“Fear Not”

Luke 1:26-37

December 25, 2016

Are elephants really afraid of mice? Fear is one of the most common emotions known to man. And the one Book throughout history that has the most to say, the most practical things to say, and the most enduring things to say about fear is the Bible.

I think you’ll be surprised to discover the role that fear plays in the Christmas story. So, I’ve titled today’s sermon “Fear Not.” Shall we pray?

Please take your Bible in hand and read with me in the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke the announcement of the Angel Gabriel to Mary about the coming conception of Jesus. Luke 1:28 *“And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. (29) And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.*

*(30) And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. (31) And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus.”*

Some say that only a woman could imagine the thoughts of Mary that day. But, as a man, I’m going to venture a guess that girls and women in the first century might have often wondered or even discussed what kind a person she might be to bring the Messiah of Israel into the world.

Please notice the words “cast in her mind” in verse 29. She was “thinking back,” trying to recall why *she* should have had an angel speaking to her. She was also trying to think on why *she* should be considered *highly favored and blessed among women.* And I imagine she was thinking, “Why should the LORD be with *me*?”

No doubt, it sent a shock through Mary’s heart to hear the voice of the Angel Gabriel and then, why was he saying those things. But I want you to focus with me on just two or three words; the words of the angel to Mary in verse thirty; “Fear not, Mary…”

“Fear not.” Two of the most powerful words ever spoken. Christmas is here. And, instead of it being a time of happiness and sharing, for a surprising large number of people, it’s a time of fear.

Have you ever heard of selaphobia? It’s fear of flashing lights. Cyssanophobia is the fear of being kissed under the mistletoe. Syngenesophobia is the fear of relatives. Siderophobia is the fear of stars. Acrophobia is the fear of being in high places.

Arachnophobia is the fear of snakes. Cynophobia is the fear of dogs. Claustrophobia is the fear of being in tight places. A hippopotomonstrosesquipedalian has a fear of long words. Globophobia is the fear of balloons. Musophobia is the fear of mice. Seriously, there are literally pages and pages and of pages of fears listed in books on psychology; thousands of phobias.

Now, at the risk of sounding a bit gloomy on Christmas Day, add to this list the following: Since 9/11 terrorist attacks all have occurred over the world. But in 2015 alone, there were 2,862 worldwide I.S.I.S attacks around the world in which not less than 27,494 people died. [Found on <http://www.thereligion-ofpeace.com/attacks/attacks.aspx?Yr=2015>]. And also, in the United States we’ve had 75 terror attacks since 9/11. [Found on <http://politicalscience.osu.edu/faculty/jmueller/since.html>].

So, yes, Christmas is here and we all go shopping for gifts for our loved ones and then another terrorist drives a truck into a crowded Christmas Market in Berlin and twelve more lives are taken.

The Scripture even predicts that in the last days, men’s hearts will fail them for fear. Jesus predicted this in Luke 21:25 *“And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring;*

*(26) Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. (27) And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”*

Today is the age of fear. Today we are living in a very fear-filled world. And, the Bible is the only place where we find the truth.

So, what is the answer?

First, believe what the LORD says about it.

Gabriel says to Mary “Fear not, Mary.” And what did the angels say to the shepherds on the night of Christ’s birth? Luke 2:10 *“And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. (11) For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”*

And what did the angel say to Joseph on the day he discovered that Mary, his espoused wife, was great with child? Matthew 1:18 *“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. (19) Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.*

*(20) But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.”*

Someone has researched the entire Bible and discovered that there are around 365 times the LORD says “Fear not” in the Bible. But, in my research, I found only 74 “fear nots.” But there are 29 more times that he says “Be not afraid.” So, really, there are more than 110 times.

But, here’s the question “How many times does the LORD have to tell you something before you do it?”

Everyone faces fears of some kind. Some may be small. But some are very large. I have a challenge for you for this Christmas. Here it is. Every time you are tempted to respond to a situation in fear, quote this phrase to yourself or even out loud; “fear not; saith the LORD.”

