

Freedom in Christ
Freedom from Fear

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom, 2 Corinthians 3:17

To a greater or lesser degree many people live in fear. We don't often think about it because by and large most of us live in and have grown up in communities where we did not have to fear for our physical safety or fear we'd lack food, clothing and shelter. Yet there are other fears that stalk us in this life and many people, like you and me, must face these fears or be haunted by them.

This morning I will talk about how the freedom we have in Christ Jesus frees us from various fears we face in life. My list is not comprehensive and my words about some of our fears are not to imply that even after we've found new life in Christ, we do not get scared from time to time. Rather I hope that you and I can find hope and confidence that living in Christ Jesus frees us from being overcome by our fears.

Freedom From Fear of The Storms of Life

Right now we're in the midst of a storm of life. Most people have been affected negatively by the virus pandemic; restricted social interactions & gathering, business and financial losses, fears of violence and chaos in the streets. Many have their own personal storm going on. The uncertainty of what comes next grips us with apprehension.

Look at the Gospel reading again. It says, *Now, when Jesus saw a crowd around Him, He gave orders to depart to the other side of the sea, Matt. 8:18.* We tend to believe that if Jesus gives orders or direction, and we obey Him, He will lead us to great success. But God's purposes for us may not be for our success; it may be the opposite! We always assume God is leading us to particular end or goal. He is not. Getting to a particular end is incidental. What we call the process, God calls the end.

Do I have a dream of God's purpose? His purpose is that I depend on Him and on His power. His purpose in the midst of storms is that I see Him holding power over the waves, no shore in sight, no success, no goal, only the absolute certainty that all is right because He's got it in His hands.¹

In the storms of life, the process is God's goal for us. We often pray for God to calm the storms around us. God is working at calming you in the midst of the storms. God's purpose is to enable me to see Him when surrounded by trouble; to see that He can rebuke the chaos in my life just now.

When fear comes upon us the best thing we can do is pray to God. But our Lord has a right to expect us, who call upon His name, to have confidence in Him. God expects us to have such confidence in Him that we are the reliable ones in a crisis. For many, trust in God goes only so far, then they fall back to the elementary panic prayers of those who do not know God. *"You of little faith, why are you so afraid?"*

There are times in life when there is no storm, no crisis, when we do our human best. But when the crisis arises it reveals who it is on whom we truly rely. If we have been learning to worship God and to genuinely trust Him, the crisis will reveal that we can go all the way to the breaking point and not break in our confidence in Him.² Jesus gave us this assurance: *In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world, John 16:33.*

Freedom From Fear of Judgement

Last week I spoke about the sin that pervades human life and causes us to do what we know we shouldn't do and act in unhealthy ways. Every descendent of Adam and Eve – the first man and woman – is so far off the mark from the original goodness of God, that his/her own nature is inclined to evil. This corruption of our nature, in every person born into this world, is deserving of judgement by the

incomparable justice of a holy God. Only forgiveness will allow sinners to be “accounted righteous before God.”

Here’s how Paul says it in the Bible: *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit,* Romans 8:1-4.

What Paul means is that when Christ’s sacrifice on the cross freed us from sin, He also freed us from eternal judgment. When we are in Christ, living with His Spirit in us, we are no longer under judgement for failing to meet the standards of a holy and righteous God. Each one of us will one day stand before the judgment throne of God to account for our lives. Thanks be to God, Jesus will be standing right there with us, saying to His heavenly Father, “She’s okay. She’s with me.”

That is why we say that ... *To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy ... be glory and majesty forever ...* Jude 1: 24.

We no longer fear that God doesn’t love us when we fail. We live in the freedom knowing that grace covers our failures! We are freed from the of fear of making a mistake.

Freeing us from fear of ultimate judgement by God frees us from fear of being judged by others. How many people spend much of their lives “playing to the grandstand,” worried about what others think of them? When you discover, deep down in your soul, that God has freed you from condemnation for your sin, that all your sins have been forgiven ... when you realize this truth and have received His grace into your life, it tends to remove the fear of judgement by others from your living. You no longer need to “play to the grandstand” because you know that only God can really evaluate you. Others may try, but their criticisms, if not turned into helpful improvements by you, cannot stand the scrutiny of God.

There is only One to whom we must “look good.” When we have given our lives to Him, we are spotless and pure in His sight. *There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus,* Romans 8:1.

Freedom From Fear of Death

Death is the big one for many people ... the greatest source of fear, or at the very least a source of some apprehension. Most of us don’t think about death at all unless someone close to us dies or when we enter the autumn of life. Death is the great unknown. I admit I have some apprehension myself about death; not so much about dying per se. Although I guess I would want to die well and not want it to hurt too much and not be in terror. The apprehension stems more from a sense that I would leave this earth with many things still undone and leave behind loved ones.

Sure, death is the great unknown, but my trust in God, because of His revelation in Jesus, gives me confidence that I can face death unafraid. ... *Jesus ... looked toward heaven and prayed: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him,* John 17:2.

The genuine Christians I have known all had or have a calm attitude toward their own death. Some have said, “When my time comes, I’m ready” or “I’ve placed my life in His hands while on earth, so I’ll place it in His hands when I leave this earth.” The Christian doesn’t worry about death because he trusts God to take care of him. Having tasted God’s grace and provision in this life, he is quite ready to have it expanded in heaven.³

The opposite of trust is fear and fear’s activity is worry. Someone once said that worry is a circle of inefficient thought whirling about a central core of fear.⁴ We have a little plaque in our kitchen that says, “Worry is like a rocking chair. It moves a lot but doesn’t get you anywhere.” When we hear these words from the Bible *For the wages of sin is death..* we might fear, if we did not hear the rest, *but the gift*

of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord, Romans 6:22-23. Christ died to set us free from sin and death. That is what he meant when He said from the Cross "It is finished."

Christ Frees Us To Truly Live

But it's not just death that we are freed from. In Christ Jesus we are freed for a life lived in joy. A life that is stalked and haunted by fear is a life deprived of fullness and joy. Fear is like a dark veil pulled over our heads preventing us from seeing and enjoying the goodness in life. Jesus said, *I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness*, John 12:46. In every situation, declare Christ and be free of the fears of this world as we know our true freedom is in him. Continue to choose to serve the Lord and put your trust in Him and He will see you through! *There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear*, 1 John 4:18. God's love for each of us is perfect.

Freedom in Christ lifts the shackles of fear, makes us able to stand before God without fear, enables us to walk calmly through the storms of life, and have a taste of that fullness of life that awaits us in eternity. Jesus said: *... I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full*, John 10:10.

Whatever you go through today, tomorrow and the future, hold onto these truths. No matter what this life throws at you, your freedom, your life, your hope in Christ Jesus holds the greatest future. Your future has been made right through Jesus. Continue to choose to serve the Lord and put your trust in Him and He will see you through!

Next week I'll talk more about this, as I talk about how Christ sets us free to be the kind of people God has intended us to be. Freed from the bondage of sin, no longer mastered by sin, we are free to live into the original goodness that God intends for us.

The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father,"
Romans 8:15.

¹ Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost For His Highest*, July 28.

² Ibid, August 12.

³ Robert Benjamin Hall, *There's More*, Logos International, 1972; 146ff.

⁴ Ibid, 147.