Fear Not - Part 1

# Faith in a Culture of Fear

## (Matthew 10:29-31)

Welcome to week number one of our series called “Fear Not.” I’m excited to share the word of God with you today because I believe that God is going to encourage you and speak to you in a very personal way. I’m going to be talking with you about walking by faith in a culture of fear, and I believe this is a timely message, because not only are we living in fearful times, but it’s also a confusing time for people of faith. Many of us are struggling with faith because we believe in God, we trust God, and yet the times we’re living in right now make it very difficult not to be just a little fearful.

In other words, it’s hard not to feed off the fear of our culture when so many around us are fearful of COVID, fearful of the economy, fearful of our national security, fearful of whatever conspiracy or other issue the media is propagating. And so, as followers of Christ it’s difficult, struggling and wrestling with these fears, taking captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ with every newsflash or rumor. You’ve put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and you believe that he is the King of Kings and Lord of lords. You know that and you believe your faith enables you, giving you the power not to be ruled by your fear, and yet day by day you’re walking and living in a culture of fear, because it’s all over the media, and it’s everywhere you go.

Or you go to certain businesses, government buildings, or medical facilities and there are warning signs to put on a mask before you enter. You walk in and hand sanitizing stations are positioned strategically throughout the building and from time to time these thoughts of fear come into your mind. You cough or you get a scratchy throat and there’s another thought. You begin to feel run down and tired and you’re fearful, you’re worried, maybe there’s even some shame or guilt, because you know the word of God. You know that Jesus said,

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

I wonder if there are any of you today who can relate? Any of you who know what I’m talking about?

Well, what I want to do in this series is to begin to balance out where we live as believers in times like these. I want to share some things from the word of God that may bring some clarity, greater understanding, building you up and encouraging you in your faith, remembering the words of Jesus who said, “Have no fear…” (Matthew 10:26, ESV).

“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows” (Matthew 10:29-31, ESV).

And so, to begin I want to spend a little time addressing the feelings of guilt, shame, or anxiety when it comes to faith and fear, because many of us are under the misconception that they’re opposites, that you can only have one or the other. But that’s not true, faith and fear are not polar opposites, they’re not like north and south, hot and cold, or day and night. Faith and fear are completely different from each other.

Faith on one hand is an equal opportunity object, it’s planted, it dwells in your spirit, and so it doesn’t matter whether you are 13 or 74, God gives each one of us the ability to walk in faith. You see, faith itself is the gift of God, that’s what the Bible says,

“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Therefore, you can possess faith regardless of your age, gender, intellect, financial status, or any other thing, because faith is not something you learn, faith is something that happens in your spirit. Jesus is the author and perfecter of our faith, and so it could be a mustard seed of faith, it could be great faith, but the Bible says that as believers we give, love, and serve,

“With as much faith as God has given you” (Romans 12:6, NLT).

And so, whatever gift you have received, the Bible says you should use it in proportion to your faith, being confident, knowing that Jesus said,

“Surely I am with you always…" (Matthew 28:20).

And he is our never leaving, never forsaking God, even in a culture of fear.

Now, on the other hand, fear is a completely different experience for each one of us, and it doesn’t matter how much faith you have, there is something, some kind of fear that you wrestle with and live with every day. For you it may be the fear of dying, or the fear of not being able to breathe, being put on a ventilator, almost as if someone put a gun to your head, and even though you’re a believer, you know that you’re saved, that you’re going to heaven, there’s still a certain level of fear because you didn’t know it was going to be right now. And so, there are many things in life that scare us, you may be afraid of heights or thunderstorms. You may have a fear of growing old, the fear of being alone, fear that a loved one has or could die without Jesus, or maybe fear that your marriage isn’t going to make it, but all of us at different times will battle with feelings of fear.

The good news is that God doesn’t give us a spirit of fear, and so as we’re walking by faith in a culture of fear, we need to learn to put faith and fear in the proper context so that we’re able to see things in the right perspective. The apostle Paul tells us in second Timothy, chapter 1,

“God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7, NKJV).

And so, what does that mean for us today as believers, if God has not given us a spirit of fear, and yet we struggle with fear?

Well, let’s first begin by looking at a definition of fear. Google tells us that fear is:

“An unpleasant emotion caused by the belief that someone or something is dangerous, likely to cause pain, or a threat.”

And so, as we consider the definition of fear it’s easy to recognize that when we talk about faith and fear they’re really not equal opposites. Faith and fear are two completely different things. We’ve already seen that faith is the gift of God, faith resides in our spirit, but fear is an emotion. Fear is part of being human, fear is found in the complexity of the human mind, and therefore it’s not something that we have to learn, but it’s given to us. Therefore, we need to understand that there is both a healthy fear and an unhealthy fear.

