

FEAR OR FAITH?
PS. 11

INTRODUCTION:

Is there any safe place in our world? When the horrific explosion rocked the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, April 19, 1995, people realized that their safety is not guaranteed by living in the heartland of America. In that one explosion more than 160 people died with 400 others suffering serious injuries. We now know that a young man who was full of hate for the leadership of our country and misguided did the deed.

In the aftermath of that incident in Oklahoma City a sociology professor at the University of Washington wrote, “We are now finding out that no one is safe anymore, and they are astoundingly frightened.”

Then in the last two weeks we have had bombing incidents in Kenya and Tanzania where two of our embassies have been blown apart. The sobering truth is that we live in a very uncertain world. Nothing seems to be absolutely secure.

Psalm 11 has as its background a period in the life of David in which he knew such uncertainty. He faced life-threatening circumstances. His life could be taken away from him at any moment. The whole structure of the government of his day had become corrupt so that he could not look to the government with any hope of justice. What do you do when the bottom drops out of everything? This is the question that is in the background of this Psalm. Do you listen to your fears or do you listen to your faith?

Fear will offer you some immediate counsel, but for the people of God there are always other words of counsel that comes from faith. Let's look at these two alternatives and listen to these two voices this morning.

I. THE COUNSEL OF FEAR – RUN!

In the Peanuts comic strip, Charlie Brown quizzes Linus, “What if everyone was like you? What if we all ran away from our problems? What if everyone in the whole world suddenly decided to run away from his problems?” Linus replied, “Well, at least we would all be running in the same direction!”

Fear has always counseled us to flee when we are faced with difficult circumstances. When David found himself in such circumstances, they counseled him, “Flee like a bird to your mountain.” They were saying to him, “Get away from here! Run! There is nothing you can do about the situation so run for your life!” As they gave David this counsel, they supported it with some confirming statements. Listen to the counsel that fear gave in support for the admonition to flee like the bird.

1. There is danger.

The Psalmist poetically describes the situation of danger like this, “For look, the wicked bend their bows; they set their arrows against the strings to shoot from the shadows the upright in heart.” They are claiming that there is a plot loose in the land to destroy all that are upright in heart. Since David was one of those who were upright in heart, he was a special target for these wicked persons. It was almost like he had a bull's eye attached

to his chest and they were ready to use him for their target practice. Their bows are in their hands and the arrows are in place and his days are numbered. In light of this kind of danger, fear says, “Run! Flee like a bird! Get out of here!”

It may not be as dangerous where you are as it was where David was, but fear still gives the same counsel in the face of any difficult circumstance. Fear always counsels you to run. It never will counsel you to stay and face your difficulties. Run for your life! This is what fear will say to you.

2. There is destruction.

One of the more sobering statements in all the Psalms is found in this next statement – “When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?” The question is with reference to the foundations under society – justice, righteousness, mercy, truth, honor, honesty, and integrity! When these character traits that underpin a society and give it stability are being destroyed, what can the righteous do? This is not a question about what the righteous ought to do; it is rather an expression of despair. The implication of the statement is that there is nothing that the righteous can do. If the bottom has fallen out then there is no point in trying any more. It is all over. So run! This is the counsel that fear gives.

There are many that think that the foundations under our own society are being slowly destroyed. When we have the kind of moral chaos that we have in high places of government and in high places in business, it makes you wonder how long the structures of society can continue to stand. If everything around us is falling apart, what can we do

about it? After all, I am just one puny individual and surely no match for the powers of society. So the best thing I can do, my fears counsel me, is to run and to hide. Practice escapism. Get away from it.

Are you aware of fear giving you some counsel? Our fears can be very real. You may not be as afraid as the young man who got a job on a construction project. It was his summer job during his college years and he was working as a welder's assistant building a hospital. He had never welded before in his life. He was afraid of the heights and wouldn't you know they put him to work welding on the 17th floor! Vast sections of steel beams were jutting out over no where. He worked, almost immobilized by fear from day to day. Finally an "incredible hulk" of a welder with whom he was working looked at him and said, "What's the matter, son? Are you scared?"

The young man said, "S-S-Scared? I-I-I h-h-have b-been trying to tell you for two weeks, I quit! But I couldn't get it out of my mouth." He was scared to death. He was speechless because of his fear. He was immobilized by his fear. Fear is a terrible reality when we give it a place in our lives. Fear always says, "Quit! Get out of here! Run!" Is this where you are? Have you been on the run? You may be running to drink, or drugs, or sex, or whatever, but you are on the run from the problems that confront you. You are listening to your fears.

