

Fear

*A Sermon on Genesis 15:1
Dave Cover, The Crossing, Preached 3/15/20 Online Only*

WE

Today we do this as we're trying to love our neighbor — particularly our elderly and immune-compromised neighbors —

Show graph of Fattening the Curve

- In the hope to delay the *peak* of the epidemic.
- AND to flatten the *peak* of the epidemic.

So as not to overwhelm our healthcare system. Healthcare workers. Facilities. Ventilators. (Still other emergencies)

Try to push it back so treatments can be developed and summer heat and sun slow the virus for a while.

Because this virus is highly contagious.

And the way we believe God, or not, is also highly contagious.

Always. But that is especially so in this crisis.

In significant ways our faith (or the lack of it) will be the most contagious thing in us to those around us, our families, friends.

And the word, “Pandemic,” shows how connected we all are as we see this deadly virus spreading so fast around the world and in our nation.

GOD

And yes, it's certainly scary. And probably the more aware and informed you are the more alarmed you will be.

What's that phrase — “Ignorance is bliss”?

But there's another kind of ignorance that does the opposite — it turns fear into panic.

NOT “I need to take this more seriously!” — BUT a momentary, emotional absence of faith that our situation is out of control.

But...

God knew that fear would always be the most powerful emotion in our fallen world and fallen human condition.

We saw this first thing after sin entered the world in Genesis 3 — first words spoken — “I was afraid.”

God knew his words — “do not fear” or “do not be afraid” — would be perhaps the most needed words by his people throughout the ages — especially considering that these few but large words are repeated more than 300 times in the Bible!

The Bible has a LOT to say about fear. Because as human beings fear will perhaps be our most repeated context in life.

And we see it in this verse we looked at a couple of weeks ago...

Genesis 15:1

After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.”

LORD = The I AM. (Infinite. Source of all existence. Giver of all life. Always present.)

God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 15 is his promise to us — that in our all fears God promises to be our shield.

Of course Abraham eventually died. So God's promise is bigger.

Let me just hit our fear head on here...

The LORD — The I AM — being our Shield means that...

1. If we or a loved one should *die*, it will *not* be because of the *virus*. It will ultimately be because of God.

Jesus explained it this way...

Matthew 10:29–31 NIV

²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. ³⁰ And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. (By God)

Some have difficulty with “Father,” but try to see from Jesus' view.

³¹ So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

Like the sparrow, you may indeed “fall,” but it will never be outside your Father's care.

David writes in the Psalms (“by the Holy Spirit”) ...

And you really can't even begin to understand the Psalms outside the context of fear... That was David's context in most of them!

This was his comfort...

Psalms 139:16–18 NIV

¹⁶ All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

Mystery of course. We must participate through our choices, but somehow ultimately God has already ordained/written it.

Written in the context of fear, this was also his comfort.

¹⁷ How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them!

¹⁸ Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand.

In other words, we can't fathom God's infinite, loving, wise intentions toward us.

David also writes ...written in the context of very real fear...

Psalms 31:14–15 NIV

¹⁴ But I trust in you, LORD; I say, “You are my God.” ¹⁵ My times are in your hands.

When it comes to *anything* we may fear — our *ultimate* trust is that ALL “our times” are always in God's hands (complete control) of infinite love

and wisdom.

Of course David eventually died. Yet God's promise is bigger.

The problem is that...

2. Fear can quickly compel us to think and feel as if God is NOT in control over all our circumstances with his infinite love and wisdom.

After talking at length about our Heavenly Father's intimate and detailed care for us, Jesus says...

Matthew 6:25 NIV

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life....

Worry/anxiety can't handle not being in control of our wellbeing.

Jesus not just saying, "Don't worry." He's saying "Therefore..."

What will your worry do that God won't? Because if you could control it, it would be far worse than God's infinite love and wisdom.

Matthew 6:27 NIV

Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

See, we worry when there are times when we can't control our life like we thought. Jesus says THAT'S the point! You have to trust the only one who does.

"*Our life*" is like a big tree towering over our view, and it's all we can see. But Jesus tells us to look at the forest... We're inside a much bigger story.

Matthew 6:33–34 NIV

³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Next verse...He says it again...

³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Corrie ten Boom led courageously under Nazi occupation and eventually suffered greatly in a concentration camp—

I like what she says...

“Worry doesn’t empty tomorrow of its sorrows, it empties today of its strength.”

I would add that it empties today of its joy, love, and appreciation because of the Kingdom of God.

That’s why...

3. God has called us to overcome our fears by leaning them on the promise of his presence and commitment to us in Christ.

Reminder about last sermon...

The I AM is always in the present tense — infinitely in the present.

¹ The I AM is 100% with you without being any less present anywhere else.

² He is 100% focused on you without being any less focused anywhere else.

I received this email after my last sermon...

I’ve known God was Omnipresent ... and I thought I knew what it meant ... until you said that “God is always in the present tense — in my present, my now.

He is 100% with me without being absent somewhere else.” ...Realizing that God is 100% with me without being [at all absent] somewhere else was an epiphany for me.