For example, a healthy fear lets me know when I’ve climbed to high, gotten too close to the edge, or should run from a dog. And so, fear in and of itself is not a bad thing because it’s the fear of getting burnt that teaches a child not to touch a hot stove. It’s the fear of getting a ticket, having an accident, or the fear of higher insurance rates that teaches us to obey the speed limit. And so, there are some healthy benefits of fear, some positive things that come from fear as the Bible says,

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom…” (Proverbs 9:10).

And so, the fear of the Lord causes us to understand a lot of things that we need to know about the boundaries that God has put in place, things that he’s warned us about, and so fear in and of itself is not necessarily a bad thing.

But just like disgust, anger, happiness, or sadness, the emotion of fear is a subjective experience. And so, if our emotions get out of control, if they start driving our lives, and we start making decisions based on our emotions that’s when we get in trouble. Therefore, it’s in that context that the Bible says,

“God has not given us a spirit of fear…” (2 Timothy 1:7, NKJV).

In other words, a spirit of fear is unhealthy, it affects us negatively, and it will keep you from having a sound mind, walking in love and the power of God. And so, God has not given us a spirit of fear because it will keep you from being self-disciplined. He has not given us a spirit of fear because it’s an unreasonable fear, it’s an irrational fear, and it’ll cause you to be fearful of walking in faith.

Today, as you and I are walking by faith in a culture of fear that doesn’t mean that you don’t have some fear, because there is a healthy fear, a fear that can serve you, that can be protection for you, that can keep you alive and keep you alert. In fact, fear itself can empower your body in fight or flight situations, because fear releases adrenaline in your body giving you strength, speed, and endurance. And so, fear can be helpful, it’s part of your emotional makeup, it’s part of the complexity of our minds that protects us and makes us who we are.

However, on the other hand, you don’t want to be controlled by a spirit of fear, always walking in fear, anxious about what’s around the next corner, because fear is putting your faith in the wrong things. Fear is not the opposite of faith; fear is putting your faith in hypothetical or even imaginary situations, placing your faith in what-ifs, instead of putting your faith in God who alone is trustworthy.

In fact, there is a familiar story in Scripture about a Hebrew baby named Moses who was born at a time when Hebrew baby boys were being murdered in an attempt to control the population. This was certainly a fearful time for every Hebrew parent, but the Bible says in Exodus chapter 2 that when Moses’ mother, “saw that he was a beautiful child, she hid him for three months” (Exodus 2:2, NKJV). History tells us that when she was unable to keep them hidden any longer, she placed him in a basket in the river where he was soon discovered by the Pharaoh’s daughter.

Now, Pharaoh’s daughter did what any young girl would do and she took him home and said “Daddy can I keep him?” Through this amazing chain of events according to God’s sovereign will, Moses escaped death and was raised in the Pharaoh’s house. That was until one day when he saw an Egyptian slave master kill one of his fellow Hebrews. Moses, not having forgotten who he was, retaliated and killed the Egyptian, but as soon as the Pharaoh found out about it the Bible says,

“Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh and dwelt in the land of Midian…” (Exodus 2:15, NKJV).

It was as he was hiding in the wilderness, a fugitive from the Pharaoh, that he had an encounter with the very presence of God. God spoke to him from a burning bush, which in itself wasn’t unusual, but the very fact that the bush wasn’t consumed and yet continued to burn caught his attention.

Drawing near to this burning bush, the audible voice of God said to him,

“The cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt" (Exodus 3:9-10).

And so, here is Moses in the presence of the living God, the Lord gives him a direct command, and the first words out of his mouth are words of fear and disbelief. Moses replies,

“Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3:11).

In other words, he’s like maybe we could just think this through first? He says, “But God, what if?” “Let’s consider some of the worst-case scenarios.”

In verse 13, Moses says to God,

"Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" (Exodus 3:13).

In other words, Moses is like, “What if they don’t believe me? What if they don’t listen to me? What if they say, “The Lord didn’t appear to you?”

“God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you" (Exodus 3:14).

And so, here is Moses in the presence of the living God and he’s so gripped by fear that all he can think about is what if this or what if that.

But isn’t that what we often do too? It doesn’t take somebody holding a knife to your throat or even hanging from the second-floor gutter of your house to become paralyzed with fear. We lay down at night and we can’t rest, we toss and turn, because there is all this turmoil, this struggle going on in our mind. We’re fearful of the economy, fearful of the times, fearful that something is going to happen to the kids, fearful that somebody is going to get sick, fearful of growing old, fearful of being alone, fearful of walking by faith, and our minds are so scarred, damaged, and wounded, because we’re holding onto all of these issues, wrestling in our mind, and we have put our faith in these what if circumstances instead of in God.

And the truth is we’re playing right into the enemy’s hands to steal, kill, and destroy, because Satan doesn’t want you to have any peace in your mind. In fact, the apostle Paul testifies about this war going on in his mind and in his body. He said in Romans chapter 7,

“When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members” (Romans 7:21-23).

