Truth for Today
The Bible Explained

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Freedom: Free from fear

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New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]

Welcome to today's talk on "Free from fear" which is the third of a series of six on the subject of Freedom.

Fear
My first sense of real fear that I can remember was when I was at school. I got on the wrong side of a school bully and his friends for some reason, I can't remember. He and his gang chased me and cornered me behind a building. I was really scared I was going to get a beating. My reaction was to shout at them at the top of my voice. To my surprise, this outburst confused my assailants, and I leapt over a fairly high wall into the garden of a neighbouring house. It was my first discovery of the power of adrenaline as I scaled the wall easily. The gang quickly dispersed, and I was left to explain my predicament to the householder.

Fear is a powerful emotion. Sometimes it is experienced in the face of physical danger, such as being cornered by people who wish you harm. In other circumstances, fear may freeze you, and you do whatever your assailants ask. Alternatively, fear may cause you to jump over a nearby wall or fight back despite of the danger. But, for most of us, fears are not physical dangers like the one I described but psychological ones that affect our minds, emotions, and behaviours. These fears can be real or imagined, but have a dramatic effect on our lives.

Fear emerges from the fall
We first learn of fear in the Garden of Eden. It was only after sin entered the world that people knew fear. Adam and Eve experienced a mutual fear when they heard something which, before they had sinned, would have been a joyous sound.

> And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden (Genesis 3:8).

Our first parents had been made to have fellowship with God. The fall ruined their relationship with God. When God asked Adam, "Where are you?" Adam replied, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself" (v.10). Sin breeds guilt and guilt breeds fear: the fear of judgment.

Spiritual people can be weakened by fear
Abraham was a man of great faith, but he discovered what happens when you move off the path of faith. He did this when he decided to escape a famine and move from the land God promised him into Egypt. As he approached Egypt, he became afraid he would be murdered for his beautiful wife, Sarah. So, he pretended his wife was his sister. In doing so, he endangered his wife and himself. God stepped in to protect Abraham. Fear can put us in dangerous situations. Abraham repeated the same mistake in his relationship with Abimelech, the king of Gerar, who took Sarah into his home. Again, God had to intervene to protect Abraham and Sarah. Abraham's excuse was

“Because I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will kill me on account of my wife.” The fear of man had robbed Abraham of faith in God. We can face the same danger.

God does not want us to be full of fear but faith
In Genesis 28:13-15, God's words to Jacob at Bethel are the clearest revelation of the wonder of God’s grace in the Old Testament.

> I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.

God asked nothing of Jacob but assured him of his purposes in the patriarch’s life. God took the most deceitful man and transformed him into a spiritual prince and the father of the nation of Israel. But what was Jacob’s response?

> Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, ’Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.’ And he was afraid and said, ‘How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!’ (vv.16-17).

What followed is important,

> Then Jacob arose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put at his head, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on top of it. And he called the name of that place Bethel; but the name of that city had been Luz previously. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father’s house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God. And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God’s house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You (vv. 18-22).

Jacob’s vow began with the word “If.” His words question what God had sovereignly promised. Furthermore, Jacob promised to repay a tenth of all God would give him. God had asked for nothing; He was acting towards Jacob in the fullness of His grace. What had God said to make Jacob afraid? God was seeking to take away his fear and fill his heart with peace and certainty for the future. If ever there was a day for Jacob to fall and worship God for all he had promised, it was that day. It was not a day to be afraid but to be filled with confidence. There is a difference, fearing God in the sense of reverence and being in dread of God. We are to live in the conscious knowledge that God is our Father. He is a Father in direct contact with His children. Jesus explains this in John 15:1-2,8.

> I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. …By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

In the parable of the talents in Matthew 25, the difference between the good and faithful servants and the wicked servant was fear. The profitable servants had confidence in their Lord and fully and

freely served Him. The wicked servant was ruled by fear and inaction. We should not allow fears to rule our hearts. Instead, faith should fill our hearts (Romans 8:31).

