

MY VICTORY IN JESUS_ OVER FEAR & DOUBT

What are you afraid of? We all know people who have some fears that immobilize them and rob them of peace and contentment. Some fears may seem unwarranted, at least in our view. We can't understand someone's fear of closed in spaces or of crowds or storms or the dark or spiders, snakes, germs or clowns – of drowning or flying or whatever – unless of course we share that fear. Then, we're a bit more sympathetic. Recently I learned of "FOMO" that motivates people to take unnecessary risks.

Then, of course there are those afraid of losing their job or their home or their health or their partner or a child or a parent. We may even now be one of those who is almost overcome by those very fears.

Perhaps you've heard counsel to "*not worry or be afraid*", but sincerely "*doubt*" that living without constant concern that something of value – maybe even our very life – could be taken from us any moment is just a pipe dream. If so, I want you to listen to the word of the Lord from Isaiah 41:9b-14:

^{9b} "I have chosen you and have not rejected you. ¹⁰ So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. ¹¹ All who rage against you will surely be ashamed and disgraced; those who oppose you will be as nothing and perish. ¹² Though you search for your enemies, you will not find them. Those who wage war against you will be as nothing at all. ¹³ For I am the LORD, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, '*Do not fear; I will help you.*' ¹⁴ Do not be afraid, O worm Jacob, O little Israel, for I, myself, will help you," declares the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.

Now this word was directed 1000's of years ago to the remnant of Israel that were truly descendants of Abraham - not just those of a physical lineage, but those men and women who possessed genuine faith in the God of heaven and His promises and power. In principle, this is for us too – that is, if we are of that spiritual heritage, believing and trusting in our Creator. Doubt that?

God often told people in the NT not to be afraid or to stop doubting. Sometimes it was because they were startled by an angelic or divine visitation – as with Zechariah, the shepherds in the field, Mary the mother of Jesus, or even His own disciples in the days immediately after His resurrection.

But, Jesus also addressed the issue more than once with His followers when they just worried about some present danger such as a severe storm (Mark 4:35-41), or the threat of persecution, or concerns of an uncertain future (Matthew 10:26-31). Depending on your translation, the words recorded that He said might be, "*Don't be afraid*" or "*Fear not.*"

Should He ask us, “*Why are you so afraid?*” we may begin listing legitimate reasons for fear and anxiety. Yet, I believe He would gently, but persistently tell us time and again not to “*be afraid.*” Why? Isn’t it natural for us to fear what we can’t control? Isn’t it at least sometimes justified for us to doubt even when Jesus says not to? Only when our focus is on the thing – or the possibility of it. And that’s the issue at hand. Consider the cherished words of our Savior shortly before His arrest and crucifixion. (John 14:1-6)

¹ **“Do not let your hearts be troubled.”** (ταράσσω – *to stir up, cause worry or terrify*) Why would He tell them this? You get 3 guesses but the first 2 don’t count. Their hearts were burdened with worry and anxiety and fear and doubt. They finally understood that Jesus was going to be leaving them. They were going to be on their own, and He had forewarned them that trouble was coming. His solution however is the same as the one offered in Isaiah 41. Read on: **“Trust in God; trust also in me.”** Hear that? The antidote to fear is trust. That in one way or another we will always have God with us, to uphold us and help us. He will get us through the worst of storms. Jesus then says, ² **In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.** ³ **And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.** ⁴ **You know the way to the place where I am going.”**

Jesus was saying, “*I won’t be gone long and you’ll be okay till I return. Besides, when I do come back, I’m taking you home with me.*” Now, that’s when one of his followers – the guy we now call “*Doubting Thomas*” spoke up with a question that was likely on the minds of the other disciples as well. ⁵ **Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”** My guess is he’s more like us than we care to admit. We doubt when we can’t work out how things will play out. Yet, ⁶ **Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”** There’s much more we could say about this, but for now, let it suffice that Jesus wants us to trust Him so much that we don’t even fret about the travel arrangements.

I find it interesting that the Hebrew writer (13:6) quotes Psalm 118 as an encouragement to those who’ve embraced Christ as their Savior and Lord. Listen to the context of that Psalm: ⁶ **“The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? / ⁷ The LORD’s with me; He’s my helper. I’ll look in triumph on my enemies. ⁸ It’s better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man. ⁹ It’s better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes.”** Simple formula; Take refuge in the Lord, trust in Him – and you will not be afraid.

Now, there’s something very important here that I must share, so track with me a few more minutes. As I’ve already said, this victory over fear and doubt is available for those who place their complete confidence in the Lord. But, oddly enough that begins with a sincere fear – not of the world or anything in it – but of the Lord Himself.

The wise man Solomon said in Proverbs 1:7 that **"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom."** Then, at the close of his treatise on the meaning and purpose of life, he also wrote that we are to, **"Fear God and keep His commandments."** (Ecclesiastes 12:13) *"Okay, but that's Old testament, Pastor Steve. I have nothing to fear from God today."* Really? Jesus told His followers not to fear those who could physically kill them – but reminded them that even they should fear Him who could destroy the soul. (Matthew 10:28)

If we don't respect, revere, and hold in awe our Creator, not only as one who could destroy us, but because of our sin has every right to do so, we have plenty to fear. We ought to be worried, anxious, and afraid. We would have no reason to do anything but doubt that we could ever find peace or contentment in this life – let alone have any assurance of anything but judgement beyond it.

But, here is the good news. When we trust God and His word, confessing our need for His mercy and for His strength and for His comfort – and then readily accept His Son Jesus as the **ONLY WAY** to a right relationship with the Father – surrendering ourselves in acceptance of Him as both Savior and Lord of our life - the fear of judgement is no longer immobilizing. Then instead of avoiding God, we are drawn to Him. Doubt that?

John the Apostle said this in 1st John 4:16-19: ¹⁶ **"God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in Him. ¹⁷ In this way, love is made complete among us so that we'll have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we're like Him."** Notice the confidence comes because we're living in relationship with Him now and He's making us more like Jesus every day. To us, He says, ¹⁸ **"There's no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears isn't made perfect in love. ¹⁹ We love because He first loved us."**

Someone told me last week that they wished my sermon had been broadcast to the world. Well, it is posted on our website. Now, I am of no reputation as to expect many people will access it, but listen closely, dear ones. If you will live so close to God that His love for you and through you is obvious, the message will reach far more people than my voice ever will. And when they not only *"hear"* about the love of God, but personally embrace it, their *"fear"* of God will dissipate along with their doubts.

Victory over fear and doubt comes when...we embrace the love of God in Christ.