

COVID-19

We are in unprecedented times – it does not even seem real. At any given time, we can turn on the television or radio or other social media and hear how masses are being affected, more are projected to be affected, and the instructions are being given to **STAY HOME** - unless, you are an essential worker, or in another of other several exempt categories. We walk about, when we do go out, to the grocery store, or other places which allow for social distancing, and our fellow “humans” are reluctant at times to speak, others are masked up and avoid eyes, others are going out of their way to make it seem like everything is still ok.

There are some feel good stories out there. Today, there was a segment on the news about a group of teachers in Suburban Lockport who did a drive by parade for their students – reaching over 200 to let them know that their teachers miss and care about them. There was another story about a neighborhood that meets in the cul-de-sac for the pledge every morning. Still another neighborhood where people are putting teddy bears in their windows for the children to see as they go on daily walks with their caregivers/parents to relieve the pressure of being cooped up in the house for long periods of time. But, in a world where it almost overwhelmingly “looks” like things are falling apart, where it “seems” so uncertain, in a world where men’s hearts are failing them for fear and others are turning to domestic violence, abuse of alcohol and other forms of mind altering substances to cope, what do we do? How do we stand on the Word of God during fear, during the unknown and during what can feel at times, like imminent chaos and certain doom? How do we convey the good news that God is still in control? Let’s look at a lesson from one of our recent Bible Classes at New Testament. Pastor James was the teacher of this timely lesson...

FAITH vs. FEAR

A. Fear works through the “word of the world” – news media, social media, headlines, statistics, rumors, “fake news”, those who don’t know what they are talking about but seemingly are experts on any subject (!), non-stop breaking news reports 24/7, YouTube, you name it – the word of the world is out there. Some have said that FEAR is “false evidence appearing real”.

- While many sources of news are reliable, we must be wise and sort through all of it, pick out the bones, as the old folk used to say when eating fish, and keep the meat!

- Matthew 14:30 and 31 gives us a clear picture of how Jesus can calm fear.
- *But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, Lord, save me.*
- *And immediately, Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?*
- What's the takeaway from this passage of scripture for us today? He did it then – He does it now! Jesus is still saving us in times of fear and will come to our rescue. Keep your eyes on Jesus!
- Luke 21:26 - *Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth; for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.* Let's look at this same scripture in the ERV (easy read version) - *They will be afraid and worried about what will happen to the world. Everything in the sky will be changed.*
- Wow, look around, most seem a little worried. How do we not worry? Stand on the Word of God! Do not, I repeat, do not let the cares of this world choke the Word and make it useless. Mark 4:18, 19 talks about how we “process and use” the Word “*Others are like the seed planted among the thorny weeds. They hear the teaching, but their lives become full of other things: the worries of this life, the love of money, and everything else they want. This keeps the teaching from growing, and it does not produce a crop in their lives.*” In other words, if we hear the teachings of the Lord, and refuse to be consumed with the worries of the world, the love of money and everything else we want, the Word will do what it is designed to do. What is that? Give peace during fear, and an assurance that God is still in control and guess what? The virus did not take Him by surprise! He's got us!

B. Fear is developed through meditating and acting on Satan's lies and demands compromise. Satan supports and develops fear. Conversely, Faith is developed through meditating and acting on the Word of God. The Word of God supports and develops faith.

- Our strength is renewed by the love of Christ. In John 4:18, we read “*there is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear; because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.*”
- 2 Timothy tells us that “*For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.*”

- What's the takeaway here? In other words, how do I not be afraid and trust and depend on God's Word? Meditate on it, instead of meditating and acting on what Satan is saying. That doesn't mean act like the virus does not exist. But know and believe that the power of God is stronger, the Word of God is everlasting and meditating on it will bring peace, hope and the ability to rise above the headlines. Does that mean that you should not take precautions? No. Wash your hands, cover your mouth, stay away from others and use wisdom. But, mix into your life, your very being, the Word of God. Take it several a times a day - meditate and study the Word of God. Turn off the 24/7 news stream and commit some scripture to heart. Instead of buying in to every "breaking news" carrying the latest on the pandemic, study the Word and say it over and over until the peace of God washes through you and yes, supernaturally brings a calmness to your spirit that the latest pandemic statistics will not bring.
- For us to believe that the Pandemic has more power than God, we must compromise our beliefs. We must disregard what the Bible says. We must allow fear to morph into doubt and unbelief. That's what the Word means when it says in John, above, that fear has torment. Watch your words! When you say the wrong thing, you start to do the wrong thing. When you receive fear into your heart – it stops faith. So, say instead, God has not given me the spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind... Rely on the words in Proverbs 4:20-23 *"My son, attend to my words, incline thine ear unto my sayings. Let them not depart from thine eye; keep them in the midst of thine heart. For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh. Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."*

So, this passage tells us that the Word is life and health! Make sure, more now than ever before that you are ingesting more of the Word of God than the word of the world.

C. Faith works through the Word of God. 'Fear not' is stated over 60 times in the Bible.

- You say – I will not fear! This puts the love of God to work in your life.
- Stopping fear before it enters your heart and becomes a part of you is an act of the will. Psalm 118:6 illustrates this. *"The Lord is on my side: I will not fear: what can man do unto me?"*
- II Corinthians 10:3-5 also makes this point – *"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself*

against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

- From the ERV – *We live in this world, but we don't fight our battles in the same way the world does. The weapons we use are not human ones. Our weapons have power from God and can destroy the enemy's strong places. We destroy people's arguments, and we tear down every proud idea that raises itself against the knowledge of God. We also capture every thought and make it give up and obey Christ.*
- What's our takeaway? God is in control. He is not defeated, and He is the victor! Even over the COVID-19 pandemic.
- *In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression; for thou shalt not fear: and from terror; for it shall not come near thee.* Isaiah 54:14 Again, this passage talks about the power of God and illustrates that as we establish ourselves in Him (through meditating on His Word, living for Him and walking in His ways) we will be far from oppression that we make a decision not to fear!
- In closing, Believe the love! I John 4:16 says *"We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. **So we will not be afraid** on the day of Judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world.*
- *"So don't be afraid, little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the Kingdom. Luke 12:32*

Pray - Father, help us to trust your Word and in the power of your Word. Help us not to fear but trust and believe that you are still in control.

Bless our leaders, oh God, give them wisdom and understanding on how to manage this crisis. Bless those who are providing essential services and bless those Lord, who are on the front line. Protect and keep them oh God. Bless and help those Lord, who have fallen victim to the devastation of this disease. Comfort them even in this time of crisis, and even in this, Lord, help them to find you. Help us to say a word that will be of comfort to those who are afraid and who don't know you. Turn their hearts even to you and your love for them. In Jesus Name, Amen.