



“Do Not Fear, for behold...”

Luke 2:8-20

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at JF Believers Church
in Menomonie, Wisc
on December 24th, 2017

LUKE 2:8-20 *Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them,*

and they were greatly afraid. 10 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. 11 "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 "And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 14 "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" 15 So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us." 16 And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. 17 Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. 18 And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.

The cartoon character Charlie Brown once said “I’ve developed a new philosophy... I only dread one day at a time.” Ahhh, if only this were true for us in the real world! We watch the evening news and hear them begin with the words “good evening” and then they promptly tell you why it isn’t. There is no denying that it is a stressful world!

It was 75 years ago that our then President Franklin Roosevelt spoke those famous words... “*the only thing we have to fear is fear itself.*” But it seems today that Roosevelt was clearly wrong! There are so many things we could and perhaps *should* be afraid of today. Drunk drivers, child abductions, communicable diseases, local violence and international instability, the economy, inflation, marital infidelity, sexual predators, sexual violence, terrorism. That doesn’t even begin to cover the likes of children biking without a helmet, shark attacks, and zombies!

The 2017 annual “Chapman University Survey of American Fears” came out recently with America’s top ten fears in 2017: Number one is “*Corrupt government officials*”, two, the *American Healthcare Act* (ObamaCare, TrumpCare), *Pollution of natural resources* is number 3 and *pollution of our drinking water* is number 4. Then comes the *fear of not having enough money for the future* (#5), *high medical bills* (#6), a *new world war* is #7, *global warming* #8, *North Korea* #9, and *air pollution* is #10.

Bertrand Russell, the British philosopher, historian, and social critic once said “*Neither a man nor a crowd nor a nation can be trusted to act humanely or to think sanely under the influence of a great fear.*” If we step back from the edge and see the bigger picture, we can easily begin to see how the end-times events will be able to play out in the qualms and jitters of our post 9-11 world. How we will slowly but steadily give up our personal privacy, our human rights and our constitutional freedoms in exchange for more perceived security and safety, paving the way for the anti-christ and Armageddon. We have no *hand* today...no control...so little ability to affect our destiny and the trajectory of our personal futures. *I know*...such talk isn’t helping our anxiety!

In John 14 Jesus was speaking to His apostles about the future... a future in which He would not be there to hold their hands physically any longer. He said that He was warning them about such a time while He was still on earth in human form; while there was still time to do so. *"I am telling you these things now while I am still with you"* He says. He went on there in chapter 14 of John to say *"But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative — that is, the Holy Spirit — he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you. I am leaving you with a gift — **peace of mind and heart**. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. **So don't be troubled or afraid.**"* (vs 26-27)

But we ARE troubled and afraid! The fact is, so many of us that claim the mantle of "child of God" are in reality *not* living in any kind of true "peace of mind and heart." We are just like the world... ruled by our anxiety and fears, and of course such keeps us from really experiencing the kingdom life as God desires us to. We can't answer God's personal call upon our lives because the whole idea of such a precarious venture just freaks us out! We can't *"seek first the kingdom of God"* because we see only risk, danger, poverty and pain in such a venture! We fear what *could* happen to us... *financial difficulty, sickness, injury, loneliness, persecution....* and what *may **not** therefore* happen to us, *marriage, children, comfortable house, financial security, friends and community*. We won't place Christ and kingdom in the controlling seat of our lives because of *FEAR*.

Contrast that with Joshua of Old Testament renown. God spoke to Him in a time of great sadness and personal and corporate uncertainty. Moses had just died and suddenly Joshua was thrust into the senior pastor role of a mega church of tens of thousands. God told Joshua *"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, **for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.**"* And Joshua went on to... well, you know the rest of his story!

Somewhere in all our thinking God has to figure into our equation. We have to realize and acknowledge that the Bible tells us hundreds of times to "fear not." But despite that tidal wave of direction, fear is such a basic human emotion that many of us instead constantly live in the grip of fear, worry and anxiety. God told us to "fear not" because he knew that we would all wrestle with fear sooner or later. He told us to "fear not" because He was equipping us to do so, and therefore actually expecting us to live without the fear that the world wears daily.

The shepherds in our story were no doubt somewhat freaked out by the sudden appearance of an angel, not to mention the fact that that angel was there to speak specifically to them. I can certainly understand that! I'm sure that they expected a work shift that night that was just like all the previous ones. But this night would be like no other. They were at one of those great life crossroads... a spiritual "thin place" where the veil between heaven and earth was pulled back a bit.

Let's not put the Hollywood spin on this picture. These guys were *shepherds*. They were not college educated and certainly not seminary trained. They spent all day and night in the fields with stinky sheep and no doubt started to smell just like those sheep. Yet of all the people in the world that this angel could have went to to be PR men for the arrival of the Savior of man, he chose these guys. Not kings, or politicians or the power brokers of this world! He went to these simple men and called upon them to *do* something spectacular, and to *be* something great. It was a calling so much greater than they were in their natural state as they stood out there in the fields that night.

