

Advent in Biblical Perspective
The Spirit of Christ at Christmas
“Four Fears Banished at Christmas”

Psalm 27:1

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December 25, 2016 – Morning sermon

This is Christ’s Sunday on our Lord’s Day. I’d like to start by reading from Psalm 27. This is a Psalm I turn to many times for encouragement and I do hope its content will be helpful to you as we read it. Then we will look at the nativity records and how this is so applicable to our lives out of the birth of Christ. This is God’s Word and God’s Word is the truth – inspired, inerrant and infallible. Psalm 27:1 says [1] *The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

This has been an interesting Christmas for me. It’s been an anomaly. I’ve had a number of people tell me “Pastor, I’m so proud you’ve lost weight and you’re keeping it off. My wife and I would like to give you a gift and it’s a 12 layer caramel cake.” Or some give me toffee and I try to talk myself into thinking it’s really health food. Our God has given to us the very gift we needed, the very gift that is perfect. It can’t be worn out and that is His Son who gave His life and gives us eternal life when we come to Him by faith and repentance. There are so many blessings that come to the believer in Christ. I want to just hit upon one from the nativity accounts.

Throughout the Bible there are references to the birth of our Savior with the 60 plus prophecies in the Old Testament, the accounts in Matthew, Luke and John 1 and then there are other references to the birth of Christ throughout the New Testament. This time of year we like to look in Matthew and Luke which give us some insights to this moment concerning the birth of Christ and what took place. I think it’s interesting, instructive and not surprising that four times in the birth account it affirms the presence of fear. In Matthew and Luke four times it states that there were those who were paralyzed at least for the moment by fear and comes the statement “Fear not” or “Do not fear.” I’d like to draw out a couple of things for you from those four accounts.

Why would this not be surprising? It is because fear is a God-given, God-designed emotion. It is a very powerful emotion. There is nothing sinful about fear but like every other emotion if that fear is not properly evoked or handled, its reason in our life or what brought it in our life or what motivated it in our life or what it evokes in our life, determines whether it is righteous or sinful. It is like anger and here’s an example.

Anger is not a sin. Anger is a God-given emotion yet the Bible says in Psalm 4:4 and Ephesians 4:26, ‘Be angry and do not sin.’ This tells you there is a sinful anger. Anger and fear both are very powerful emotions and therefore if they don’t come for the right reason and don’t provoke the right response then they are debilitating and destructive. If they are rightly embraced and rightly handled or if sinful fear is banished then that becomes a blessing in our life. In fact, the Bible indicates that to us.

In the Old Testament you see these great men and women of God that are identified by them fearing the Lord. Clearly there is a fear that is promoted, affirmed and extolled. Ladies for

you there is the Proverbs 31 passage which says in Proverbs 31:30b, [30b] *...a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.* It becomes a hallmark of blessing in the life of a Godly woman.

We are also told that fear is something that is destructive. Proverbs 29:25 says [25] *The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe.* We are told that there are those who are not yet in Christ who have been captivated and enslaved by fear all their lives. Fear captivates, debilitates, corrupts, and enslaves which is sinful fear but there is clearly a fear that is good that identifies men and women of God. Then there is fear that is destructive that needs to be banished, it is to be removed, sent away.

The question becomes, what is the reason for your fear? How did your fear come into existence? What motivated it? It is not whether you have fear for you are made in the image of God and God designed it in your life. God has placed it in your life out of the dynamic relationship you are to have with Him. Why is it that there is sinful fear? The answer is to look back to why it's there, what caused it (evoked it) and then what does it produce in your life?

Every time God shows up in your Bible we call it a miracle. Every time God sends a messenger they are called angels. Every time God does a sign, wonder or miracle or speaks or interacts with us by angels in the Scriptures the next words are always 'do not fear.' The automatic response with the presence of God is not triviality. That's why when I'm riding down the highway and I read a sign that says 'casual worship at 10am' my mind just explodes. Whenever I read the Bible and God shows up to be worshiped it is anything but casual. Some might say when it says 'casual' they are talking about how they dress, but it says worship. Worship is where we bring the reverential fear of the Lord He is due out of the love of the Lord that He has displayed and there is nothing casual about that moment.

