

Matthew 10:24–39; Romans 6:1b–11; Genesis 21:8–21; Psalm 86:1–
10, 16–17; Jeremiah 20:7–13; Psalm 69:7–10, 16–18

Opener: Alive to God in a Fearful World

There is a country song by Rodney Atkins called “Watching You.” It tells the story of a father who realizes his little boy has been paying closer attention than he thought.

At first, the boy copies something his father wishes he had never taught him. One careless moment. One word spoken in frustration. Suddenly, the father hears it coming out of his son’s mouth.

But later, the father sees something else. He sees his son praying. Not because the father gave a lecture on prayer. Not because the boy passed a test. But because the boy had been watching.

That is how formation works.

We are formed by what we watch. We become like what we behold. You hear that? Children learn more from the life in front of them than the lesson explained to them.

Scripture Reading

So, Friends, please open your Bibles to Matthew 10:24.

[Read Matthew 10:24–39.]

These are the words of God for the people of God (*Praise be to God*).

Jesus says, “The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master” (Matthew 10:24, NIV).

That may sound simple to us, but it is a hard word to receive.

The Shape of Discipleship

Because Jesus is telling us that discipleship is not about using him to build the life we already wanted. Discipleship is about letting our lives be shaped by his life.

And that cuts against the grain of the world we live in... We live in a world that teaches us to protect the self, promote the self, and place the self at the center. My comfort. My rights. My plans. My control. My peace. My way.

But the Christian life is not finally built around me. It is built around Christ.

And because it is built around Christ, it becomes a life of “we” and “us.” A life where freedom is not found in getting my own way, but in belonging to the One who sets me free.

That is the surprise of following Jesus.

When our lives begin to take the shape of his life, we do not become less free. We become more free.

- Free from the pressure to perform.
- Free from the need to control everything.
- Free from the exhausting work of defending ourselves.
- Free from a life of always taking, always proving, always protecting, always needing to be first.

Jesus is not calling us into a smaller life. He is calling us into a holy life. A life alive to God.

And if our life is being shaped by Jesus, then we should not be surprised when faithfulness costs something.

We Might Be Misunderstood

You see, if Jesus was misunderstood, his disciples may be misunderstood. Jesus is telling his disciples the truth before they go. He is saying, *“Do not be shocked when faithfulness costs something. Do not be surprised when the world misunderstands you. The student becomes like the teacher, and the servant becomes like the master.”*

But then Jesus says, *“Do not be afraid.”*

Not because there is nothing to fear. There is plenty to fear. Rejection is real. Conflict is real. Family tension is real. The cross is real.

But fear is not Lord... People can misunderstand you, but they cannot define you. People can reject you, but they cannot unmake you. People can threaten the body, but they cannot hold your soul.

In Matthew 10:29–31, Jesus says the Father sees even the sparrow fall, and even the hairs of your head are numbered. So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

So Jesus is not calling us into combativeness. He is calling us into faithfulness.

- He is not diminishing our love for family. He is ordering our loves around himself.
- He is not asking us to chase suffering. He is inviting us to follow him so fully that fear no longer gets the final vote over our obedience.

That is the thread running through all these passages: **God’s holy people are sent into costly faithfulness, but they are never abandoned.**

Hagar and Ishmael are cast out into the wilderness. Jeremiah is mocked for speaking God’s word. The psalmists cry out from weakness, shame, danger, and reproach. Paul says we have died and risen with Christ. Jesus tells his disciples that the road will not be easy.

Every text has someone under pressure.

But every text also bears witness to the same holy truth: God hears, God sustains, God raises, and God sends.

Genesis 21

In Genesis 21, Hagar is in the wilderness with her son. The water is gone. The future looks gone. The promise feels impossible. She cannot bear to watch her child die, so she sits at a distance and weeps.

But God hears what Hagar cannot fix. The angel of God says, *“Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there”* (Genesis 21:17, NIV).

That is where trust begins. **Trust begins when God hears before we see.**

Hagar does not see the well at first. The well is there, but grief has narrowed her vision. Fear has closed in around her. Despair has convinced her that the wilderness gets the final word.

Then God opens her eyes.

Friends, sometimes faith begins there. Not with courage. Not with clarity. Not with a five-year plan. Sometimes faith begins with the mercy of God meeting us before we can see the well.

