

“Fearing God” – Pr Jim Sprengle – New Year’s Eve – 2022

- I. **Romans 8:31; 37** – ³¹ If God is for us, who can be against us? ³⁷ we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us...
- II. **Life is full of fear.**
 - a. It’s strange how fear works as we go through life... because it sort of grows and changes as we do.
 - b. We can laugh at some of the things that toddlers are afraid of – like Santa Claus, or clowns, or random objects... like our little one was deathly afraid of balloons...
 - c. As time goes on, kids start to fear strangers, dogs, spiders, and the dark...
 - i. Usually, these things come from experiences that are negative, but sometimes not.
 - d. Pretty soon, we get to the age where we fear being rejected by our peers or the opposite sex, bullies and being made fun of, and social situations.
 - e. As life moves on, some of these childhood fears hang on and plague us, while new ones start to kick in...
 - i. What will I do with my life? What if I don’t succeed?
 - ii. Will I find a life partner?
 - iii. How will I support myself as I go into the world?
 - f. Around this time many of us then begin to deal with the fear of disease and death...
 - i. In my early 20’s, Michele’s dad passed away while she was pregnant with Morgan.
 - ii. I found myself dealing with overwhelming fear of being a parent, of dying, of getting a horrible disease or maybe a car accident.
 - iii. As time went on, this morphed into being afraid for my kids and their wellbeing... along with losing the ones closest to me.
 - g. Again, some of these fears stay with us, deep in our brains... and actually change the course of our lives, because we behave differently... we avoid things that trigger our fear instead of just living.
 - i. Some people refuse to fly for fear of crashing or they’re claustrophobic...
 - ii. Some people will never speak in public...
 - iii. Some people will never go to a high place and look down... or take a boat trip for fear of drowning... or swim in the ocean for fear of sharks
 - h. Fears are simply replaced over time... sure, we might not be afraid of something that bothered us years ago, but then something new comes along... for example, Covid.
 - i. A few years ago, most people were mildly afraid of a worldwide pandemic... until Covid.

- ii. Now we get hit with constant updates on every new disease from Monkey Pox to the latest killer version of strep throat...
 - i. If it's not a disease, it's crime, the economy and social unrest, politics, or world issues and wars... there is not shortage of things to be afraid of – and the more we think about it, the more fearful we become.
- III. **Now that I've got you in a tizzy**... let's talk about the meaning of fear.
 - a. Fear is actually a strange word, because it can mean different things.
 - i. The other day I came across a list of “contronyms”, or the same word that has the opposite meaning...
 1. An example is cleave – which can mean to cut apart, or in the Bible it says a man and woman shall cleave together.
 2. Another example is fast – you can go fast, or you might be held fast or stuck to something.
 3. Apology is being sorry for something or defending something
 4. Left can mean who remains or who took off
 5. Refrain can mean stop from doing something or to repeat
 - ii. Fear may not be a true contronym, but it can mean being afraid or terrified, or it can mean to revere, respect, and trust.
 - b. Martin Luther's Small Catechism explains the first commandment, “You shall have no other gods” as, “You shall fear, love, and trust in God above all things.”
 - i. We can be sure that Martin Luther is not telling us to be afraid of God like public speaking or flying... he explains that we are to place our lives in God's hands alone... not avoiding – but going near.
 - c. I read a story about a father who's 9-month-old liked to climb on things and jump into his arms... whether he was ready or not!
 - i. No fear... just a complete trust that dad would catch her...
 - d. I appreciate this visual – because a little child has yet to develop the fears that often take our eyes off God – but instead they have a simple trust.
 - i. I suppose that's why Jesus says, “Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”
 - e. Fears, anxiety, and worries are like a laser focus on that which is not God and His promises – while fearing God or trusting God is placing everything in His hands.
- IV. **Paul helps us put our fear of the world in perspective.**
 - a. One of my favorite chapters in all of Scripture, Romans 8 is a beautiful summary of God's love that overcomes fear.
 - b. It begins by explaining that “those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.” (vs 5)

- c. Next it says, “You did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” (vs 15)
 - i. This is the picture of dad with open arms catching us as we hurl ourselves off the top of the stairs... trusting fully in him
- d. And, in our reading tonight, we hear, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (vs 31)
 - i. We might also ask, “what” can be against us?
 - ii. Do we have a fear of the world and its dangers or the people in it?
 - iii. Or, do we fear and trust God and His unbelievable grace and love?
- e. Paul is asking a rhetorical question here – or he expects the answer to be our faith and trust in God will answer, “Nothing!!” – absolutely no one and nothing can be against the children of God and succeed in separating us from His love.
- f. If God is for you, how can anything in the world take you away from Him?

V. **The Christmas message is still fresh in our minds tonight.**

- a. God’s love is so incredibly profound that He overcomes any barrier to eternal life in His arms...
 - i. Yes, a child was born... a child who lived a life with all the fears we experience – all the temptations for misplaced trust...
 - ii. But Jesus was the perfect person in every way, especially as He gave His entire life and being to the will of the Father – trusting Him unconditionally...
 - iii. Even as He grew old enough to fulfill His destiny of false accusations, total rejection, and death on a cross.
 - iv. He was for each of us the true example and life we could never measure up to – especially His trust in the Father through the scariest of times.
- b. But the greatest news of all is that God didn’t just leave us to our brokenness and sin – He gives us the victory Jesus won on our behalf.
 - i. No rejection – no troubles – no authorities – no torture – not even death itself would stop Jesus from fulfilling the promise that God’s love reigns supreme.
 - ii. In fact, Paul says, “we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” – we are victors – we are super victors – ultra winners.
- c. When I hear these words of St. Paul, I begin to regain the courage and boldness of fearing God alone...
 - i. Whenever I have doubts and fears – especially over which I have no control or power – I think of these words again and again – I win.
 - ii. I win because God loves me so much that He gave up His own Son so that I can jump into His arms with complete abandon.

- iii. The world has no real power over me – because my God is in charge – and of all things... He actually loves me just like a son.
- iv. If God is for me, who or what could possibly be against me that matters?
 - 1. The answer is no one and nothing.
- d. In Jesus Christ, God loves you... God gives you the victory... God is always with you... now, in the new year, and forever. Amen.