

The Difference Between the Fear of the Lord and Being Afraid of Everything Else

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Preacher: Scotty Smith

- [0 : 0 0] Psalm 56. Be merciful to me, my God, for my enemies are in hot pursuit. All day long they press their attack.
- My adversaries pursue me all day long. In their pride, many are attacking me. When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise.
- In God, I trust and I'm not afraid. What can mere mortals do to me? All day long they twist my words. All their schemes are for my ruin.
- They conspire, they lurk, they watch my steps, hoping to take my life. Because of their wickedness, do not let them escape. In your anger, God, bring the nations down.
- Record my misery. List my tears on your scroll. Are they not in your record? Then my enemies will turn back when I call for help. By this, I will know that God is for me.
- [1 : 0 3] In God, whose word I praise. In the Lord, whose word I praise. In God, I trust and I'm not afraid. What can man do to me? I am under vows to you, my God.
- I will present my thank offerings to you. For you have delivered me from death and my feet from stumbling. That I may walk before God in the light of life.
- Thank you, Neil and Cornerstone family. I look forward to my next visit to Edinburgh. And may that be soon. Well, I thought it would be wise for us in this very defined season that is full of fears and challenges.
- A season that makes one of the great lines in the wonderful hymn Amazing Grace so real to us. Remember, we sing in that great hymn of Amazing Grace.
- Through many dangers, toils, and snares we have already come. But your grace has brought us safe thus far.
- [2 : 1 1] And your grace will bring us home. I want us to think about that this morning. What does it mean to be a people that really between the resurrection and return of Jesus, that we do experience fear.
- We do experience challenges. Whether it's in the form of a global pandemic, economic challenges, our own health crises. Our children making choices that we wish they would not make.
- There are so many dangers, toils, and snares, and fears. And that's what I love about the Bible. It's so real. If you're someone joining us today, perhaps later, just beginning to look over at the fence, at this story of faith, this word called the gospel.
- And you're intrigued. You're confused. We're glad you're here. And what we would hope you would experience this morning and these next few moments through this talk is the fact that the Bible is very real.
- It's God's words to us in the midst of all the difficulties of life. Now, this morning in particular, as we look at just two verses from Psalm 56, I want us to think about the difference between what the Bible calls the fear of the Lord and being afraid of everything else.

[3 : 37] What's the difference between the fear of the Lord? That's a phrase that I grew up hearing long before I understood what it really meant. What is the fear of the Lord?

And how does it relate to being afraid of everything else? What's the difference? How do they relate? Well, let me read these two verses that we're going to walk through this morning for a few moments.

Psalm 56, which you've already heard Joe read. I'm looking at verses 3 and 4 when King David, in a very difficult season in his life, spoke these words.

When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God whose word I praise. In God I trust and am not afraid.

What can mere mortals do to me? Now, let me pray briefly for us. Father, thank you that you are trustworthy. You are worship worthy.

[4 : 42] You are the God who meets us in our fears. And I pray for these few moments that you would encourage us with the good news of your word.

Your word that always points us towards Jesus. The living word. The incarnate word. The fulfillment of every promise you have made.

Help us as we walk through these words. Though our moments be brief, may they impact our hearts by your spirit, we ask in Jesus' name and for his glory.

Amen. Well, let's walk through these words together and consider what King David is doing. First of all, let me give you the context of Psalm 56.

King David wrote this song during a time when he had been captured by the enemy. The Philistines at Gath. David is not writing this psalm on the coastal regions of the highlands where Neil and Louise took holiday for a few days this week.

[5 : 49] King David is not eating a fine Scottish breakfast simply with pen in hand writing down a few words that might translate into a good psalm.

No, he is a vulnerable man. He is in a season where he is very honest about what it felt like to be vulnerable, to be threatened. But he writes these words.

Let's walk through line by line. When I am afraid. Notice that David does not say, if I am afraid, but when. See, the assumption is for King David and for all of us that fear happens.

In fact, throughout the Bible, God never scorns us or shames us for experiencing the emotion of fear. Never. In fact, in the Bible, there are no bad emotions, even the emotion of anger that we know can take us to places that we regret.