Psalm 86

That is why Psalm 86 matters too. The psalmist does not posture strength. He prays from need: *“Hear me, Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy”* (Psalm 86:1, NIV).

That is not weakness pretending to be faith. That is faith telling the truth.

The psalmist knows where to take fear: *“You, Lord, are forgiving and good, abounding in love to all who call to you”* (Psalm 86:5, NIV).

Trust becomes prayer. And prayer becomes the first act of holy resistance against fear.

Jeremiah 20

Then Jeremiah takes us deeper.

Jeremiah is not in trouble because he has been unfaithful. He is in trouble because he has been faithful.

He has spoken the word God gave him, and it has cost him. He is mocked. He is weary. He wants to be done. But when he tries not to speak, the word of the Lord burns inside him: *“his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones”* (Jeremiah 20:9, NIV).

That is belief when obedience becomes costly... Not casual belief. Not easy agreement. Not faith as decoration. Jeremiah shows us belief that has gone down into the bones.

There are moments when faithfulness will cost us something. It may cost approval. It may cost comfort. It may cost the easy peace of saying nothing when something needs to be spoken. It may cost the illusion that everyone will understand us if we explain ourselves well enough.

Psalm 69

Psalm 69 knows that cost too: “*For zeal for your house consumes me, and the insults of those who insult you fall on me*” (Psalm 69:9, NIV).

- This is where faith becomes public.
- This is where trust becomes witness.
- This is where the holy life stops being only inward comfort and becomes outward faithfulness.

But here is where we must be careful. **The Gospel is not, “Try harder to be brave.”**

Jesus does not gather frightened disciples and say, “Do better. Be tougher. Act fearless.”

No. The center of this message is Romans 6.

Romans 6

Paul says we have been joined to Christ.

[Read Romans 6:1-10.]

We have been united with him in his death and resurrection. The old self, the self-ruled by sin, fear, and self-preservation, has been crucified with Christ. This is what Apostle Paul writes, “*In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus*” (Romans 6:11, NIV).

Alive to God. That is the center.

We are not faithful because we are fearless. We become faithful because we are alive to God. Now, that is worth writing down... Amen.

In Christ, we have already died to the power that makes fear our master, and we have been raised into a holy life where we can speak truth, bear witness, and trust the Father even when obedience costs us something.

- Fear is real. But fear is not Lord.
- Conflict is real. But conflict is not Lord.
- Rejection is real. But rejection is not Lord.
- Death is real. But death is not Lord.

Jesus Christ is Lord.

And if we have been buried with him, then we have also been raised with him. That means the deepest truth about us is no longer what threatens us. The deepest truth about us is who holds us.

Concluding

That is why Matthew 10 sounds so strong.

Jesus does not hide the cost. But he also says, “*Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care*” (Matthew 10:29, NIV).

Then he says, “*And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered*” (Matthew 10:30, NIV).

Then he says, “*So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows*” (Matthew 10:31, NIV). Jesus does not say, “*Nothing hard will happen.*” He says, “*Your Father sees.*”

He does not say, “You will never be afraid.” He says, “Do not let fear own you.”

He does not say, “Preserve your life at all costs.” He says, “Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 10:39, NIV).

That is resurrection-shaped discipleship. That is holiness under pressure. That is faithful presence in a fearful world.

So, we come back to the song. A father realizes his son has been watching.

That is not only true in a song. It is true in life.

People are watching.

Children are watching. Grandchildren are watching. Neighbors are watching. Coworkers are watching. A fearful world is watching the people of God to see what we do with fear.

- Do we pass fear along?
- Do we let fear master us?
- Do we let fear silence our witness, harden our hearts, or shrink our obedience?

Or do we show another way?... Not because we are never afraid. We are afraid sometimes.

But in Christ, fear does not get to be our master anymore.

We have died with Christ. We have been raised with Christ. We are alive to God.

So people do not need to see a church pretending to be fearless. They need to see a holy people who know where to take their fear.

- A people who pray in the wilderness.
- A people who speak truth when it costs something.
- A people who trust the Father when the road is hard.
- A people who live as though resurrection life has already begun.

Because we are not faithful because we are fearless. We become faithful because we are alive to God.

So as we enter Open Worship, here is the query I invite us to hold before the Lord:

Lord Jesus, where is fear trying to master me, and what would it mean to live there as one alive to God?