You are no more likely or less likely to have to face a fear than the person sitting near you. Fear is a common emotion. But God’s word is the only remedy that will enable you to proceed.

Now, what should you believe about fear?

Believe that the LORD Himself is your Salvation.

Psalm 27:1 *“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”*

There is no salvation apart from the LORD. But, folks, salvation isn’t a thing. Salvation is a Person. The LORD is your Salvation.

Jesus came into this world to do all the work necessary to accomplish your salvation. And the moment you no longer trust in yourself and begin to see Him as your Salvation, you are delivered from fear.

Hebrews 2:14 *“Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; (15) And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”*

The entire story of Christmas revolves around this very simple fact. Jesus became like you and me. He partook of human flesh and human blood. And why? Paul tells us. Hebrews 2:14 “…*that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; (15) And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”*

You see; He’s your Salvation. When you see Jesus and what He accomplished at the Cross, and you put your faith in Him and in His work, then you are forgiven. But beyond forgiveness is this. You are delivered from the fear of death.

First, believe what the LORD says about fear.

Second, each occasion where you are tempted to be afraid, choose trust over fear.

Psalm 56:3 *“What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.”*

Psalm 56:11 *“In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me.”*

Psalm 112:7 *“He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.”*

Sometimes it’s bad news from the doctor. Sometimes it’s bad news from a policeman. A man called me this week from Minnesota. Somehow he found my name and number.

We talked for nearly forty-five minutes. That very morning his wife of twenty-six years had died. And how was this husband grieving? He said “I know exactly where Judy is today. She’s with the LORD.”

Where does a man get that level of comfort in the face of death? One place. He had his heart fixed, not on the things of this world; but on the LORD, the Lover of his soul.

Hebrews 13:5 *“Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. (6) So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.”*

How is it possible to face your fears in this modern world? One way. Every time you are afraid, turn yourself in faith to the LORD. He is your Father, your Savior, your LORD, your King, your Husband, your God, your Helper. He’s the Answer to your every fear.

First, believe what the LORD says about it.

Second, each occasion where you are tempted to be afraid, choose trust over fear.

Third, believe in the presence of the Invisible God.

Isaiah 41:10 *“Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.”*

For Mary, for Joseph, and for the shepherds, the LORD says the same thing “fear not.” Why? Because He knows who you are and where you are and what troubles you most. And He cares.

And, yes, Mary and Joseph and the shepherds had the same fears you have. And did they not have the Invisible God present with them?

One of my daily prayers is this. LORD, I ask that I might have a greater sense of Your awareness than my self-awareness. Christ-awareness greater than self-awareness.

One of the passages that Janet shared with me recently while I was this one in the midst of my trial was Psalm 91. Here it is.

Psalm 91:1 *“He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. (2) I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. (3) Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence.*

*(4) He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. (5) Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; (6) Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday.*

*(7) A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. (8) Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. (9) Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation;*

*(10) There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. (11) For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. (12) They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.*

*(13) Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet. (14) Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name.*

*(15) He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. (16) With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation.”*

So, for Christmas this year, let’s stop letting our hearts be troubled. John 14:1 *“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.”*

Probably the greatest heart trouble you can have is to walk in fear.

First, believe what the LORD says about it.

Second, each occasion where you are tempted to be afraid, choose trust over fear.

Third, believe in the presence of the Invisible God.

Hebrews 12:1 *“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,*

*(2) Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

If you are one of those who struggles with fear today, take yourself in before the LORD and offer this prayer. “LORD, I’ve been doing this for way too long. I surrender myself completely to you right now. Thank you for sending Your Son to be my Savior and LORD. Thank you that He has removed my greatest fear, the fear of death. I’m Yours, LORD, Thy will be done; In Jesus’ Name, Amen.”

Shall we pray?

Please find with me hymn number # 277 “Hark, The Herald Angels Sing”