The Bible never says, don't be angry. What it does say is, in your anger, do not sin. In other words, anger is an important emotion. Fear is a reality.

[7 : 01] There are all kinds of things that trigger us, even appropriately. Pretty soon, you're going to have your lunch. I'm going to have my breakfast before I go preach twice more this morning at our local church.

And when you prepare your lunch, if you were to reach into the refrigerator and find that there was a rattlesnake or some poisonous viper in your refrigerator, fear would be an appropriate response.

You would want to take an appropriate action with regard to that fear. You would do something, right? Biblical spirituality does not mean we don't feel appropriate reactions.

But notice what King David says to us when he says, when, not if, but when I am afraid. He's come to a point in his life and his knowledge of God.

He's come to a place in his own humanity accepting his weakness, accepting his fears, accepting his brokenness. He's come to a place that now he's begun to choose a different way.

[8 : 09] When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. See, David is now helping us understand even in the midst of a vulnerable season that he's walking through, I've got some choices to make.

I will do something with my fear. And that's a part of what we want to talk briefly about today. What do you, what do I do when we're afraid? Fear will demand something of us.

We will go somewhere under fear's influence. We might shut down. We might hide. We might medicate in very foolish ways.

We might get really, really busy. But notice what David says. When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. And look at his next words. In God, whose word I praise.

Now, what's the connection there? Why does David immediately speak about trusting God, moving towards God when he's afraid? What's the relationship between that and the God who speaks?

[9 : 17] Well, think of it this way, that King David has come to experience that what's unique about the God of the Bible is that he is the God who is not silent, but he speaks.

He's a God of revelation. The God of the Bible makes himself known. He gives us his name. He comes to us. He pursues us. In his word, which we know to be the completed scripture, it's a word that narrates, that tells the story of life.

You see, when we experience fear or any emotion, we give the authority, we give the power to someone to tell us what to do or to give meaning to those fears.

So David is modeling for us, not just an abstract thought that I want to be a spiritual man, but no, God, I've come to trust you, the God who speaks in his word, the God who reveals himself.

I want to listen to you, God, more than I listen to my own heart, more than I listen to other people or other voices in my world that would try to tell me what this fear means, that would try to instruct me about what I must do in order to get out of this fear or fix this thing going on.

[10 : 41] What a beautiful picture here, how instructive it is for us. When, not if, I am afraid, I put my trust in you, God.

In God whose word I praise, I trust in God and am not afraid. Now, in that next phrase, David begins to set up, I think, a parallel between what it means to trust in God and move to a place where our fears shrink.

I know that Louise, Neil's wife, has learned a lot, a lot through one of my friends as well, someone that teaches in the States at CCEF, Ed Welch.

Ed Welch is a wonderful friend of mine. My wife and I have had two splendid visits with him in the context of gospel renewal and encouragement and pastoring.

And Ed Welch wrote a tremendous book years ago that's still, I think, one of the most helpful ways of thinking about fear, the fear of man, what it means to really know the Lord.

[11 : 51] He wrote a book called When People Are Big and God As Small. And that's a part of what I think David's saying here. Lord, when people threaten me, when my world around me really stirs up inside of me the fear of death, the fear of life, the fear of pain, the fear of things I cannot control, I've got some choices to make here.

Will I let mortal men have the day? Will I look to men to be my savior? Or will I look to you? See, that's where David goes in the final part of our text this morning.

Notice what he says. In God I trust and am not afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?

Well, that might seem ludicrous, right? Mere mortals can do a lot. I mean, David is already listed in Psalm 56. A lot of things that people can do. Slander, mock, threaten, arrest, do physical harm.

Is David being naive here? Is he simply spinning life? Is he inviting us to a life of hype rather than real hope?

[13 : 14] Absolutely not. He's showing us that this biblical story, this call to know the God of all grace, that does put us in a position to ask very important questions.

Whose presence is bigger in my life? Where do I trust? Am I more afraid of men than I live in awe of God?

In fact, let me unpack for us one of the ways the Bible helps us to think about fear. There's a lot of words in the Hebrew Old Testament scriptures and the Greek of the New Testament that use common words that mean different things given the appropriate context.

