

“Do Not Fear”

-Christmas 2019-

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at JF Believers Church
in Menomonie, Wisc
on December 22, 2019

Luke 1:11-13 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, "**Do not be afraid**, Zacharias..."



Luke 1:26 – 30 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her, "**Do not be afraid**, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

Matt 1:19- 21 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, **do not be afraid** to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. "And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins."

Luke 2:8-10 Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, "**Do not be afraid**, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.

All of these participatory accounts of the Christmas story have one common thread: *they each had an angel telling someone "do not be afraid."* In fact "do not fear" is one of the key themes in the whole of the Christmas story.

"Do not be afraid Mary...Do not be afraid Joseph...Zacharias, ...shepherds in their fields." Sure...that's easy for him to say. But let's face it. We live in a **culture** of fear. The medical and physiological labels alone would fill pages. Paralyzed by our anxieties and immobilized by our jitters. The list is long and sordid. Maybe you fear what people think of you... Not having enough money... Public speaking, flying, being far from home, or spiders... Failure or rejection... Losing a loved one... Disease or pain... Death... And of course, there is all the stuff *out there*. The world itself seems to be breaking a part at the seams.

Ironically, some of the greatest neurosis I have had contact with have been in church pews. Where is God in all of this, and why doesn't he bring a flashlight?

Yet we need to know that "fear not!" is the most repeated command in the Bible. In fact, it's been said that there are 365 "Fear nots" in the Bible — one "Fear not" for every day of the year! It seems that God in fact doesn't want us to go a single day without hearing his word of comfort: "Fear not!" In reality, the King James Version says "Fear not" or "Be not afraid" 103 times. But the subject of "Fear" is spoken of *over 500 times* in the KJV. Furthermore, in addition to the "Fear nots," many times the Bible teaches us to "Fear God," which really means reverence God alone and *do not fear anyone or anything else*. Expanding the search to look at verses encouraging us not to worry or not to be anxious would add many, many more "Fear not" Scriptures. It is clear that God is quite aware of our human tendency to live in fear. And perhaps for good reason. There indeed does seem to be plenty to be afraid of.

Jesus knew that we would be afraid, and that we would doubt. That's why we read "*Fear not*" again and again in the Bible. God knows that sheer willpower will not enable us to conquer our fears, but His love and His grace and a sound mind and courage, can and will. But we also need to know this: courage is not the absence of fear; it's the will to persevere in the face of fear. Sometimes we have to *do it afraid*.

With each new encounter with fear, God is teaching us more faith and more trust. We will not always know just why we are tested nor will we always understand just why we are going through something. At least on the side of eternity! But often we *do* come to understand if we are willing to "wait upon the Lord" as Isaiah 40:31 calls us to do.

Zacharias was told not to fear because God "had heard his prayers." Joseph was told not to fear because what was happening was actually "the work of the Holy Spirit." Mary was told not to fear because she had "found favor with God." He told the shepherds not to fear because he had awesome news for them which would ultimately bring them great joy.

In Mary's case, the words "*Favor with God*" is literally "favor **beside** God," which is even better. His grace was beside Mary because *He was beside her*. Just as He is beside each of us if we are his redeemed child. God has promised us "*I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you.*" so that we confidently say, "*The Lord is my Helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?*" (Heb 13:5-6) In the Greek that sentence actually has five negatives making God's promise very emphatic, "I will never, never, never leave you."

In the case of Zacharias, the angel said, "*Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard.*" Those word's...just a short sentence, is actually the first mention of the breaking of God's 400 years of silence since God had last spoken through His prophet Malachi. 400 years prior God grew very quiet...literally the last words in Malachi God predicted the coming of the forerunner John the Baptist (Malachi 4:5-6, Malachi 3:1), the very one God's messenger was now announcing to Zacharias! God went silent after a prediction and 400 years later first speaks by describing the fulfillment of His prediction and then the one who hears, Zacharias, he goes silent for about 9 months! Zacharias had no idea what part he was playing in God's plan and kingdom. He had no idea what it all was about. And neither do we. But God had heard his prayers. He was not *alone*.

