

## Concerning Fear and Anxiety

### Bible Reading – Joshua 1 verses 1 to 9 (NLT)

*1 After the death of Moses the LORD's servant, the LORD spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant. He said, <sup>2</sup> "Moses my servant is dead. Therefore, the time has come for you to lead these people, the Israelites, across the Jordan River into the land I am giving them. <sup>3</sup> I promise you what I promised Moses: 'Wherever you set foot, you will be on land I have given you— <sup>4</sup> from the Negev wilderness in the south to the Lebanon mountains in the north, from the Euphrates River in the east to the Mediterranean Sea in the west, including all the land of the Hittites.' <sup>5</sup> No one will be able to stand against you as long as you live. For I will be with you as I was with Moses. I will not fail you or abandon you.*

*<sup>6</sup> "Be strong and courageous, for you are the one who will lead these people to possess all the land I swore to their ancestors I would give them. <sup>7</sup> Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the instructions Moses gave you. Do not deviate from them, turning either to the right or to the left. Then you will be successful in everything you do. <sup>8</sup> Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do. <sup>9</sup> This is my command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."*

### **SERMON**

Last month we looked at the need to choose life instead of death.

God gives us all a choice, to have faith in God, to trust and obey Him, and if we choose to do this then, as a result, He promises He will bless us and as a result, we can experience joy as He showers His blessings upon us.

Alternatively, we can choose death (that is following self and the ways of unbelievers), in which case He says we will be plagued with curses. The choice is ours.

Today I want to look at the fact that most of us - even when we have chosen life - chosen to follow God, and make Jesus Lord of our life, still sometimes either doubt God, or are anxious and fearful about aspects of our life.

Sometimes we find ourselves saying things like:

'Will God really bless me, now that I have chosen life?' 'What if He doesn't?'

'It doesn't feel like God is blessing me right now'. 'I am full of anxiety today'.

'I prayed for such and such and it didn't happen, maybe God wasn't listening.'

'I've got this horrible illness' or 'I have run out of money, where are you God?'

Sometimes our thoughts might be concerned simply with wondering how we are going to get through the rest of the day...

And so I want to share with you today, what God's Holy Word says to encourage us **all** to **counter** these negative feelings, however difficult our situation on any one day might be.

My experience of life has shown me that there are different reasons why we sometimes doubt or worry; why we believe perhaps that God has let us down.

But what does God's Word say in relation to matters of doubt, fear and anxiety?

When we look, we see the Bible is full of passages where God clearly tells us NOT to be afraid. In fact, not to be afraid of anything.

I did an on-line search to discover how many times in the Bible the words fear, fearful and fearing was mentioned, and the result was 330.

The word 'afraid' is mentioned 219 times. (In this case the search was in the NLT version, but similar figures would be revealed whichever translation we check – in fact the word fear, fearful or fearing can be found 551 times in the King James Version).

The first three times the word 'afraid' is mentioned in the Bible – all in the book of Genesis - refer to people being afraid of God!

Other times it refers to our fear of our personal circumstances, or of dangers, or a fear of others.

Scientists would tell us that we have an in-built 'fight or flight' mechanism. When we are in an anxious situation, cortisol is pumped around our body and we prepare to confront the situation - or we decide to run away as fast as we can!

So I think we can deduce from this, that it is normal for people sometimes to be fearful or afraid. But so many times the words are used in the Bible in sentences where either God or an angel is telling a person NOT to be afraid or fearful; and it is those Scriptures I want to bring to your attention today.

In Exodus chapter 20 God had just finished giving the 10 commandments to His people but they were terrified of Him. It says this:

***'When the people heard the thunder and the loud blast of the ram's horn, and when they saw the flashes of lightning and the smoke billowing from the mountain, they stood at a distance, trembling with fear.'***

In verse 20 Moses addressed them and said this:

***"Don't be afraid, for God has come in this way to test you, and so that your fear of him will keep you from sinning!"***

Here and elsewhere in the Bible it says we are to **fear God** but **not** be afraid of Him. There is a difference. We fear Him in a way that is designed to stop us from sinning. And this kind of fear is a reverential fear of God's Almighty power and His holiness.

Last month I read to you from the very first chapter and verse of the book of Job where it said, ***'Job was blameless—a man of complete integrity. He feared God and stayed away from evil.'***

He feared God and stayed away from evil.

When we are in God's will, there is nothing to fear, except God!

Do you, do I, fear God?