In other words, he says in my spirit I want to do what is right, but I’m holding onto so many things in my mind that there is this war going on. And so, even though in my mind I serve the Lord, there is this battle going on, this war waging in my mind filling it full of all these worst-case scenarios.

The problem is that even though we recognize they’re not from God they actually matter a lot to us, because what you fear the most reveals what you value the most. And if that wasn’t true you wouldn’t be so obsessed by it, and so it’s not necessarily bad, but we need to find the balance. If you’re worried and fearful about your marriage, that means you value your marriage. If you’re fearful about the longevity of your job, that means you value the security of your family. If you’re afraid something might happen to your kids, that means you care for them and value their health and well-being. And so, what you fear the most reveals what you value the most, but what you fear the most also reveals where you trust God the least.

And so, I want you to think about that for a moment, I want you to begin processing that, because if you don’t allow yourself to be honest about where you struggle with fear and let the Holy Spirit minister to you there, you’ll never find the freedom Christ came to bring. You’re going to miss it because you can’t overcome what you’re unable to define, and so this is where I want to get really practical. Because this is the first step to a life of freedom, you’ve got to name that thing that is the catalyst for this war in your mind, so that you’re able to experience the power of God to be set free from your fears.

Now, this may seem too simple, but it’s life changing because we’re going to acknowledge our fear and choose to trust God anyway. I’m not talking about just closing your eyes and pretending it’s not there. I’m talking about being honest and acknowledging before God that I struggle with this and I need your help to overcome it. This is what we see with Moses, the acknowledgment of his fear, the recognition that he was unworthy, but believing what God said and in holy fear he moved. Recognizing the danger of what was ahead he stepped out in faith understanding that his fear was justified, because this is real, this is true, this is important, and these things are coming to pass.

We find Moses’ name made it into the book of Hebrews where the writer is talking about faith itself. In Chapter 11 he begins to list all of these people who did all these amazing things by faith. By faith Abel offered a better sacrifice, by faith Enoch was taken from this life, by faith Noah when warned about things not yet seen, by faith Abraham when called to go, by faith Isaac, by faith Jacob, by faith Joseph, by faith verse 23,

“By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born…” (Hebrews 11:23).

“By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter” (Hebrews 11:24).

And so, it is by faith, “that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.” It’s not flesh, it’s not by emotions, not by compassion or coercion, but by faith. Because it’s faith that literally opens the doors of heaven for you to receive things that don’t make any earthly sense. By faith Moses,

“chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time” (Hebrews 11:25).

And so, without faith the Bible says,

“It is impossible to please God…” (Hebrews 11:6).

Without faith you can forget it, without faith there’s no gift, no service, no benevolence whatsoever, because whoever comes to God “must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

In other words, today you and I must earnestly seek God, we must go out of our way to meet with him, believing that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. That’s the key if you’ve been fearful, that’s a game changer if you’ve felt guilty because you’re concerned about the times. You see, if you have the faith to earnestly seek God, believing that he exists, you can still live in a culture of fear like Moses and perform great feats of faith, because you’re not moved by your fear, you’re moved by your faith.

David is another example of faith in a culture of fear. He was anointed to be the next king of Israel, but Saul was the king and when he heard about David he was not about to be ousted from the kingdom. So, Saul begins to look for every opportunity to take David’s life, but listen to these amazing words of David in Psalm chapter 56. David says,

“In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?” (Psalms 56:4).

Now, obviously, he had every reason to be afraid because the king had the power and authority to kill him. However, David recognized that his calling and the sovereign will of God were not in competition and that what God had said would happen according to his perfect timing. And so, he was like, “Saul, you can pursue me, you can hurt me, but you can’t change the fact that my God still has a purpose for my life.” That’s how he could say with confidence, “What can mortal man do to me?” And so, he publicly declared among the people of God “in God I trust; I will not be afraid” and he determined not to put his faith in his fear, but to put his faith in the Lord.

I love that because if you live your life concerned about the events around you, concerned by what the media says, believing all of these things that you see and hear you’ll be gripped by fear. But if you look at it from the perspective of David and speak the word of God over yourself, declaring, “I am a child of God, I am a citizen of heaven, and it’s the things of God’s kingdom, presence, and power that define who I am.” And even though you walk in a culture of fear, God will take away your fears, and his purposes will be done in you because you chose to trust God with it.

Today, we need to do what David did, earnestly seeking God, pressing into him, pursuing him, persisting until he takes away our fears. That’s exactly what David who had everything to fear did. He testified saying,

“I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears” (Psalms 34:4).

Would you take a moment right now to think about whatever it is that you fear, whatever has caused you anxiety, that which has caused you sleepless nights, and give it to the Lord, trusting him who says, “Fear Not.”

Church, as we do, God is going to remove the fear and restore our trust, because he has the power to make sure that your future is not reflective of your past. Not only that, he will redeem the time, and so as we close, we’re going to acknowledge our fears, earnestly seeking him, trusting him, and pressing in by faith until he removes our fears from us.

Let’s pray together.

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