And here's what I mean. Sometimes in the Greek of the New Testament, the word that is translated fear sometimes is translated as a phobia.

sometimes is translated as the little three-letter word awe, A-W-E. Now, what's the difference between phobias and awe?

[14 : 27] I believe the fear of the Lord really invites us to think about this category of awe. When you're in awe of something, it's big, it's looming, it's real, it just captures you.

I remember the first time I traveled to Switzerland and I saw the Swiss Alps. I was stunned. I was shocked. I was in awe of the majesty, the beauty.

And peering at the freshly snowed upon Alps around the Lake of Briennes outside of Interlaken, nothing else mattered for a few moments.

I had come to Switzerland in the fall of 1984 for the first time and I had many dangerous tolls and stairs. It wasn't an easy season of life but in the moment of seeing the sheer beauty and the majesty being filled with awe, I wasn't afraid of other things that came with me on that flight over from Nashville and to Zurich, Switzerland.

And you see, that's a part of what David is showing us here. God, when I live in awe of who you are, my phobias shrink. When you are big, but not just big, God, when you are good, it puts everything else into perspective.

[15 : 46] Certain things begin to take their proper size. See, that's really what David is doing for us in that phrase, what can mere mortals do to me?

Now, again, he's not naive. He's not denying the reality of the fact that a lot of difficult things happen to us, but you see, back to the word of God, who has the right to define what it means to live or to die.

The Bible says that one of the reasons that Jesus came into the world, this is in the second chapter of the book of Hebrews, one of the reasons Jesus came to us was to set free those who all their lives had been held in captivity to the fear of death.

death. It's not wrong to be afraid of death. It's not wrong. In fact, it's healthy. It's emotionally healthy to know that death is real. You see, when our God speaks to us by his word, his promises that he is faithful to keep, we begin to even look at death differently.

The Bible says that through the person and the work of Jesus, the sting of death has been removed. The grave has been robbed of its victory for all who put their trust in Jesus who experienced death for us, who lived in our place and died in our place.

[17 : 18] So you see, King David in Psalm 56 is beginning to look forward to the fulfillment of all of God's promises to the day when we even more fully could agree with him.

Lord, when I feel vulnerable, whether it's by COVID or things I cannot control, transitions I did not plan. This summer, my wife and I were supposed to be in Northern Ireland, Spain, Canada, Alaska, Montana, all beautiful places, all places we were so looking forward to going.

All of that got canceled. You know, when things change, what does that feel like to you? What does vulnerability feel like to you this morning, dear friends?

Where do you know your humanity and how do you hear the Lord speaking to us this morning that you don't have to be ashamed of feeling vulnerable? In fact, we're invited in this scripture today to know that our God is worthy of our awe.

He's worthy of our worship. In fact, it's interesting, the most repeated command in the entire Bible from the book of Genesis, which is the first book in the Bible, through the book of Revelation, which is the last book in the Bible.

[18 : 37] From Genesis through Revelation, the most repeated command in the Bible is do not fear. Do not be afraid. 365 times, one for every day of the year, God says to his people, God says to us, you don't have to be afraid.

afraid. And it's fascinating if you, perhaps, as a follow-up to this talk today, want to do a study in the Bible, most of the time when God says to us, do not be afraid, he immediately draws attention to himself.

One of the best examples of this is concerning the birth of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus. Two of the precious contexts when God says to us, do not fear, do not be afraid.

Again, he's not scorning us. He's not telling us just to buck up and be strong. He's saying, no, do not be afraid. For instance, the night Jesus was born, the way it's recorded in Luke's Gospel, chapter 2, there were shepherds on a hill.

And shepherds were broken people. They did not live an easy life. Even Jewish shepherds were ceremonially unclean. They could not go to the temple worship like everyone else because they dealt with animal life and the preparation of animals for the sacrifices of temple worship.

[20 : 01] But angels show up the night Jesus is born, the promised Messiah. And they are terrified. There's this incredible movement over them in the sky.

And the angels say to these startled, trembling shepherds, do not be afraid. afraid, we bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

Tonight, in Bethlehem, there has been one born to us, Christ the Lord. See how that works? Fear is real.