The shepherds, they too were told to "not be afraid." It was an angel who told them to not be afraid. Our reaction to such a statement has much to do with just who is doing the speaking. The comfort of that directive depends upon the source of the person who is making this statement. Men often tell us to not be afraid, when we, in fact, actually have plenty to fear.

For example, Franklin Delano Roosevelt in his first inaugural address as President of the United States made the famous statement, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself." Even today people quote this sentence and think this was a great statement. But ironically it was a time in world history when we actually had plenty to fear!

- In Germany, Adolph Hitler and the Nazis were coming into power.
- In Russia, Joseph Stalin and communism were gaining much power.
- In Japan, Hideki Tojo was moving up the ranks.
- Mussolini had a grip on Italy.

Millions of Americans and people of other nations, would die as a result of these four men, but Roosevelt said that we had nothing to fear but fear itself. So you cannot always trust men when they tell you to not be afraid, but you can trust Heaven.

"Fear not." Christ isn't scolding us with these words, and he wasn't scolding the players before us in the Christmas story. He's not barking out an order, forbidding you to fear, shaking His finger at you, speaking in a stern tone of voice. He's speaking to you gently, calling you tenderly to "fear not." He's saying that there is no reason for you to fear. You don't have to fear. And then, like in these accounts before us, He often tells you why.

Little did these simple shepherds know what was truly happening or what part they were playing in history. The spiritual darkness which had covered the earth for four thousand years, was about to be rolled away. The way to pardon and peace with God was about to be thrown open to all mankind. The head of Satan was about to be bruised (Ge 3:15). Liberty was about to be proclaimed to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind (Lk 4:18). The mighty truth was about to be proclaimed that God could be just, and yet, for Christ's sake, justify the ungodly (Ro 3:26). Salvation was no longer to be seen through types and figures, but openly, and face to face (Col 2:16,17). The knowledge of God was no longer to be confined to the Jews, but to be offered to the whole Gentile world. The days of heathenism were numbered. The first stone of God's kingdom was about to be set up. If this was not "**good tidings**," there never were tidings that deserved the name!

The angel said, "I announce to you good news, a great joy which shall be to all the people." He used the word which means "to preach the Good News," a word Luke uses often in both his Gospel and in the Book of Acts. But God had not sent a soldier or a judge or a reformer, but He had sent a Savior to meet man's greatest need, the need to be restored in our relationship with God. And the need to free us from the fear that engulfed us in our walk without such.

The Jewish word **shalom** (peace) means much more than a truce in the battles of life. It means well-being, health, prosperity, security, soundness, and completeness. It has to do more with *character* than *circumstances*. Life was difficult at that time just as it is today. Taxes were high, unemployment was high, morals were slipping lower, and the military state was in control. Roman law, Greek philosophy, and even Jewish religion could not meet the needs of men's hearts. Then, God sent His Son!

The angel was bringing to them a "good news" that would result in their joy. Biblical **joy** is a state of inner gladness, delight or rejoicing. Joy is more than our modern "happiness." **Joy** in the NT is virtually always used to signify a position of being that is based on spiritual realities, and independent of what "happens". **Joy** is an inner gladness; a deep seated pleasure birthed and energized by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:52, Ro 14:17, Gal 5:22, 1 Th 1:6)

I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. —Luke 2:10

After Adam and Eve disobeyed God, joy was lost. God expelled them from their garden home to prevent something worse from happening. If they had eaten from the tree of life after eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they would have lived forever in their misery.

Life outside the garden was not easy. Adam and Eve had to work hard for their food. The reality of death was everywhere, and animals preyed on one another. Even worse, the couple's firstborn son murdered his younger brother. What could be worse? Sin had pierced their lives, and the couple could not stop joy from draining out.