God is in His temple and we are before Him. That is not debilitating or burdensome, that is liberating. That is why He also tells us that the 'fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.' God has placed it here when it has its right object, its right reason and its right consequences, then all of sudden that fear is that which ought to be in our life, but there is a sinful fear that is supposed to be banished.

So what is the antidote to sinful fear in our lives? It's interesting. What is the opposite of fear? What is it that emancipates us from it? It's not courage. The opposite of fear, the antidote to fear, the emancipator of fear is love. I John 4:18 says [18] *There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.* Perfect love banishes all, debilitating and destructive fear in our lives. Now what is perfect love? It is the love of God. The love of God is perfect love. So if God loves me, saves me, is with me then according to Psalm 27, whom shall I fear?

I no longer need to fear death. I no longer need to fear life. I don't need to fear failure, success, those who can take my body or anything in this world. The Lord is my light and my salvation. He has so loved me that He gave His Son to save me and His Son by the Holy Spirit is with me. So now let's look at these four situations chronologically in Matthew and Luke that include the phrase 'fear not' or 'do not fear' when God shows up in a situation. Let's start by looking at Luke 1. The birth of Jesus will be preceded by someone name John the Baptist and he will be a miraculous birth given to a woman who has been barren and a priest named Zachariah.

Luke 1:5-17 says [5] *In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. [6] And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. [7] But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.*

[8] Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, [9] according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. [10] And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. [11] And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. [12] And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. [13] But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. [14] And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, [15] for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. [16] And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, [17] and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."

Here is the communication to Zachariah that there will be a miraculous birth that he has been praying for and he and his wife Elizabeth will bear a son who will fulfill the prophecy that before the coming of the Messiah, a man in the Spirit and power of Elijah will come turning the hearts of many to the Lord. This one will be the one who says 'Look, behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. I am not the Messiah but He is the Messiah.' God tells Zachariah not to be afraid for his God has loved him. God is bringing His prophet before the Messiah to you and through you.

Now let's look at the account of fear in Matthew 1. Now we fast forward about six months further. Matthew 1:18–25 says *[18] Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. [19] And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. [20] But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. [21] She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." [22] All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: [23] "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). [24] When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, [25] but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.*

Here Joseph gets the news that his wife is expecting. They have been betrothed but have not yet come to the ceremony and have not consummated the marriage. Therefore he assumes his wife has been unfaithful. Deuteronomy 24 commands that he is to set her aside and divorce her but unlike the custom of the day, this man who is committed to truth will be gracious to Mary and will do it privately to take care of her. Then he is visited by the angel who tells him 'do not fear to take Mary.' Right now fear is captivating him – I must not marry her but I am going to be gracious – do not fear for she has not been unfaithful. This is the fulfillment of the promise of the virgin conception and the virgin birth. So you keep her this way. Joseph is now liberated from fear, obeys the Word of the Lord, cares for his wife and then as instructed names Him this audacious name, Yahweh saves, for God has come to save us from our sins, Immanuel, God with us. His God is with him, having loved him, banished his fears that would paralyze him and sets him free. Joseph is not the only one troubled. Let's go back to Luke 1.

Luke 1:26–38 says [26] *In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, [27] to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. [28] And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" [29] But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. [30] And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. [31] And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. [32] He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, [33] and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."*

[34] *And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"*

[35] *And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. [36] And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. [37] For nothing will be impossible with God." [38] And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.*

Here fear would paralyze her. The command ‘do not be afraid’ is used and why is she not to be afraid? The Lord is with her. The grace of God is to you and upon you. Your God has chosen you and is using you. Her fear was banished. The fear of Zachariah banished. The fear of Joseph banished. The paralysis of fear is banished in Zachariah, Joseph and Mary as she says ‘let it be done unto me according to Your Word.’ That is three and there is a fourth one. Let’s look at Luke 2.