If you do **not** fear God, then I believe you have every reason to fear man, to fear people. And that's a reason why a person's life may be full of fear and anxiety. Because if we do not fear God then His blessings cannot flow to us and He may well withdraw His hedge of protection from around us. And if we are attacked by man, God may not be there to protect us.

One of my favourite passages in the Old Testament is the story of a heroic man of God called Joshua.

We heard a little about him in today's reading:

God had chosen him to be Moses' successor. Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land after they had escaped from slavery in Egypt.

In the last sentence of the Bible reading today, God said this to His servant Joshua:

***"This is my command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."***

And do you know what - that is God's command to you and me today. Do NOT be afraid or discouraged, the Lord your God is with you wherever you go! Amen?

We might say 'well it's all right for Joshua he didn't have to go through what I'm going through'. 'He didn't face what I am facing'.

Well let's have a look and see if we have grounds for thinking that.

You may well know the story of Joshua and his life, in which case I shall remind you about two aspects of this courageous 'sold-out-for-God' man. If what I am about to read is new to you, then be encouraged. Joshua knew what it meant to overcome against human odds.

Have you ever had to lead a band of not-very-well-armed or trained men, into battle against giants? Joshua did and he succeeded!

In order to move into the Promised Land, after escaping through the Red Sea under Moses' guidance, the Israelites sent some spies into the land and only two men believed they could capture it from the enemy. This is what we read

in Deuteronomy chapter 1 where Moses is reflecting back to the people what they told him earlier:

***“The people of the land are taller and more powerful than we are, and their towns are large, with walls rising high into the sky! We even saw giants there—the descendants of Anak!”***

***<sup>29</sup> “But I said to you, ‘Don’t be shocked or afraid of them! <sup>30</sup> The LORD your God is going ahead of you. He will fight for you, just as you saw him do in Egypt.***

***<sup>31</sup> And you saw how the LORD your God cared for you all along the way as you travelled through the wilderness, just as a father cares for his child. Now he has brought you to this place.’***

***<sup>32</sup> “But even after all he did, you refused to trust the LORD your God, <sup>33</sup> who goes before you looking for the best places to camp, guiding you with a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day.***

***<sup>34</sup> “When the LORD heard your complaining, he became very angry. So he solemnly swore, <sup>35</sup> ‘Not one of you from this wicked generation will live to see the good land I swore to give your ancestors, <sup>36</sup> except Caleb son of Jephunneh. He will see this land because he has followed the LORD completely. I will give to him and his descendants some of the very land he explored during his scouting mission.’***

***<sup>37</sup> “And the LORD was also angry with me because of you. He said to me, ‘Moses, not even you will enter the Promised Land! <sup>38</sup> Instead, your assistant, Joshua son of Nun, will lead the people into the land. Encourage him, for he will lead Israel as they take possession of it.’***

Joshua fearlessly led his people into the Promised Land. He had no fear because he knew and believed God would be with Him!

The second example I want to share with you concerning Joshua’s faith and fearlessness is this:

He had the courage to totally trust the Lord to give him and the Israelites victory, in the battle for the town of Jericho. This was remarkable, because of what God told him to do in order to take the town. God was testing Joshua’s faith. God said to him ‘tell the people to march once around the town each day for six days, and then on the seventh day to march round 7 times, non-stop’.

Talk about ‘go and provoke the enemy’, and ‘make yourselves sitting ducks’.

After all, the scripture says in Joshua chapter 6 that only the men at the front of the marching people were armed, the remainder were not!

Then on the seventh day, in verse 20 it says:

***‘When the people heard the sound of the rams’ horns, they shouted as loud as they could. Suddenly, the walls of Jericho collapsed, and the Israelites charged straight into the town and captured it. <sup>21</sup> They completely destroyed everything in it with their swords—men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep, goats, and donkeys.’***

Joshua was totally fearless, and his lack of fear was based on his willingness to trust in God absolutely.

Moses, Joshua’s guide and mentor, helped develop Joshua’s courage. Listen to what the great leader Moses said to Joshua as he appointed him to be his successor just prior to his own death. I’m reading from Deuteronomy 31 verses 7 and 8:

***‘Then Moses called for Joshua, and as all Israel watched, he said to him, “Be strong and courageous! For you will lead these people into the land that the LORD swore to their ancestors he would give them. You are the one who will divide it among them as their grants of land. <sup>8</sup> Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD will personally go ahead of you. He will be with you; he will neither fail you nor abandon you.”***

How strong is our faith today? Do we, like Joshua, know deep within our soul, that the Lord our God will neither fail us nor abandon us?