But God had a plan to restore joy. Joy was lost in the Garden when death came, but joy returned through birth—the birth of God's own Son. "I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people" (Luke 2:10). Jesus grew up to heal the sick, give sight to the blind, and raise the dead. But this was just a taste of things to come. God entered our world, experienced our sorrow, and conquered death, giving us hope that He will keep His promise to end pain and eliminate sorrow and death (John 11:25-26; 1 Cor. 15:3-4; Rev. 21:4). No wonder Christmas is the season of joy.

Joy is a depth of assurance and confidence energized by the Holy Spirit that ignites a way of life. And it is a life that then leads to a living behavior. **Joy** is not a standing that comes from favorable circumstances but is God's gift to His truly redeemed children even in circumstances that are difficult. **Joy** is the deep-down sense of well-being that abides in the heart of the person who knows all is well between himself and his God. The opposite of such...a life engulfed in unconfessed sin...or a life in which we struggle to control and force in the direction we desire, will steal that joy and profoundly affect everything within your life's reach. There is a chorus from an old spiritual song that says - "**Happiness happens, but joy abides.**"

Jesus asks us to turn our fear over to Him. Replace that fear – that He didn't give us – with the love, power and sound mind that He did give us (2 Tim. 1:7) His presence is the answer to our fear. Fight fear with a Faithful God.

Romans 8:15 says, *“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship.”*

“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears (for himself) is not perfected in love” (1 John 4:18).

We are prone to want to be rid of fear at any cost, by any means. John says there is and should be only one means—perfect love for God should cast out fear. We think we will be better Christians when we stop fearing—but that may be quite false. We will be better Christians when we love God the more for his perfect love. The perfecting of love drives out fear, but the driving out of fear does not necessarily mean that love is being perfected. In those moments we ought not to be completely free from fear, because we are not completely controlled by love for God; that is, we are not living completely by faith. But the fear that we are to feel as Christians is itself a work of grace. It is a fear which casts us back into love for God and trust in his mercy, and thus destroys itself. Fear is the proper servant of love for imperfect saints.

One example is Psalm 56:3. David has been seized by the Philistines and he starts to become afraid, but instead he sets his vision on his Lord and Savior in his midst. He praises God and his word to him: “Fear not!” He puts his trust in the Lord...

*When I am afraid, I will trust in you.
In God, whose word I praise,
In God I trust; I will not be afraid.
What can mortal man do to me?*

Isaiah 41:10 (NLT) - *Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand.*

Often we feel like we're the only ones that battle with fear and we feel isolated. But God is so adamant about us not living in fear. Jesus says, “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Lk 12:32).

That verse tells us that as a redeemed individual, Jesus numbers us among His “little flock.” You're not a member of a huge numberless nameless herd of sheep. Rather, Christ's flock is a little flock. He knows His little flock intimately. He knows the name of each one of His sheep. He knows all of your personality quirks. He knows your likes and dislikes. He knows your sins. He knows your fears. He knows you. You're part of Christ's cherished little flock. He bought you with His blood. You don't have any reason to fear because He knows you and you are His.

Jesus reminds us that we have a “Father.” And your Father is a good Father who gives good gifts to His children. He's a Father who intends to care for, protect, and provide for His children. He's a Father who gives an eternal inheritance to His children. The Heavenly Father is a big-hearted, open-handed, loving Father who only wants the very best for His children. Here is another reason you don't have any reason to fear.

Jesus also says that your Father is the King. God the Father isn't just a well-intentioned Father. He is a Father who is also a Sovereign. He has infinite power to deliver on every one of His promises to you. Nothing in heaven or earth can stop Him. His enemies can't stand in the way. Your enemies are powerless before Him. He will certainly keep you to the end, and He will make certain that you enter into your eternal inheritance. He will finish this. Ours is to simply hold on to His hand...