

Luke 12:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.

Analysis

And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do—Jesus transitions from warning about hypocrisy to encouraging boldness in persecution. The address my friends (τοῖς φίλοις μου) is tender and intimate (cf. John 15:14-15), preparing them for a difficult teaching. The command *mē phobēthēte* (μὴ φοβηθῆτε, be not afraid) is present imperative—continuous, habitual fearlessness. The object of this fearlessness: **them that kill the body** (τῶν ἀποκτεινόντων τὸ σῶμα)—human persecutors whose power is strictly limited.

The key phrase is after that have no more that they can do (μετὰ ταῦτα μὴ ἔχόντων περισσώτερόν τι ποιῆσαι)—human power terminates at physical death. Persecutors cannot touch the soul, cannot affect eternal destiny, cannot harm one's standing before God. This radically relativizes the worst they can inflict. Martyrdom is not ultimate loss but a doorway to eternal life. The logic is simple but profound: since man's worst (death) is temporary and limited, while God's judgment is eternal and comprehensive, fear God rather than man.

Historical Context

Jesus spoke these words knowing His disciples would face violent persecution. All the apostles except John died as martyrs. Early Christians repeatedly faced the choice: deny Christ and live, or confess Christ and die. Roman authorities could torture and execute but had no power beyond the grave. This teaching sustained

countless martyrs—from Stephen (Acts 7) to Polycarp ("Eighty-six years I have served Him...") to modern persecuted believers. The Greco-Roman world feared death supremely; Jesus taught His followers that there are worse things than death—namely, denying Christ and facing God's judgment. This inverted cultural values, creating a community of believers who could not be controlled by threats of violence.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does recognizing the strict limits of human power liberate believers from the fear of persecution?
2. What does Jesus calling disciples 'my friends' before this difficult teaching reveal about His pastoral care?
3. In what ways does contemporary Western Christianity need to recover this fearlessness in the face of social or professional consequences for faithfulness?

Interlinear Text

Λέγω	δὲ	ὑμῖν	τοῖς	φίλοις	μου	μὴ	φοβηθῆτε	ἀπὸ
I say	And	unto you	G3588	friends	my	no	Be	of them
G3004	G1161	G5213		G5384	G3450	G3361	G5399	G575
τῶν	ἀποκτείνοντων	τὸ	σῶμα	καὶ	μετὰ	ταῦτα	μὴ	
G3588	that kill	G3588	the body	and	after	that	no	
	G615		G4983	G2532	G3326	G5023	G3361	
ἐχόντων	περισσότερόν	τι	ποιῆσαι					
have	G4053	G5100	that they can do					
G2192			G4160					

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 10:28 (Parallel theme): And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Jeremiah 1:8 (Parallel theme): Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD.

Revelation 2:10 (Parallel theme): Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

Philippians 1:28 (Parallel theme): And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God.

1 Peter 3:14 (Parallel theme): But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled;

Acts 20:24 (Parallel theme): But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

James 2:23 (Parallel theme): And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.

Ezekiel 2:6 (Parallel theme): And thou, son of man, be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns be with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions: be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house.

Acts 4:13 (Parallel theme): Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.

Jeremiah 1:17 (Parallel theme): Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them.