The truth is that at some point in your life... maybe many times, God is going to call you out... call you to "man up." Your response to that "phone call" will be the one of the greatest... if not **the** greatest, crossroads of your personal post rebirth journey through this plane of existence. It will make "all the difference" in the story of your life.

Abraham was such a man as this. He was called to leave his comfort realm...the world of security and familiarity to go to an unknown destination on the direction of Jehovah. Further, he was called to do so without a child to be his heir and the years were catching up with him. He had every reason to question and worry, and yet God said to him "*Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.*" (Genesis 15:1)

And thus Abraham had to decide...*as we all do*, whether he was going to trust God in what he, Abraham, could not yet see, or attempt to make it on his own. The temptation is so great to panic and grab the wheel and take back the control of our lives. We like Abraham must decide whether we really believe in God or whether our faith is simply an "in good times" venture. It's been said that people are like tea bags—you never know your own strength till you get in hot water. Such a life crossroad has been the catalyst for a grand life fulfilment for some and has been the end of some believers faith journey because they essentially told God "no." They told the Lord that He wasn't really...

I have often stated that "a Christian is immortal until his work on earth is done." That means that nothing can harm you...nothing can touch you, without God's permission. Not cancer, not violence, not bankruptcy, not theft, not physical disability, not the loss of your job, not a terrible accident, not the death of a child, not any of a thousand other traps that await us out there. That doesn't mean that Christians are somehow untouchable when it comes to sadness and pain. What happens to others also happens to us.

The difference is this: we know that God is our shield and therefore nothing can touch us that doesn't first pass through his hands of love. Again, that knowledge doesn't mean that we don't weep or we don't suffer. Far from it. But it is the basis for 1 Thessalonians 1:13... that "*we sorrow but not as those who have no hope.*" Our sorrow is different precisely because we hope in God.

Once again, the shepherds were simple men. They had to decide whether they intended to act upon this heavenly overture or whether they would ignore it. Whether they would hunker down in fear or move in faith. "*...the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us."* Let us **go** and **see this thing which the Lord had made known to us.**

When I was a young boy, I loved to ride my bicycle. It took me to such places! New and unknown places and experiences. If my mother ever knew how far I would ride that bike she would have killed me! I would ride miles to explore little towns in rural Iowa. For me, it was my bike that took me away...to *go and see*. As I grew into a man, I have been compelled in the same way...to *go and see* what was over the next hill just like I did when I was a boy. I want to see what the Lord has done...what the Lord is doing. For me, the only fear I have had was that I would miss some great thing God was doing and some great thing He wanted to show me.

I think that it was that same passion that compelled those shepherds that day. If God had something for them, they wanted it. They heard those words of the angels. They would set aside their fear and *go and see*. The great "I AM" had their backs, as surely as He has had mine now for all of these years. Because the road before me...the road before you, is never controlled by you...or for that matter anyone or anything other than that great "I AM."

I am your strength.	I am your courage.
I am your health.	I am your hope.
I am your supply.	I am your defender.
I am your deliverer.	I am your forgiveness.
I am your joy.	I am your future.

If all that is true...then what is there to fear but fear itself?

I know that one of these days I will ride my bicycle over a hill and I will not come back. I will just ride on into the physical presence of my God. The only choice I have is will He find me following His call or sitting in my house in fear of the future? Because I will be leaving at that moment one way or another. My choice is merely what airport I will be flying out of....

Faith take the next step- whatever it is-and walking with God wherever He leads us. Sometimes it will make sense, other times it won't. But we still have to take that step if we are going to do and know God's will: if we are going to "finish our course" as Paul put it. "*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.*" (2Timothy 4:7) The bottom line is this. It all comes down to one simple question: Can God be trusted to do what is right? If the answer is yes, then we can face the worst that life has to offer.

If the answer is no, then we are no better off than the people out there in the world. Those that will burn everything in their lives to hold onto to what they want...what they desire in the flesh. They will rip up their blood families, burn their church family, spit on the cross of Christ, trash their testimony in order to try to control their destinies and have what they think they want...what they think they *need*.

If the answer is no...I cannot trust God to do right by me, or if we're not sure, then we really don't have any faith, and "without such faith it is impossible to please God" and we are lost. Lost in this life and lost for the next.

We are called to fear not, child of God. No one knows what 2018 will bring to any of us. Who knows if we will all even make it through this week. But our God is faithful when nothing else and no one else is. Certainly not ourselves! Things in this world are not going to get better. For scripture is clear, telling us that "*evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.*" (2Ti 3:13) But child of God, nothing can happen to us except it first passes through the hands of God. If your path is bright today, grab it for all it's worth. Find out what is over that hill before you! ...what God is doing and what He wants to show you. For life is but a vapor...today it is here and tomorrow it is gone. And if your way is dark, keep on believing. His eye is on the sparrow, and I know he cares for you.

"Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord..."

"With this news, strengthen those who have tired hands, and encourage those who have weak knees. Say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, and do not fear, for your God is coming to destroy your enemies. He is coming to save you." And when he comes, he will open the eyes of the blind and unplug the ears of the deaf. The lame will leap like a deer, and those who cannot speak will sing for joy!" Isaiah 35:3-6

Happy Birthday Jesus!