II. THE COUNSEL OF FAITH – STAY WHERE YOU ARE AND DO RIGHT.

The second part of this Psalm gives a completely different word of counsel. David opened the Psalm with an expression of faith; “In the Lord I take refuge.” And then after listening to the counsel of fear, which came through the lips of timid friends, he says as a declaration of faith, “The Lord is in His holy temple; the Lord is on his heavenly throne.” And in the words that follow in this Psalm he demonstrates what faith does when it looks at the same circumstances that fear has seen. Fear says, “Run for your life!” Faith says, “Stay where you are and trust God and do what is right.” Look at the supporting things that faith presents for staying where you are and doing the will of God when the bottom seems to have fallen out of everything.

1. God still reigns.

In stead of focusing on the activities of the wicked, evident all around him in life, David lifted his eyes toward the heavens. Instead of focusing upon the foundations that are crumbling, he lifted his eyes toward the throne of God that remained unmoved by the circumstances. He declares, “The Lord is in His holy temple; the Lord is on his heavenly throne.” The wicked go about their evil deeds as though they are in charge, but actually the sovereign Lord of the covenant is the one in charge. He has not vacated his throne nor abandoned His people. He is still reigning over all!

Savonarola, one of God’s useful servants in the ancient days, found himself in disfavor with the Pope. His bold preaching against the corruption of the Vatican and all of its religious hierarchy had brought the wrath of the Pope down on his head. He found himself in circumstances in which his life was in constant danger. But before he died for

his faith, he declared, “He, who believes that Christ rules above, need not fear what happens below.” If we truly believe this morning that Jesus Christ still sits on the throne of this universe as the King over kings and the Lord over Lords, then there is no need to run. There is no need to hide. There is no need to be afraid. All is well as long as He is still enthroned.

2. God knows where you are.

In a second expression of faith, David declares, “He observes the sons of men; his eyes examine them. The Lord examines the righteous but the wicked and those who love violence His soul hates.” He describes God poetically as having eyes that see into the present circumstances. He “observes” all of the sons of men – the good and the bad, the upright and the wicked. God is not ignorant of what is going on in your life and around your life. If wicked men are putting the squeeze on you, God knows. God knows who you are and He knows who they are. We need to find comfort in the fact that though it may appear that God doesn’t see or doesn’t know, He knows everything that is going on with you and around you.

Jesus personalized this when He indicated that the heavenly Father even knows the number of hairs on your head. You do not lose a hair from your head without him taking note of it. O He knows!

3. God still judges wickedness.

In his third declaration of faith, David says, “On the wicked he will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur; a scorching wind will be their lot.” Evidently he has in mind the fiery

judgment that God poured out on Sodom and Gomorrah. He is declaring by faith that the end of the wicked will be the judgement of God. It may be that you are taken back by the statement that God “hates the wicked,” but you should not be. The word “hate” could be translated “set against.” God, being the holy God that He is, has to be in opposition to the wickedness and to the evil that men impose upon other men. He would have to change in His own holy character not to be set against wickedness and the wicked men who do wickedness. The judgment of God upon wickedness is sure.

You and I need to face our present circumstance with the sure confidence that God will do what is right. He will do what is right by us and by those who would abuse or misuse us.

4. God still keeps His own.

The last statement in this little Psalm is the fourth declaration: “For the Lord is righteous, He loves justice, upright men will see His face.” This stands in contrast to the plight of the wicked, which he described in the prior verse. While he will rain upon the wicked “fiery coals and burning sulfur,” the righteous will see the smile of His face. Is this not a comforting word? When all of the smoke clears from these present circumstances we will be in fellowship with God for we are His own people. God never abandons His own. God never forgets the man or the woman who does the right thing.

Leonard Griffin tells about what he discovered through reading the letters of the leaders of the German resistance movement during the II World War. Many of them died at the

hand of Hitler in the concentration camps of Germany. Griffin declares as you read their letters there is not any indication of fear or uncertainty in their writings. They seem to have within them an inner sense of calm in the face of the storm. Bishop Hans Ilje, who survived Hitler's fury, has written in his book, The Valley of the Shadow, about his experiences in a Nazi concentration camp. Again and again he tells that what gave some prisoners greater courage than others to endure privation, indignity and torture was the fact that they clung so stubbornly to their faith. They stood out among the prisoners because they had a calm and a peace within. They were simply not afraid any more; they had even conquered their fear of death. Ilje himself tells that though his own execution appeared imminent, yet having contemplated death in the light of his Christian belief, even the bars on his windows and the chains on his wrist seemed no longer to have much meaning. He writes, "In those days it was granted me to tread the shores of that land which lies on the outer most fringe of time, upon which already something of the radiance of the other world is shining." He discovered that God is real.