> What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

Constant faith defeats fear

To answer the question "How do we defeat fear?" let's survey some of the examples of fearfulness. Matthew 14 records the time when Jesus walked on water to His disciples who were in a boat on a boisterous sea. When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, thinking it was a ghost and crying out in fear. Jesus responds by telling them, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." Being in rough waters and seeing something supernatural deeply disturbed the disciples. Peter asked the Saviour, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." Peter, as far as we know, was the only man to walk on water, other than Jesus. Everything was going well until Peter took his eyes off his Lord, saw only the stormy conditions, and began to sink, crying, "Lord, save me!" Jesus immediately stretched out His hand and saved Peter. And then said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" Jesus allowed his disciples to experience genuine fear to teach them that faith defeats fear. Peter had a little faith, which gave him the courage to step out onto the water. But once on the open sea, seeing the crashing waves and feeling the powerful wind, he took his eyes off Christ. Faith needs to be constant; otherwise, fear re-emerges.

Elijah showed incredible faith as he faced the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel in 1 Kings 18. But after his great victory, Jezebel threatened to kill him, and we read, "Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life" (1 Kings 19:3, ESV). Faith has to be applied in every circumstance. One victory does not guarantee the next victory without faith.

> For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that overcomes the world—our faith (1 John 5:4, ESV).

In Mark chapter 4, we find another example of the Lord and his disciples at sea. After an exhausting day of ministry, Jesus shows His true humanity by falling fast asleep in the boat he was travelling in. Suddenly, the small group of boats that were sailing together was caught in a great wind storm and were in danger of being submerged. The disciples' fear is expressed in the words they said to Jesus as they woke Jesus up, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" It was a question Jesus did not answer, but stood up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" The wind ceased, and there was a great calm. His next words were a rebuke, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?"

Jesus highlights their fear and their lack of faith. He is explaining that whilst he was with them, they were safe. The storm could rage, but it could not destroy. The experience was vital to their spiritual education. The Lord took the storm away, but their safety was not dependent on the storm being removed. The Lord does not always take the storm away, but He assures us of His abiding presence in every circumstance. It is true faith that grasps this reality.

This reality is portrayed in the experience of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego in Daniel chapter 3:16-18 when they refused to bow to Nebuchadnezzar's idol.

> O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.

They had faith that God would deliver them, or that He would be with them as they passed through the burning fiery furnace. God did not remove the storm, in this case a burning fiery furnace. Instead, He was with them as they passed through the fire (Daniel 3:25). Daniel had the same experience in the lion's den and afterwards tells the king, "My God sent His angel to shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you." (Daniel 6:22). The message is simple: that constant faith is victorious over fear, whatever the circumstances.

The fear of man

One of the most common fears we face is what people say and do. Peter again illustrates this important lesson. Peter never understood the Saviour's sacrificial death and resurrection until he saw Him in resurrection.

In Matthew 16 in the region of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked His disciples,

> "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" [They answered], "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." Then He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" (vv. 13-15).

Peter wonderfully declared, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v. 16). And Jesus blessed Peter (vv.17-19).

> Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

But afterwards, Jesus predicted His Death and resurrection, telling His disciples He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.

Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" (v. 22). Jesus, who had blessed Peter a little earlier, had to severely reprimand him with the chastening words, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offence to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men" (v. 23). Before Jesus went to the cross, Peter asserted His devotion to Him in the self-confident declaration to the Saviour, "I will lay down my life for Your sake." After Jesus was arrested, "Peter followed Him at a distance" (Matthew 26:58). Jesus never intends us to follow Him "at a distance" but closely. Peter then joined a group of servants who were talking about Jesus as he was being mistreated. Some of them identified Peter as a disciple of Jesus, fearing for his life, Peter denied he had ever known the Person he had declared to be the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus turned to look at Peter (Luke 22:61). It was the look of the Good Shepherd who had prayed that the faith of His wayward disciple would not fail. The fear Peter experienced that night in the company of those who rejected Christ caused him to discover the mistake of trusting in our own strength and the fear it plunges us into. Faith takes us outside of ourselves to rest in Christ and draw our strength from Him, and to have all our fears removed.

John 13 Love frees us from fear

It is difficult to imagine a more fearful place than Calvary. Yet as the cross approached, the Saviour spends the time He has with his disciples. He removes fearfulness from their hearts and prepares them for His resurrection, ascension and promised return. John's Gospel presents to us

the Saviour's actions and words. This begins in John chapter 13. The opening verse sets the scene,

> Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end (v. 1).

John would later write in his first letter,

> There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment (1 John 4:18).

