

Sermon for Sunday, August 18, 1974 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor  
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GOD AND THE FIFTH SPARROW

St. Matthew 10:24-39

Text: "But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows." St. Matthew 10: 30,31

There are several portions of Scripture that I would like to put together for you this morning. I think they make a rather interesting and revealing sequence. The first passage is the first part of the 29th verse of our passage for this morning where we read, "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny?" Now, the word translated "sparrow" in the Bible is actually a generic name used to designate all small birds that lived and nested around houses and gardens. So, the word sparrow here does not mean the kind of sparrow that we think of. As a matter of fact, there was a custom in the Bible country of the Jews to catch small birds which were then skinned and roasted to be sold as tasty tid-bits. One bird was about one bite! So, when Jesus mentions two sparrows being sold for a penny, he is talking about something familiar to all the people who themselves had often bought tasty tid-bits from the street vendors.

The second passage of Scripture is St. Luke 12:6. There we read, "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies?" Now, this passage affirms what we have already learned, that these little birds were an article of commerce in the days of Jesus, just as they are today in the Far East. However, we learn one additional fact, which is this: these little birds are of such small value, that you not only get two for a penny, if you buy two pennies worth, they throw in an extra one for nothing. In other words, the fifth sparrow is free, it is worth nothing.

The third passage of Scripture is the last part of verse 29 of our passage for this morning. There we read, "And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father's will." Now, the point is this: sparrows are worth very little--so little, that when you buy two pennies worth, you get a fifth one free. Yet, God's care and concern for his creation is such that even the fifth sparrow may not fall to the ground without God's knowledge and concern. God cares even for the fifth sparrow.

Some of you may have seen the article recently reprinted in the Reader's Digest entitled, "Seven Reasons Why a Scientist Believes in God." The first reason listed is that only a great mastermind could have lavished such care and infinite detail on every part of the creation. Yes, we live in an orderly world, a world which operates by laws that man can discover and by which he can learn how things will function and operate. Yet, when we have said this about our world, we have not said enough. We must go on to say that the God who created this world and who lavished such love and attention upon it, is still very much concerned about it. He is so concerned about every little detail that even a worthless fifth sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his will.

The fourth passage of scripture that I would like to call to your attention is our text for today. There we read, "But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows."

Do you ever begin to feel unloved and unlovely? Do you ever begin to feel that no one cares about you or what happens to you? Do you ever feel isolated and cut off as though you were all alone in the world? Well, Jesus tells us that God cares. If the valueless fifth sparrow is worthy of God's attention, how much more does God care

for us; how much more is God concerned for what happens to us. So, whatever need you might have this morning, I want to say to you, you are not alone. God cares for you. He knows what is going on in your life and it is of vital concern to him. You have a friend--you have someone who loves you and cares.

But the fact that God loves and cares for you has some implications for your life. It is about some of those implications that I wish us to think together this morning.

The first implication is this: If God cares for the fifth sparrow, if he cares for you, it also means that he cares for other people. And if we are so precious to God, so much so that even the hairs of our head are numbered, does it not have tremendous implications for how we treat other people for whom God also cares? We have been reading a lot lately about wide-spread starvation in parts of Africa where drought has wasted the land. Do you think God cares for those dying people if it grieves him when even a little sparrow dies? At the International Congress on World Evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland several weeks ago, we became aware of millions upon millions of people who have never heard of Jesus and who are perishing spiritually. Do you think it grieves the heart of God that men are lost eternally when he loves even the fifth sparrow? Are not men worth more than many sparrows? How will we answer to God if people perish because we didn't care?

Actually, it is much more personal than people in far off places. Are you ever guilty of looking down on other people? I know I'm sometimes guilty of that. If a person has a lowly or menial job, if the color of his skin is different from mine, if his educational level is below mine, if his standards are different from mine, I have been guilty of thinking less of him. Have you ever done that? But the Bible says that if a man says he loves God and hates--or thinks lowly--of his brother, he is a liar. The Bible says that if God so loved us, we ought to love one another. And if God loves even the fifth sparrow, he surely loves these people I have thought lowly of. Surely I will have to answer to him for how I have treated a fellow human being for whom Jesus died and whom God loves.

