

70 – Dealing with Danger

John 12: 20-38

Fear is very lonely. It seems to place a barrier between us and others, and between us and God. It feels like we've walked into a chamber and closed the door. There, alone, trapped with our terrible thoughts, our emotions churn and our body grows weary. In fact the suffering that fear brings is often worse than the problem itself. We can suffer through the same event over and over again in our mind, long before we actually encounter whatever it is we fear.

I wish there were a way we could do away with fear forever, but that blessing awaits the return of Jesus Christ. Until then you and I live in bodies that are vulnerable to fear. But when God gave us the Holy Spirit, He placed inside us a power greater than fear, a power strong enough to bring our rebellious emotions into submission. Here's how the apostle Paul described that power: "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal (dying) bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you" (Ro 8:11).

That means that the Holy Spirit who lives inside the physical body of every believer is stronger than the forces, impulses, temptations or attitudes that arise from that body. This means you and I have been given access to a power greater than fear. And that means you and I are not slaves of fear; we can break its grip and live free of its control. There is no promise in the Bible that says fear will never trouble a believer, but there are many promises that say we can have victory over it when it arrives.

The apostle John gives us a remarkable gift in the passage we're studying today. He records Jesus talking about how He dealt with the fear of the cross. If Jesus had to deal with fear, then so do we. But as we'll see, when fear attacked Him He didn't allow it to control Him. He knew how to gain victory over it. So let's listen to Him carefully and learn to do what He did.

The hour of suffering (Jn 12:20-27)

• DBS (Tues, Wed, Sat)

Jesus was truly and fully human, so the terror of what lay ahead shook Him as it would anyone. His natural desire to live recoiled at the violent death His spirit had obediently chosen. By recording what Jesus said in that moment of reflection, John allows us to hear Him deliberate within Himself. And we learn that His natural man wanted to live. And the desire to live is no sin; it's a God-given instinct. His humanity longed to ask the Father to rescue Him, and we know from another statement He made in the Garden of Gethsemane that the Father would have done so had He asked. Listen:

"Do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" (Mt 26:53).

Jesus was not a victim. He was a willing sacrifice. Not even the Father would force Him to endure the cross (Jn 10:18). He chose to suffer because He saw the purpose. He said, "But all this has taken place to fulfill the scriptures of the prophets" (Mt 26:56). Those words tell us that He saw Himself in the Bible. He knew He was the One the prophets said must die for us before He would be glorified as our great King. So He knew what He must do and why, and He used that understanding to silence the fear.

The response (Jn 12:28-38)

After reminding Himself of why He must suffer, Jesus prayed, "Father, glorify Your name." I believe He was saying, "Glorify Your name by empowering Me to fulfill Your purpose for this hour," which was to become "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29); it was to become the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 49:1-53:12. And the Father answered Him by saying, "I have both glorified [it] and will glorify [it] again" (literal), meaning, "I have already glorified My name by sending You into the world to die as a guilt offering (Isa 53:10). I will glorify it again by raising You from the dead and placing You in a position of authority that is high and exalted above all My creation (Isa 52:13; 53:12).

The Father said these things audibly, and the entire crowd standing nearby heard His voice. Many reacted with denial. Some pretended to have heard thunder. Others, who didn't dare deny that they had heard distinct words, said it must have been an angel. But it was the Father's voice answering His Son's prayer, and Jesus knew the crowd heard what the voice said. So He said to them, "This voice did not come because of Me, but because of you" (literal) (v30). In other words, "I didn't need this assurance, you did." Then He went on to say that God was promising them that the judgment that had fallen on the human race because of our sin and the brutal control the devil held over us was about to be broken (v30). By His cross He would make a way of salvation for all humans (v32).

By using the words "lifted up" (v32) Jesus indicated that He would die violently, and they all knew what He meant. That, however, was the one truth most of them were not willing to accept. That truth had always been their point of conflict with Jesus. They would gladly welcome Him if He would become a king who would rise up and defeat their enemies, but they felt no need for a Messiah who would die for their sins. So they tried to show Him how mistaken He was by engaging Him in a theological debate about Messianic promises (v34), but Jesus refused to be drawn into that argument. He simply warned them that their opportunity to respond to Him, while He was there with them in person, was nearly at an end (vs35-36). Yet few were willing to believe (v37), so on that Sunday afternoon He slipped away from the crowd and returned to Bethany (Mk 11:11).

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In case any of his readers missed the point, John quotes to us Isaiah's question, "[Lord] who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" (Isa 53:1). Isaiah spoke those words in the middle of his prophecy about the Messiah dying as a guilt offering for the sins of Jews and Gentiles (Isa 52:13-53:12), and as he wrote it he wondered who would believe it.