Christ's endless and perfect love casts out fear and its torment. The Saviour gives us every reason to have complete faith in His love. It is a love that saves, keeps, and assures our destiny. Then He demonstrates what it is to serve in love as He takes the lowest place and washes the disciples' feet. Christ does it to illustrate His profound humility described by Paul in Philippians 2:5-11.

> Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The Saviour's action portrayed, in miniature, the love that took Him from glory into the world He made, to demonstrate in His life, death, and resurrection the power of divine love, which met all our needs. As Paul writes in Romans 5:1-4.

> Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

John 14 Hope frees us from fear

John chapter 14 begins with the removal of fear and looks on to our future, certain hope (vv. 1-3).

> Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

Uncertainty breeds fear of the unknown. Christ removes uncertainty by assuring us of our destiny. The Saviour was facing the cross, a fearful place, but He also focused on the joy before Him of having those He would redeem forever in His presence. The Hope is in the future, but in the meantime, Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life." The resources we have in Him provide

direction, certainty and the enjoyment of life in Christ.

John 15 Fruitfulness frees us from fear
I remember having a conversation with the local Director of Public Health when I was involved in community well-being. He said that having a job had a positive effect on people's mental health. I am not a mental health expert, so I cannot comment, but it sounded sensible. I do know God the Father wants us to have fruitful, productive lives. He is actively involved in ensuring His children glorify Him. This process concentrates us on ensuring nothing prevents the Holy Spirit from bearing the fruit of the Spirit in us and leaves no space for the works of the flesh. The power to live fruitful lives for God is by abiding in Christ, having fellowship with Him through the word of God, the indwelling Holy Spirit, prayer, faith and obedience, demonstrating the life we have in Christ in our thoughts, words and actions.

> I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing (vv. 1-5).

Galatians 5 helps in this process by identifying "the works of the flesh" so we can avoid them and listing characteristics of "the fruit of the Spirit" which God wants to see in our lives (vv. 19-25).

> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such, there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit (vv. 22-25).

Paul also lists in Philippians 4 the things we should be occupied with,

> Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you (vv. 8-9).

Such contemplations leave no room for fears, only fruitfulness.

John 16: **The Holy Spirit frees us from fear**
The Saviour introduces the Person of the Holy Spirit in chapter 14,

> The Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you (v. 17).

He is with us and in us,

> But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you (v. 26).

In chapter 15, we learn about the Spirit Truth witnessing to Christ,

> But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me (v. 26).

In chapter 16, we first learn of the Holy Spirit's work in the world in verses 7-11,

> Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

Then, in verse 13, we discover that the Spirit of Truth would guide the apostles into all truth, the completed Scriptures, and our application of them. This would include the revelation of things to come.

> However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.

The Holy Spirit is a witness in the world, and works in the hearts and lives of the people of God, both in fellowship and individually. He protects us from fears and intercedes for us on earth as Christ intercedes for us in heaven (Romans 8:26, 34). We mustn't grieve Him through sin or quench Him by hindering His holy work.

John 17: Jesus frees us from fear

Aaron was Israel's first High Priest. When he was dressed in his holy garments, he wore two onyx stones on his shoulders, each engraved with the names of six of the tribes of Israel. He also had a breastplate over his heart, on which twelve jewels representing the twelve tribes of Israel were set. He wore these in the presence of God, on his shoulders representing power, and over his heart, representing love. Jesus is our Great High Priest who upholds His people by His power and love. He lives for us in the power of an endless life (Hebrews 7:16) and in a love from which nothing can separate us (Romans 8:38-39).

> For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Lord's prayer to the Father in John 17 gives us an understanding of the depth of Christ's love for the Church, He gave Himself for her. It was made just before He went on to Calvary. His words cast out fear from our hearts and look on to the day when fears will be no more, and divine love will dwell in all its fullness.

> Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world (v. 24).

Prayer casts out fear

To close, let us not forget to put into practice each day God gives us, Paul's advice on prayer,

> Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6-7).

Anxieties and fears are close relatives and should be left before the Throne of Grace. We are to cast our cares upon the Lord who cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). Sometimes, after laying down our anxieties and fears before God, we pick them up and take them home again!

Hannah, in 1 Samuel 1, teaches us how to leave things in God's hands. She arrived in the presence of God broken-hearted, fearing she would never have a child. She returned home full of faith and confidence in God and was no longer sad. To know freedom from fear, we must follow her example.

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