I would be terrified if an angelic host started singing over my house here in Franklin, Tennessee. What does this mean? Do not be afraid, Jesus. So the angels went and they found the God who promised redemption and kindness and mercy and sovereignty.

He showed up in the form of a baby. What a remarkable story that God would come to us in weakness, meeting us in our weakness. Well, at the end of the life of Jesus, not just at his birth, but at his death and resurrection.

[21 : 17] So another time angels said to some very fearful, confused, vulnerable men and women, spoke these words, do not be afraid. You'll remember that after, as the Bible tells the story, after Jesus was crucified, he died upon the cross.

He died for us. He did something wonderful for us that we could never do for ourselves. After his death, there was real confusion. Is this the end of his life?

Well, no, the Bible had promised that God would raise his son from the dead. This is the gospel, the good news of the person and the work of Jesus. And so disciples ran to the tomb where he, Jesus, had been buried.

And women outran men. I love that. I think women are far more noble than some of us men and faster runners too when things really matter. And so women run to the tomb and there, indeed, was an angel saying to them, do not be afraid.

He is not here. He has risen. Again, the relationship between, can I be in awe of something? The God who comes to us, the God who says, I love you.

[22 : 30] I show up in your world, in your life, in your moment, not to shame you, but to redeem you. Cast your care on me. I care for you.

Well, through the resurrection of Jesus, we have this good hope. God can be trusted. You see, that's the functional issue, right? What do I trust?

Who do I trust when I am afraid? The fear of the Lord is the opposite of being afraid of everything else. In fact, the fear of the Lord is the opposite of being afraid of God.

Maybe today, you're not what you think about. You don't know what to think about God. Maybe even as a believer, you've been confused about what does it mean to fear the Lord?

Well, Charles Bridges, who was a great expositor from Great Britain, wrote a wonderful commentary on the book of Proverbs in which he gave me my favorite definition of the fear of the Lord.

[23 : 27] Charles Bridges said, in light of the person and the work of Jesus, to fear the Lord is to have an affectionate reverence for God.

Don't you love that? I love how those two concepts come together. An affectionate reverence for God. The awe of the Lord, the fear of the Lord, moves us to love our God, to trust him, even when we don't have control, even as we, like King David, are looking at circumstances that we're not sure what the outcome's going to be.

hope. You see, again, the God of the Bible does not lead us into a life of hype, but real hope. Some things will only be experienced in fullness when Jesus comes back the second time to finish making all things new.

And for those that live in the fear of the Lord and affectionate reverence for God, that is okay. It's why Justin Martyr, who was one of the first followers of Jesus after the resurrection of Jesus that died the death of a martyr, even as he was threatened with his own life, said this to those who were about to burn him at the stake.

Justin Martyr said, you can't really hurt us. All you can do is kill us. Now, again, that seems nonsensical to some people, but really consider what Justin Martyr had come to understand.

[25 : 00] Because Jesus has conquered death, I'm not afraid to die. Oh, I'm not looking forward to being burned at the stake, I'm not naive, but that is so brief, it's so brief compared to what God has done for us, who God is for us in the midst of the things that we cannot control.

So the question for us today as we begin to wind down now in these final moments of this talk, can you own your own humanity? Do you hear the Bible inviting you and me to say this morning, what am I most afraid of?

What has the stress of COVID generated within my heart? And how does the reality of stress and the experience of fear really reveal what I really am trusting in?

am I trusting in me and my resources, my spouse, my kids, my parents, my world, my government? Dear friends, those will never be enough. They were never meant to be enough.

But to come to know our God, to know that those 365 times he says to us, do not be afraid, I. Do not be afraid, I am your shelter.

[26 : 15] Do not be afraid, I am your God. Do not be afraid, I am your father through adoption. Do not be afraid, I, God, the Spirit, live within your heart having sealed you for eternity.

And I will tell you every single moment of every day, even when you sleep, that you are a daughter of the living God. He delights in you. He has forgiven you. He's begun a good work in you that he will bring to completion.

Well, that leads us really to this final thought. I love how John the Apostle kind of brings together our reflection this morning, this talk, relative to this experience of living in awe of the Lord or being afraid of everything else.