Luke 2:8–20 says [8] *And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. [9] And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. [10] And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. [11] For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. [12] And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." [13] And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,*

[14] *"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"*

[15] *When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." [16] And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. [17] And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. [18] And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. [19] But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. [20] And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.*

Paralysis with great fear is banished. Do not fear! Why? The love of God has been proclaimed. We bring good news of great joy. I have often wondered on this. I get periodically birth announcements from people in this congregation. I have never had one that said ‘Rejoice pastor for we bore a child for you today.’ Notice the birth announcement here. It is not for Mary and Joseph but it’s for you. It is for all the people that a Savior has been born today and the

paralysis of fear dissipates. With great haste they rise and go and worship. *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”*

I simply want to say that you were born into this world as a sinner. Today if you are not in Christ you have a sin nature that takes all of your emotions including fears and you bring it to bear for yourself and what you think is your sovereign self actually paralyzes you as the slavery of fear dominates your life. Maybe it's the fear of success, failure, death, your future, your past, the consequences of sin or the unknown but it's always there before you. You will not get rid of fear but you can banish sinful fear with the perfect love of Jesus. The perfect love of Jesus will cast it away and in its place will come the fear that is the right reason, the majesty of God. It sends you to that God because of the love of God and that makes you wise to serve that God who has loved you.

Here is the takeaway which is a series of statements. The fear of God captivates us so that the glory of God would consume us because the love of God compels us and sends us into every area of life. It is an unbelievable blessing when the fear of the Lord sends you to the Lord and the glory of God consumes you. Whatever you do you want God's glory. God made you, saved you and sustains you for His glory. One of our big issues today is that we dumb down our worship and therefore we do not display the majesty of our God so we don't see the grand majesty of God and that leads to little lives for God. Big God – big life. It is a big life that sees the majesty of God and says 'whom shall I fear.' This God made me, saves me and sustains me.

Why do we obey Him who deserves obedience, the majesty of God? The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. This God has filled us with a desire for His glory and the love of God that has been displayed for us now compels us so we obey Him because we love Him. Jesus said 'if you love Me you will obey My commandments.' It is not our obedience that gets His love but it's His love that compels us to obey. What does that lead to? The grace of God will transform us, by the very Word of God which informs us, through the Spirit of God who empowers us, from the Son of God who saves us. That is my Christmas card to you.

That Son has come for you and you have come to Him. Whom shall you fear? Here is a maxim I keep which says; never take counsel from your fears. The book of Proverbs says that what you fear will come upon you (Proverbs 10:24) so fear the Lord who is upon you. If you don't fear the Lord then the very things you fear will become the snares in your life because fear brings a snare but the Lord will set you free. Sinful fear only captivates and paralyzes but the fear of the Lord instructs us, emancipates us and encourages us. Sinful fear can't motivate us. Godly fear gives us wisdom and instruction. The fear of the Lord sends us into this world to know Him, love Him and serve Him.

This God who is so glorious and great, sent His Son to that manger, from that manger to the cross, because He loves you and that love casts out all fear. The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear. I know you will live your life under the paralysis of fear for you'll either try to escape fear or deny it but your whole life will be dominated by it because when we're born into this world and think we're the center of life, we soon find out that we're not, but we do everything to try to be the center of life. We think people open businesses to give us jobs or we have children for our self-esteem or that our marriage partner is there for us – it's all about us, then it unravels and fear begins to captivate us.

There is a God alone who is to be feared who has come to save you from the slavery of fear, the snare of fear so that anything and everything in this world you do not need to plan your life from fear. You can live your life because of the love of God in Christ who will never leave

you nor forsake you. Whom shall I fear? The Lord is my light and salvation. He has come. Joy to the world. Come let us adore Him. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, I thank You so much for the privilege to be together with Your people this Lord's Day and to celebrate the majesty and glory of our God. May the counsel of our Lord come to us. Do not fear Zachariah, the Lord is with you. Do not fear Joseph, the Lord is with you. Do not fear Mary, the Lord will overshadow you. Do not fear shepherds, the Lord has brought salvation. The love of Christ banishes the fear of man and the fears of men that we might know the awe and majesty of God. It is that God whose mind and thoughts we do not have, who is gloriously above us and beyond us but it is that God who came to save us and will be with us. Whom shall I fear? We join Zachariah, Joseph, Mary and the shepherds in Christ, fear is banished for the fear of the Lord is now our Director and our Informer. The love of the Lord compels us. The grace of God transforms us. The Spirit of God empowers us because the Son of God has come to save us and we will praise His Name forever, Amen.

Power Point

FOUR FEARS BANISHED AT CHRISTMAS

- Zechariah
- Joseph
- Mary
- Shepherds

The Fear of God Captivates us so that...

The Glory of God would consume us because...

The Love of God compels us since...

The Grace of God transforms us by...

The Word of God that informs us through...

The Spirit of God who empowers us from the...

The Son of God who saves us.