

SERMON: CHEAP BUT VALUABLE

Matthew 10:29-31

Luke 12:6-7

Matthew 10:29-31

(29) Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your father.

(30) But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

(31) Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.

Luke 12:6-7

(6) Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God?

(7) But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.

Introduction

We can associate our moods and aspirations with birds. The various species have images, some positive, some neutral, and a few negative. We won't talk about the buzzards, the turkeys, or the chickens. Even athletic teams are named after birds to project a positive image: the Atlanta Falcons and the Atlanta Hawks, just to name the local ones.

As I said, we can associate our moods and aspirations with birds. Sometimes after a successful endeavor we feel like a powerful eagle. Sometimes when we are dressed to a tee, we strut like a handsome peacock or glide like a stately swan. When we impart words to de-escalate a touchy situation and resolve imminent conflict, we feel like a wise old owl. Let's face it; there are other times when we feel like an itchy bitsy sparrow. There are times when we feel we are not good enough, or do not measure up to our own standards, or up to the standards of others. There are times when we feel we are not up to the task at hand.

I remember a young lady in a Bible class in which we were studying this text. She said, "I wonder if those little sparrows have feelings. If they do, a lot of times, I feel like they would feel, if they truly had feelings. Most of the time I feel like a sparrow; I feel small and insignificant. I wonder if sparrows compare themselves to eagles and other magnificent birds." She was born with severe, debilitating birth defects. "I am a burden to my family and I don't like that. I am that fallen sparrow. I have to read this Scripture all the time and recite the words of Jesus to keep my spirit up. I know I am worth something, but a lot of times I don't feel like it. It seems like this Scripture is in the Bible

just for me. I have to concentrate more on the reassurance of Jesus and less on the attributes of sparrows.”

In the New Testament era sparrow had come to mean any small bird sold very cheaply and used for food by the poor.

They would be trapped, plucked, and tied in a bundle for sale.

Thus, the sparrow was understood as an example of an article with little value. Jesus uses the diminutive form of a sparrow while speaking of God’s concern for persons. According to Jesus, even that which has little earthly value is within the pale of God’s care.

Some say perhaps Jesus saw a flock of sparrows and used this real-life word picture as a way to enhance His teachings.

Others say Jesus alluded to an aphorism that was common during that time. “When the eagles soar, the wise sparrows hide in the shadows and when the storms rage, they take cover in the thorns.” In common terms it meant when the big shots show up, the little people must get out of the way. Jesus was saying God cares for everyone in a mighty way. We say in our community there are no big “I’s” and no little “you’s.” Jesus took this time to let everyone know that God’s love and care extends to all people. He was saying you may not be a big shot according to cultural standards, but you are important to God. The hairs on your head are numbered. Not just counted but numbered. Each hair has its own assigned number.

This text is a mixed metaphor; it refers to both sparrows and the hairs of our heads. Both refer to things that many would consider collectively and individually as of little value. As is apparent, in this sermon we will concentrate on the sparrow motif. I intentionally used both Matthew’s and Luke’s recordings. A comparison of the two versions reveals a tremendous truth. One farthing, which is one of the smallest coins circulated at the time, would buy two sparrows, and two farthings would buy not four, but five sparrows. Sparrows were of such little value in the market place that when two farthings were paid, a fifth bird was thrown in, at no additional cost, to make a bargain. It is similar to a baker’s dozen, where the thirteenth one was thrown in free. Yet, God’s eyes were on the odd sparrow as well as the others. We are like sparrows in some ways and unlike sparrows in other ways. Let’s explore as we exegete these Scriptures.

Exposition

How are we like sparrows?

1. Like Sparrows, We Sometimes Feel So Small In Such A Big Threatening World.

2. Like Sparrows, We Sometimes Feel Helpless Before The Strong Winds Of Life.

3. Like Sparrows, We Sometimes Feel We Are Incapable Of Maintaining What We Have Already Attained.

4. Like Sparrows, We Sometimes Seem So Common As To Be Comparatively Of Little Worth.

How are we different from sparrows?

5. Unlike Sparrows, We Are The Crown Of God's Creation.

6. Unlike Sparrows, We Have A Soul Worth Saving.

7. Unlike Sparrows, God Loves Us More Than the Other Creatures.

Closing Thoughts

How comforting and encouraging it is to know that God's loving interest extends to His smallest creatures. Without His consent, not one sparrow falls, whether struck by a stone or attacked by a larger bird of prey. It is more encouraging and comforting to know He cares much more about us. God watches over us better than we can watch over ourselves.

I can't resist quoting the first verse and chorus of the gospel hymn, *His Eye Is On the Sparrow*.

“Why should I feel discouraged?
 Why should the shadows come?
 Why should my heart feel lonely,
 And long for heaven and home,
 When Jesus is my portion?
 My constant Friend is He;
 His eye is on the sparrow,
 And I know He watches me;
 His eye is on the sparrow,
 And I know He watches me.

I sing because I'm happy,

I sing because I'm free;
For His eye is on the sparrow,
And I know He watches me.

Give God Glory! Give God All the Glory!

End Notes:

1. In this metaphor of the sparrow, Jesus used one of the rabbinic teaching techniques call *qal wahomer*. It proceeds from the lesser to the greater. This metaphor shows how God cares for sparrows and then shows that His love for humans is even greater. This technique implies similarities between some attributes of entities and then shows how one has superiority in some other aspects. The logic of the technique is simple: what applies in a relatively minor case, must certainly apply in a more important case. Literally in the Hebrew it means "light and heavy." This technique was also used in chapter eleven of Luke to show that God's love for us is greater than our earthly fathers' love (Luke 11:11-13).

2. There is some holy homework with this sermon. Please google the inaugural performance of the song, *Not One Falls*. It is on YouTube. It was composed, arranged, and conducted by Maestro Heather Sorenson. Alyssa Barnes is the featured soloist. She is a gifted soprano. It was performed during a "Leap of Faith" Concert at the Grace Center on March 5, 2020. The Grace Center provides medical care for the underprivileged. In my humble opinion, this performance is a little better than the official demo. Perhaps this is true because Heather was conducting it and you get a chance to see a live choir and orchestra in action. Also, the demo was made during the pandemic under unusual conditions. I hope I didn't make the demo singers mad. There will be a test next Sunday. I'm only kidding. However, I do believe the song will bless your spirits.

Copyright © 2021 By James C. Ward
All Rights Reserved