This is the testimony of David. We do not know the exact circumstances out of which the Psalm came, but it was one that could have produced fear. The fear would have counseled him to run for his life. In that circumstances instead of focusing upon evil men and their wickedness, he focused upon God. He focused upon God who rules over every circumstance. He focused upon the God who knows and understands every circumstance. He focused upon the God who holds ultimate judgment in His hands. He focused upon the God who will never forsake nor abandon his own. He focused upon the God who always does the right thing. This is our God.

I call upon you this morning not to listen to your fears but to listen to your faith. Your faith says, "Trust in the Lord!" Strong and courageous! Continue to do what is right! God will bring everything to a righteous conclusion!

FINISHING LIFE WITHOUT FEAR

FCF: It is nature of life in this fallen world to produce fear.

Proposition: It is possible to finish life without fear if we chose to live by faith.

Objective: to encourage senior adults to live by faith in this dangerous world.

Introduction:

Life in this world has always been full of danger. The faces of fear change in this modern world, but the fears are still the same.

Health fears.

Safety fears.

Financial fears.

Spiritual fears.

David had faced such fear, and overcame. We can learn from him.

I. The Challenge to Faith.

Fear says, "Run". Give up! Give in! David rejected this counsel. He chose rather to face His fear. He does not deny them, but rather faces them.

1. The danger is highlighted..

A few years ago I almost drowned in a storm at sea in the Gulf of Mexico when I found myself swimming far from shore, having tried to reach my drifting boat. I got into that predicament through my own stupidity, something not unusual at all. I can remember saying, "Well, this is it." The waves were seven or eight feet high, and the sky was dark with gale force winds and lightning. I was drifting out to sea when the Word of the Lord came to me and saved my life. What I thought He said was, "I'm here, Larson, and you're not coming home as soon as you think. Can you tread water?" Somehow that had never occurred to me. Had I continued my frantic effort to swim back to shore, I would have exhausted my strength and gone down.

In all sorts of situations we can make matters worse by our frantic efforts to save ourselves when God is trying to tell us, "Stand still." We have gotten ourselves into a hopeless situation and the more we do the worse it gets.

2. Bruce Larson, Wind and Fire

--James S. Hewett, Illustrations Unlimited (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988) p. 189

Title: Tigers in the Dark

Several years ago there was a well-known television circus show that developed a Bengal tiger act. Like the rest of the show, it was done "live" before a large audience. One evening, the tiger trainer went into the cage with several tigers to do a routine performance. The door was locked behind him. The spotlights highlighted the cage, the television cameras moved in close, and the audience watched in suspense as the trainer

skillfully put the tigers through their paces. In the middle of the performance, the worst possible fate befell the act: the lights went out! For twenty or thirty long, dark seconds the trainer was locked in with the tigers. In the darkness they could see him, but he could not see them. A whip and a small kitchen chair seemed meager protection under the circumstances, but he survived, and when the lights came on, he calmly finished the performance. In an interview afterward, he was asked how he felt knowing that the tigers could see him but that he could not see them. He first admitted the chilling fear of the situation, but pointed out that the tigers did not know that he could not see them. He said, "I just kept cracking my whip and talking to them until the lights came on. And they never knew I could not see them as well as they could see me."

This experience gives us a vivid parable of human life. At some point in our lives, all of us face the terrifying task of fighting tigers in the dark. Some face it constantly. Many people cope daily with internal problems that are capable of destroying them. They cannot visualize their problems or understand them, but their problems seem to have them zeroed in.

Thomas Lane Butts, *Tigers in the Dark*

--James S. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988) p. 205.

2. The destruction is apparent.

II. Determine to live by Faith.

1. The Lord reigns (v. 4)

The temple is the place of His earthly throne. Throne in heaven indicates that it is awesome in power and above all other thrones.

2. The Lord knows (v. 4-5)

His eyes watch—He knows. He examines—both the righteous and the evil. He knows everything.

Sweeping across Germany at the end of World War II, Allied forces searched farms and houses looking for snipers. At one abandoned house, almost a heap of rubble, searchers with flashlights found their way to the basement. There, on the crumbling wall, a victim of the Holocaust had scratched a Star of David. And beneath it, in rough lettering, the message:

I believe in the sun--even when it does not shine;

I believe in love--even when it is not shown;

I believe in God--even when he does not speak

Robert Schuller

--James S. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988) p. 186.

3. The Lord judges (v. 6)

His judgment expresses his character—his hatred for evil. His judgment will match the character of the deeds and persons judged.

4. The Lord preserves (v. 1, 7)

The opening confession is based on the faith expressed in the Psalm. He is a safe refuge, a place of hiding because He is the God we know Him to be. He does love righteousness, and He does preserve the upright.

I will stick to Christ as a burr to a topcoat!

Last words of Katherine Von Bora, wife of Martin Luther

--James S. Hewett, Illustrations Unlimited (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988) p. 188.