I knew He was with me, but I had the concept that He was busy with other things too and that if I needed something I should “call upon the name of the Lord”.

So, realizing that God is with me 100% has given me a new peace that I am cherishing. ...I feel like I’m in a little bubble with God and it is such a peaceful place to be.

Jesus in Matt 6 — “your Father who is with you in secret.”

God says that this promise alone can overcome our fears...

Isaiah 41:10 NIV

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God.

When God says “I am your God” = he is forever committed to you.

That he is your security. He is focused on you as GOD!

Which means...

4. We can choose to trust in God — to believe God — IN our fears.

Let's keep in mind that *fear* is not *necessarily* the opposite of *faith*.

It's not as if we're not going to fear fearful things. Impossible.

But we can have both at the same time. No doubt David had both at the same time as he wrote many Psalms *by the Holy Spirit*.

Fear and faith go together. Fear is why we need faith.

Our goal is to have a kind of faith in God's promise and presence that enables us to experience a kind of joy, love, and appreciation *IN* our fears.

Because there IS a kind of fear that CAN be because of wisdom of knowing what is likely ahead.

The night before Jesus was crucified, he knew what was coming.

Mark 14:33 ESV

[Jesus] began to be greatly distressed and troubled.

“Distressed” — to be greatly alarmed.

“Troubled” — to be very heavy.

You can have *faith* and *wisdom* and still experience that kind of fear.

Yet in v. 36 Jesus asks God to deliver him from this oncoming suffering, then he prays what we all should try to pray...

Mark 14:36 ESV

“Yet not what I will, but what you will.”

Jesus knew that ultimately the Father's will is infinite in love and wisdom.

That's perfect faith while IN fear.

IN your fears, you can say to yourself...

“God is my God who is 100% with me and is in control of everything and his will for me is infinite in love and wisdom.”

You can trust God’s promise to you IN your fears.

And the Bible also tells us that...

5. We can have faith AND we can be careful, too

Faith in God as our Shield does NOT mean we take careless risks.

It is NOT faith to NOT take precaution against the virus and try to protect others from it as well.

Some say, “Don’t worry about it. God will protect us.” That sounds a lot like Satan’s second temptation to Jesus in Matthew 4. Jesus said don’t put God to the test.

Proverbs 22:3 ESV

The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it.

But...

6. If you do get sick, then get sick well!

I’m told 70%-80% of the population will end up getting this virus.

But who knows?

While we want to delay the peak and we want to lower the peak, ultimately most of us are probably not going to be able to avoid getting this virus at some point.

My point is, if we DO get sick with this, let’s get sick well.

That means get sick VERTICALLY and not just horizontally.

When we get sick, we can pray like David...

Psalms 16:1–2 ESV

Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge. I say to the LORD, “You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you.”

When we get sick, we can take comfort in this...

Philippians 4:5–6 NIV

⁵ The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

In your anxiety, remember to pray and praise with a kind of joy and love and appreciation that God is infinitely near/with you RIGHT NOW.

1 Peter 5:7 NIV

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

Take all the mental and emotional energy you're tempted to devote to anxiety and pray instead about whatever makes you anxious.

Here's what we know for sure: if COVID-19 doesn't kill us, something else eventually will.
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Just like Abraham. Just like David.

Just like Jesus. God himself in Jesus when he died to ultimately take death's power back forever. And then he rose forever!

The chances are still higher that you won't die from this.

But you will die eventually and if you're a follower of Jesus then your long term absolute *worst-case* scenario, according to God's promise, is resurrection from the dead and everlasting life.

A couple of weeks ago ... seems so much longer ... but

The NHL asks home teams to keep an extra emergency backup goalie in the arena.

They're not official NHL players; they're merely there in case either the home team or the visiting opponent loses both their goalies in a game. The job almost never results in action.

42-year-old David Ayres — who works at a local sports facility in Toronto — had been a Toronto Maple Leafs emergency backup goalie for a few years, but he'd never come close to getting into an actual game.

He did a couple Saturdays ago...

Show Photo of Amateur goalie – David Ayres

He had to play for the visiting Carolina Hurricanes after they lost their two goalies to injury in the game.

He came in in the 2nd period and quickly let in a couple of goals.

In the Carolina locker room between the second and third period, injured goalie James Reimer offered advice. “He sat down beside me and said, ‘You know what you’re doing. You know how to stop a puck,’”

He went back in and ended up blocking 8 shots on goal and got the 6-3 win.

I thought of this when thinking of how we’re to respond in this pandemic.

None of us any experience at this — total amateurs, this pandemic is like NHL hockey pucks drilled right at us.

So easy to panic in our fears. Step back and see the forrest.

But just remember what you already know!

Jesus rose from the dead. And that means ALL of his promise is true!

Look...

Things could get really really bad in the coming weeks/months AND *at the same time* we can trust God’s promise IN our fears that he is our shield.

It’s NOT a promise that we’re *not going to get sick* or that *something bad won’t happen*.

It’s God’s promise that he is ¹God — your God, he is ²always with you and ³he is in control and ⁴you can trust his infinitely loving and wise will.

Music Team...

Pray...