For God’s people that is a promise, so why do we get afraid and anxious?

In the New Testament, we read many times about God or his angels telling His people not to be afraid.

In Luke 1 we read this concerning the imminent conception of John the Baptist:

***‘While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar. Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. But the angel said, “Don’t be***

***afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John.'***

Just a few verses later we read these words spoken to the Virgin Mary:

***“Don’t be afraid, Mary,” the angel told her, “for you have found favour with God!<sup>31</sup> You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus.’***

And in the next chapter we read these words spoken to some shepherds minding their own business out on a hillside:

***‘Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord’s glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. “Don’t be afraid!” he said. “I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. <sup>11</sup> The Saviour—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!’***

And so God speaks to us today the same refrain:

Do not be afraid!

Fear not!

And often God needs to tell us more than once not to be afraid. He’s knows sometimes it’s not easy for us. Clearly, He knows we don’t find it easy and that’s OK.

Listen to this moving account (at the beginning of Matthew chapter 28), of the visit of the two Mary’s to the tomb where Jesus had laid for 3 days:

***‘Early on Sunday morning as the new day was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out to visit the tomb.***

***<sup>2</sup> Suddenly there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled aside the stone, and sat on it.***

***<sup>3</sup> His face shone like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. <sup>4</sup> The guards shook with fear when they saw him, and they fell into a dead faint.***

***<sup>5</sup> Then the angel spoke to the women. “Don’t be afraid!” he said. “I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. <sup>6</sup> He isn’t here! He is risen from the dead, just as he said would happen. Come, see where his body was lying.***

***7 And now, go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and he is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there. Remember what I have told you."***

***'The women ran quickly from the tomb. They were very frightened but also filled with great joy, and they rushed to give the disciples the angel's message. 9 And as they went, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they ran to him, grasped his feet, and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Don't be afraid! Go tell my brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see me there."***

So the angel told them not to be afraid, and as they ran off this passage says, although they were filled with great joy they were still frightened. So this time it's Jesus who says – Don't be afraid.

It's not always easy but Jesus' Word to us, God's word to us today, is 'do not be afraid'.

And even in suffering, this is the disciple Peter's advice to us all  
**(1 Peter 5 verses 7, 9 and 10)**

***'Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.***

***Remember that your family of believers all over the world is going through the same kind of suffering you are.***

***In his kindness, God called you to share in his eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. So after you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation.'***

So there is no promise that life will be a bed of roses for us, but there is a promise that if we are not fearful and if we cast our cares upon God, then we can be overcomers. Why? Because God will neither fail us, nor abandon us, if we have put our trust in Him.

And this is what Paul said to the believers in Philippi:

**Philippians 4 verses 6 and 7:**

***‘Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.’***

So God’s Word promises us that if we do not worry about anything and instead pray about everything, then we will experience God’s peace – a peace which the world cannot give you; a peace that enables us to come to a place of believing that worry is fruitless and futile.

Finally, some words from Jesus Christ Himself to us all, concerning this topic of fear and anxiety. This from Matthew 10 verses 26 to 31:

***“But don’t be afraid of those who threaten you. For the time is coming when everything that is covered will be revealed, and all that is secret will be made known to all. What I tell you now in the darkness, shout abroad when daybreak comes. What I whisper in your ear, shout from the housetops for all to hear!***

***<sup>28</sup> “Don’t be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell. What is the price of two sparrows—one copper coin? But not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it. <sup>30</sup> And the very hairs on your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows.’***

Do **not** be afraid....., - Fear only **God**....., - **You** are worth so much more to God than a flock of sparrows.....

In this one short paragraph, Jesus tells His followers, you and me, three times **not** to be afraid.

The last words of Jesus, recorded in the Gospel of Matthew just prior to Jesus’ ascension into Heaven are these:

***Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”***

“Be sure of this”, said Jesus “I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” His Father said to Joshua He would never abandon him. Jesus likewise says to us today, I will never abandon you.

If Jesus, our Saviour, God made flesh, is with us always, even to the end of the age, why then would we feel a need to be fearful and afraid?

Let’s take a few moments in silence to let that truth, and those other truths from the Holy Scriptures that we have heard today, enter our hearts and occupy our souls and our spirits and replace the lies that we have had spoken into us, or over us, by the world and the forces of darkness.....

God IS good, He loves us, He wants what’s best for us and He is speaking to each one of us today, “Don’t be afraid. Fear not, I am with you always.”

**AMEN**

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