Three sources of fear

All fear isn't the same. There are different sources of fear, so there are different solutions for dealing with fear depending on its cause. Jesus' fear arose because of a genuine danger. He was about to undergo a shameful and brutal death. But not all the things that cause us fear are genuine. Some of our fears arise from doubt and some from deception. Let's try to understand the difference before we examine how to deal with genuine danger.

- 1) Doubt: We lack confidence that God can help us. Solution: repentance and filling our heart with the truth of His Word, then stepping out in small steps to discover His faithfulness, followed by larger steps as we learn to refuse to let doubt control us.
- 2) Deception: In this case, we are afraid of something that's not really there. We've come to a false conclusion on our own or believe a lie that's been told to us. Solution: ask God to show us the truth, and then refuse to let the lie return by focusing our thoughts on Jesus every time fear tries to return.
- 3) Danger: There are genuine dangers, and God has given us a natural reaction that triggers the strength we need to flee or defend ourselves. This is a good form of fear and may keep us alive at a moment of crisis. But there are occasions when God will ask us to face a genuine danger and ignore our fear. Those moments often come when He needs us to rescue others, and that's the choice Jesus made over and over again throughout His ministry.

Dealing with danger

When genuine danger is present fear will tend to re-emerge. We deal with it; we find peace; and then the fear comes back, and we have to deal with it again. It did even for Jesus. John lets us hear Him pray on the Sunday afternoon of that final week, but by late Thursday evening or early Friday morning, Jesus endured an even more severe attack of anxiety while waiting for Judas to betray Him (Mt 26:37-38; Mk 14:34; Lk 22:42-45). On both occasions He dealt with the fear in the same two ways and found victory over it. Let's discover what He did, so we can deal with our fear in the face of genuine danger the same way.

1) Purpose: He reminded Himself of why He had to go through the danger, rather than run away from it. He said it was necessary for Him to accomplish God's will. Let's hear it again: "What shall I say, 'Father, save Me out of this hour'? But for this purpose I came into this hour" (literal).

No, Jesus would not ask to be rescued, because the cross was the very reason God had sent Him into the world. He would choose obedience and trust God's promise to raise Him from the dead. And He would make that same decision, days later, in Gethsemane when the fear arose again. Listen. "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done" (Lk 22:42).

2) Presence: Determined to face what lay ahead, Jesus immediately turned and spoke to the Father. He called on the Father to glorify His name, and the Father answered in a voice from heaven. In Gethsemane the Father sent an angel to strengthen Him (Lk 22:43). Each time Jesus turned His thoughts away from the danger and concentrated on the invisible, but very real, presence of God.

Setting the mind

Jesus shows us that whenever we are attacked by fear we can turn our thoughts to God. Paul calls that action "setting the mind on the things of the Spirit" (Ro 8:5). He says we have a choice. We can either focus our attention on the "mind of the flesh," which is where the fear is coming from; or we can focus on the "mind of the Spirit," which is assuring us that God is with us and will protect us, even if we must pass through the "valley of the shadow of death" (Ps 23:4). Paul says by doing that we can put to death the "deeds of the body" (Ro 8:13), which certainly includes fear.

Fight the fear

The greatest obstacle that prevents us from receiving God's help is fear. Once the fear is gone, faith can arise; our spiritual ears can open up, and we can hear God's voice and receive His guidance. We come out of that lonely chamber. Our peaceful mind is again able to pray boldly, and in many cases that's when a miraculous turn begins to happen. And even if we still have to engage the thing we feared, we do so now not as victims, but as children of God, confident that our Father has our circumstances firmly in His hands.

Responding to fear

How we respond to fear depends on why we are afraid. If it's because we are full of doubt, then our solution is to repent and fill our hearts with the truth of God's Word. If we have been deceived and are afraid of something that doesn't really exist, then our solution is to ask God to show us the truth. But if the danger we face is genuine, then we can follow the example of our Lord who reminded Himself of why He had to suffer and then set His mind on the presence of the Father.



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We can do the same. And when we do, the fear will leave us, at least for a while. And if it returns, we will again remember God's purpose and return to His presence, and we will find His victory over fear as many times as we need it... until the day comes when He wipes away every tear (Isa 25:8), and sorrow and sighing will flee away (Isa 35:10).

Questions

- 1) Describe how fear affects you personally. What happens to your body, your mind, your emotions? How do those changes put up a barrier between you and others? Between you and God?
- 2) Have you ever had to go through a situation that was genuinely dangerous, and you called on God and He helped you? Tell us about it.