In 1 John chapter 4 verse 18, John the Apostle said this, perfect love casts out fear.

Perfect love drives out. It's a strong word in the Greek there. It's a picture of perfect love shows up and fear, whatever the fear might be, fear of death, fear of life, fear of loss, fear of pain, fear of sorrow, fear of not having control.

[27 : 30] Something about perfect love, it just moves that out of the way. And in the context of 1 John 4, John's talking about the fear of judgment, the fear of what will happen actually after I die.

Now let me ask you this morning, dear friends, have you come to a real assurance, not just in the prayer that we prayed in this marvelous service of worship, but have you come to know that Jesus did live for you a life of perfect obedience?

You could never earn your salvation. Have you come to know that the death of Jesus, that cross that shows up in both of our cultures all the time, that it is a boldest affirmation, that Jesus took the judgment we deserve, that we now can be certain that as we not simply die, that as we face the Lord after we draw our last breath, we do not have to be afraid, because the perfect love of God, and the perfect love of God is manifest in the gospel.

There's no more profound picture of the sovereignty of our God over every crisis and every cricket. There's no pure manifestation of the sovereignty of God and the love of God than the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

This is the perfect love that meets us in this ongoing global pandemic. This is the perfect love, not partial love, but perfect love that has been lavished upon us.

[29 : 01] So, one final quote, and then I'm going to pray for us. It's been a wonderful full morning, and I ask you to pray for me as I will go preach a different sermon twice more this morning here in Nashville.

One that will help our congregation come to understand more of the awe of the Lord. In fact, I'm preaching from Revelation the fifth chapter this morning, which really shows God's people in a crisis of when John wrote the Revelation, seeing Jesus and seeing what's going on in heaven so that we would know more of this perfect love.

Well, someone that really modeled this so well for us in our life is Corrie ten boom. Maybe you know that name. She was an amazing Dutch woman whose family helped hide many of the Jews that were fleeing from the threats of the Holocaust.

And in time, her family was arrested, and they too were taken by train into the work camps. Well, in her fabulous book called *The Hiding Place*, telling the story of living through that evil, listen to this incredible word she gives us.

And I will conclude with this and pray for us. Corrie ten boom said, when a train goes through a tunnel and it gets dark, you don't throw away the ticket and jump off the train.

[30 : 19] You sit still and trust the engineer. Corrie ten boom did not just know the trains that got her around Amsterdam. She knew the trains that were tragically driven by evil story.

But she shows us that we can trust our engineer. Brothers and sisters, we are on a gospel train. And there are times when we go through long tunnels of darkness.

We don't know where we are. We wonder, is this going to be okay? We don't jump off the train. We don't throw away our ticket. We trust our engineer, who is our faithful savior that saves to the utmost.

I'm so thankful that God is at work in this world. He's at work in your story. He is trustworthy. He is all worthy. He is worship worthy.

And may he grow bigger in our hearts. That our fears which are real, may they shrink to their proper signs. And help each other in this story. Keep bearing each other's burdens.

[31 : 23] Keep encouraging each other. And all the more as we see the great day of Jesus approaching. Let me pray for us. Father, thank you today for my privilege of being with my brothers and sisters in Edinburgh.

Lord, I love the fact that Neil and I get to interact every single week in different little ways. And I thank you that you've knit our hearts together as pastors, as families, as friends.

And we do pray that, Lord, we would know what it means to have an affectionate reverence for you. That, Father, you are sovereign. That, Jesus, your work is perfect and complete.

That, God, the Spirit, you are narrating our story, our world for us through the word of God. May your peace that passes all understanding help us when we are in the dark tunnels of stretches of life that really do make us feel very vulnerable.

We thank you, Lord Jesus, that you are not just the captain of our salvation. You are our righteousness. You are our hope. You are the king, the ruler of the kings of the earth. Thank you that COVID, thank you that evil, have an expiration date, but your love lasts forever.

[32 : 39] Hallelujah with a Savior. Hallelujah with a salvation. We pray with thanksgiving today in Jesus' name. Amen. God bless you, friends.