

Tell Fear Where to Go

Message for Sunday, March 22, 2020
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Proverbs 1:7, Psalm 23, others.

East Germany, before the collapse of communism, was a place where people lived in fear. Not just fear of the authorities, but even fear of their friends and neighbours. The security police, known as the *Stasi*, kept tabs on everyone. They were watching for signs of dissent or resistance to the regime. Undesirables were sent to prison or work camps, where conditions were terrible. The *Stasi* relied on a vast network of regular informers, as well as individuals who would divulge someone's secret for a cash reward. As a result, people there lived in fear of everyone else. You couldn't trust anyone, not even family members.

Today German citizens can go to the old *Stasi* office and ask to look at their file. Everyone's file gives all the details on who squealed on them, and what information they provided. People who have done that have been horrified to learn who informed on them: husbands, girl friends, co-workers, and so on. Decades after the fall of communism, that history still leaves people in a state of trauma.

Life here in Canada is similar, in terms of the fear factor. With all the news about the danger of getting this virus, people are afraid. You never know if your neighbour or your friend was in contact with someone who was in contact with someone who was in contact with someone who had the virus. They may not mean you any harm—unlike the *Stasi* informers—but the result can still be dreadful.

This past week, most of the items on the news have been about the COVID-19 virus. It's as if there's nothing else going on in the world. And if everything completely shuts down, that may very well be true. If everyone on the whole planet simply stayed home for two weeks, that would end this virus in its tracks.

But of course that's not possible. Workers in hospitals and nursing homes still need to look after patients and residents. Criminals don't obey the rules about not going out, so the police have to be on the job. Fire likewise doesn't obey the law, so the firefighters have to be ready to go. Grocery

stores and drug stores are essential services, so their workers have to be present. Then there are the people who operate the utilities like power, telephone, water, sewer, natural gas. To enable all these people to get to work, buses and subways have to run, and gas stations need to be open. And so on. With all those people coming and going, the virus is bound to keep on spreading. And so people live in fear.

Let's talk about fear. God actually has a lot to say to us in the Bible about fear. The main theme throughout the Scriptures can be summed up in two words: "Fear not." Well, not quite. There is one thing—or rather, one being—we should be afraid of.

Proverbs 1:7, New International Version:

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.

Now this fear of God is not like the fear of someone who is evil, who wants to hurt you. The fear of God comes from an awareness of the awesome power and majesty and holiness of God. People who casually talk about "the Big Guy upstairs" do not know who they're talking about.

Here's what Oswald Chambers wrote about the connection between fear and faith:

The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God you fear everything else.

Let's go back to that theme of "Fear not."

First of all, we must realize that safety isn't found in a place, or in beefed up security, or in having lots of money. That's an illusion. None of these can save us from all dangers.

God is the only one that can keep us truly safe. By "safe" I don't mean away from physical harm or illness or bad things. God sees things from the point of view of eternity, not our very short-sighted (and often self-centred) view of life. This is how Jesus puts it:

John 16:33, New Living Translation:

Jesus said, "I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many

trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.”

Psalm 23 contains one of the best known verses about fear.

Psalm 23:4, New International Version:
 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
 I will fear no evil,
 for you are with me;
 your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

It is a prayer of quiet calm and confidence. As long as I am staying in God’s paths, I have no fear of enemies or danger.

Another Psalm has a similar theme of confidence in God.

Psalm 56:3-4, New Living Translation:
 When I am afraid, I will put my trust in you.
 I praise God for what he has promised.
 I trust in God, so why should I be afraid?
 What can mere mortals do to me?

Isn’t that interesting? This passage begins, “When I am afraid...” But a moment later, the person says, “I am not afraid.” What made the difference? – “I put my trust in you.”

The person praying has a sober, but realistic thought: “What can people do to me?” This person realizes, “I am not invincible. Even innocent people get hurt sometimes. But really, what can they do to me? They can hurt me, even kill me. But they cannot touch my soul. That is kept safe with God, where nothing can harm me.”

Let me give you a real-life example of this truth in action.

John Chrysostom was one of the main leaders of the church around 400 A.D. Even though he was very bold when it came to condemning sin, he was much loved by the people. They trusted him because they knew he would speak only the truth. Chrysostom even spoke against the Emperor for some things he or his wife had done. He was called before the Emperor, who threatened him with exile unless he apologized.

Chrysostom replied, “You cannot exile me because the entire world is my Father’s house.”

“I will kill you,” said the Emperor.

“No, you cannot, because my life is hid with Christ in God.”

“I will take away your treasures.”

“No, you cannot, for my treasure is in heaven and my heart is there.”

The Emperor was furious at this point. “I will drive you away from man and you shall have no friend left.”

“No, you cannot, for I have a friend in heaven from whom you cannot separate me... I defy you; for there is nothing that you can do to hurt me!”

Say this with me: “When I am afraid, I will put my trust in you.”

I’ll close with another Psalm.

Psalm 121:1-2, New International Version:
 I lift up my eyes to the hills — where does my help come from?
 My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.

Next Steps:

- Pray: Begin with meditating on the greatness of God. Spend some time worshipping this awesome God.
- Confess any fear you might have about anything. Using your hands, “scoop” it all up and give it to God to look after.
- Trust God: “Lord, I don’t know what’s going to happen with this virus and everything surrounding it. But I know that whatever comes, I am with you and there’s no better place to be.”