Father. ³⁰ Even the hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

Review

After the tough and demanding talk of the first half of chapter 10 of Matthew, these words come as something of a relief. There is plenty here which is instructive and powerful, but it is placed in the context of the love and care of the Father. The text is punctuated by the words 'do not fear' (v26,28), and 'do not be afraid' (10:31). This sets the tone of this part of Jesus' pre-mission speech to the disciples, and provides us with a structure for understanding this collection of sayings.

The beginning of our passage brings together what has been implicit within much of what Jesus has taught about what it means to be a disciple. Those who follow Jesus are like students to the teacher, or slaves to the master (10:24). In normal life, students can eventually surpass a teacher; but this is not so with Jesus. The best we can be is 'like' Him (10:25) because we can never be as perfect as Him nor imagine that we can. Neither is the disciple one who has achieved any moral standard, but one whose purpose is to be like Jesus in order to become godly. In every age and generation, people turn to Christ and experience His saving grace from different backgrounds. What unifies Christians is not moral, cultural or social standards, but the explicit, stated goal of becoming like Christ. We all grow in holiness over time, but the path for everyone is very different!

Returning to our text (10:25,26), Jesus draws these sayings together to make a serious point. He is being accused by the Pharisees of being in league with Baalzebul (which means 'prince of demons' see – 9:34)! So if we are identified with Christ in his mission, and He has been accused in this way, then we too stand accused with Jesus, and being 'like' Jesus has difficult side effects as well as pleasant ones! Every possible accusation has been levelled at Christians over the ages, yet few bear any truth or factual basis. Christians have been blamed for wars, murder and racial hatred. Latterly, psychologists have labelled Christians as less than fully human because of their need to relate to another 'being'! Really, it should only be possible to accuse Christians of trying to be like Jesus; it would indeed be an offence to some, but it would be the truth. People have always whispered about others and what they think or believe, and Jesus picked this up when saying 'nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered ...' (10:26), bidding the disciples not to fear such scaremongering. The purpose of Jesus' ministry was to bring to light the true teaching of the Old Testament, which had lain hidden for centuries, and which was in fact being covered up by the Pharisees and their emphasis upon the law.

The words 'do not fear' appear a second time in verse 28, and are somewhat daunting because Jesus speaks about death and the possibility of martyrdom. Jesus knew that He was heading towards the Cross, and soon He would instruct the disciples 'take up' their cross to follow him (10:38). In building up to this, Jesus warned the disciples not to fear those who could take their lives by killing them, because God was in charge of their very lives. It was God who breathed spirit into the flesh of a human body to make a human 'soul' (Gen 2:7), and God who was in charge of their eternal destiny, and therefore to be 'feared', and if a disciple was loved by God, what was there to fear?

The words 'do not be afraid' appear again in verse 31, but refer back to the saying about sparrows, from verse 29 onwards. After the serious yet liberating truth of the previous two sayings, this harks back to the message of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount about not worrying, in which Jesus had used the example of the flowers of the field (see Matt 6:25ff). In this passage, Jesus used for His illustration the small birds, sold two for a penny or five for two-pence (Luke 12:6) in the market place (being the smallest amount of meat that could be purchased to make a meagre sacrificial meal). If God cared for such birds when they died, how much more did He care for the disciples? At this point, Jesus broke into His serious tone by giving a humorous example of the 'innumerable' hairs on a man's head; I

can imagine a wry smile on the faces of those disciples who were balding when Jesus said 'even the hairs of your head are all numbered'. Yet the point is as important as the others in our passage. God does indeed truly care for every little detail of our lives.

Overall, the message from this text is that Jesus cares. We need the challenges of Jesus' ministry of course, but knowing that He cares for us reminds us of the love of God which has set us free to be His disciples in the first place.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. In what ways do you positively seek to 'be like Jesus'? Share your experience of this with others in your group.
2. Do you feel that God is aware of every part of your life and existence? How is it possible to know this?
3. Are there any situations in which it is wise to be entirely private about faith? Do you think that God always requires us to make our faith public?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

I think I need to know that Jesus cares for me, whatever work I do for Him and whatever circumstances I find myself in. Sometimes the Christian message becomes so serious just because the issues at stake are so huge, that we fail to demonstrate trust in God and in His care. I know that this passage has challenged me about this, and I hope it will benefit you.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *In the course of a day, count how many times you become conscious of God's love and care for you. Indeed, the more you think about this, the more examples you may spot!*
- *Pray about letting yourself trust God for situations that you feel are not well controlled. Offer these up to the Lord and give them into His hands. Let Him take control.*

Final Prayer

Mercy and love and peace belong to You, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer. Just as you care for each hair of my head, You assure me that Your love surrounds me every day of my life, that I might live to Your praise and glory. Thanks be to God, AMEN