Wasn't one of the reasons the Jews crucified Jesus because he broke down barriers they had set up between themselves and others? He broke down social barriers when he ate with publicans and sinners; he broke down racial barriers--the parable of the Good Samaritan--he broke down religious barriers when he fellowshiped with the woman at the well--he broke down forgiveness barriers when he forgave the woman taken in adultery--he broke down compassion barriers when he reached out to heal the man possessed with demons. In every area of life where man excused himself for his injustices, Jesus reached in to the heart of the matter to show God's care and God's love and God's compassion. Do you think a God who is so careful over the little fifth sparrow will overlook our carelessness for others?

But there is a second aspect to this love of God. Many of you have deep, personal troubles or sorrows this morning and I want to say to you that the God who loves the fifth sparrow loves you, too. Many of you can remember the tragedy of Dunkirk early in World War II. The British Army had been pushed back to the sea by the Panzer divisions of Germany. With their backs to the water they faced inevitable destruction for they were out-manned, they had no armor and very little ammunition. But from England came a great armada of boats--every vessel that could float was called into service and you will remember how the entire army was taken off from Dunkirk. It was not an easy job. As one little ship, loaded with soldiers began to pull away from the beach at Dunkirk, she took several shells just above the waterline. By some miracle she made it back to England and the soldiers disembarked. As they left the

damaged vessel they said to the crew, "You'll never make it back--one little wave will sink her." The crew looked at their little ship and then at the channel. The channel is noted for its choppy waters and great swells. Ordinarily the sea would have sunk the little ship as she pulled away from the docks. Today, however, the water was strangely calm--not a ripple broke the surface. The sailors let go the lines and turned back towards Dunkirk. "We'll make it," they said, "God's got his hand on the water."

Many of you this morning have heavy hearts. Some trouble or loss or tragedy has brought you deep, inner pain and you are crying inside. I want you to know that God is conscious of your need, he knows of your trouble and God has His hand on the water.

Not long ago I visited with a family just before conducting the funeral for a loved one. I took the hand of the wife and said to her, "This will be the hardest part for you." "Yes," she said, "but I'm holding on to the promise." "What promise is that?" I asked. She smiled at me through her tears and said, "The promise that he won't send more than we can bear." Yes, God had his hand on the water and he who loves the fifth sparrow, loved her, too, and she knew it.

Just a few days ago I visited with a person who was dying and she knew it. She wanted to talk about her death but as we talked it was obvious that her concern was for her family and not herself. Finally, I asked her how she felt about dying and she looked at me with the most serene smile and said, "I'm not afraid of death. I have His promise that He will be with me." Yes, God had His hand on the water.

C. H. Spurgeon, a great preacher of a past generation, tells of once talking to a farmer who had a weather vane on his barn. The arrow on the weather vane had inscribed on it the words, "God is love." Mr. Spurgeon tells that he asked the farmer, "Do you think that God's love is changeable, that it veers about as the arrow turns in the wind?" "Oh, no," replied the farmer, "It means that whichever way the wind blows, God is still love." That's the way it is with a God who loves even the fifth sparrow, whichever way the wind blows, He still loves us.

Just last Friday I visited a man in the hospital. He had had emergency surgery and later in the Intensive Care Unit he suffered a cardiac arrest. He is still not out of the woods, but he has a certain radiance about him. He told me about his experience and then he said, "How glad I am to know that I have eternal life." Do you have that glad assurance this morning? You can, you know. God who loves the fifth sparrow has much more love for you. He wants you to give your heart and life to Him and He will give you that inner peace and joy. Then, no matter which way the wind blows, you will know that God is love; no matter what life brings you, you will find that in your life, God has His hand on the water.

Let not your heart be troubled, His tender word I hear  
And resting on his goodness, I lose my doubt and fear;  
Though by the path he leadeth, but one step I may see;  
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know he watches me.

Whenever I am tempted, whenever clouds arise,  
When songs give place to sighing, when hope within me dies;  
I draw the closer to Him, from care He sets me free;  
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know he cares for me.