

[don't fear the caesar]

:: philippians 1.12-14 ::

Our day is just beginning and as we face the hours before us we have a choice: will we be full of **fear** or will we be full of **function**?

Fear is a *natural* emotion, but we are no longer simply *natural* men. The moment we were born again we became new creations, complete with the *supernatural* power and presence of God.

Part of God's plan for our lives is that we be free from fear.

John 14.27 - Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

Sometimes we think of fear as something childlike or rare. But if we think about what it means to *worry*, I believe we find that they are much the same. To have fear or to worry essentially means that we are unsure of what is coming and we are distressed about it. Something, I would guess, we all struggle with from time to time.

Worry is a weight that the Lord Jesus desires to free us from. Several times in the Gospels He instructed us to **not** worry. To make a choice to trust God and walk in spiritual confidence.

On a human level, Paul had a lot to be worried about and a lot to be afraid of. He had a big job as an apostle. He was an important figure in the beginning of the Church age. He had a lot of weight on his shoulders, as it were.

But beyond that, he was also facing death by a pagan Caesar, which could come at almost any moment.

Yet in our next verses in Philippians, Paul demonstrates how a man of God can live full of function and empty of fear. He shows us that if we are willing to live in a state of faithful abandon to God's will, then *everything* we do will function to impact the people around us, whether they be Christians or those who need Christ for salvation.

Here are our 3 verses, chapter 1 verses 12 through 14:

Philippians 1.12-14 - But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Paul was facing the pressure of leading in the Church in a world which was increasingly anti-Christian. He is to us an example this morning. His life was an extreme version of what many of us are facing today.

Here's what I mean.

I know you guys have pressures and stresses in your lives right now. We all do. Things going on at work or things going on at home. Problems and situations and difficulties that are weighing on our hearts.

Beyond that, as fallen human beings, each of us hold fears. Maybe the death of a family member, our own impending deaths. The safety of our children, the state of the nation and the world at large. Areas where we are frightened or anxious or overwhelmed.

These struggles may be specific to each of us, but the stresses are common to man. And in this passage, Paul addresses how a Christian is to respond to the pressures and fears of life, by walking in the Spirit and fulfilling the function of a disciple.

He begins in verse 12 and says:

Philippians 1.12 - But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel,

The people were confused and worried about all the suffering he was enduring and they, no doubt, were worried about suffering in their own lives. Paul immediately elevated their thinking to the heavenly level. He shifted their focus from the current difficulty and the current loss to the understanding that the Christian life is about a massive, epic plan that God is working out on the earth.

They were focused on his chains and his imprisonment, the difficulty he was facing. They were focusing on the persecution and the negative parts of this situation. And Paul stops them and says, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, you're worried about my shackles? You're worried about my living arrangement?" And then he goes on to explain to them how this situation, which they were so discouraged about, was being used powerfully to further the Gospel. To change lives. To win souls.

We need to understand and believe that God is working completion in our lives. We need to believe that God is working all things together for good for those that love Him and are called by Him. We have to look at our lives and our situation and understand that God is moving in and through us so that He can accomplish salvation and transformation in hearts.

And when we focus on the suffering or on the difficulty, how quickly we forget that God is orchestrating a fantastic feat in us.

Paul knew what he was doing when he appealed to Caesar. He wasn't afraid. Back in the book of Acts, it's recounted for us how he took an opportunity to have the Jews' case against him, which was flimsy and empty, heard by the ruler of the kingdom. The local officials said amongst themselves, "If this guy hadn't appealed to Caesar, he would've gone free!" But, being led by the Holy Spirit, Paul took this rare opportunity to further the Gospel.

Paul understood that his function in life was to accomplish the work that God set before him to do. He knew his calling. He knew his gifting. He knew that his desire was to follow into the will of God.

And so, he was able to dive into a potentially dangerous and scary situation not only *without* fear, but *with* a confidence and peace that God was going to further the Gospel.

Of course, we know that the Gospel is not meant to be kept to ourselves. The Gospel is to go throughout the entire world. We are the messengers that have been commissioned to deliver it.

If we are keeping the Gospel of Jesus Christ to ourselves, then we are failing. Because God has filled our lives with the function of *furthering* His Good News. And then He orchestrates our lives so that that work can be accomplished.

But why suffering? Why difficulty? Why not all blessing and ease for God's people?

Job 2.10 - Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?

We live in a fallen world that is full of enemies of the Lord. They are rebels who are contending against Him. Of course, since they hated Jesus Christ, they are going to hate those who love and represent Jesus Christ. So, difficulty and persecution is a natural byproduct of living the Christian life and furthering the Gospel. It's a good sign when we encounter that sort of difficulty. It means we're *NOT* keeping the Gospel to ourselves.

But, on another level, we know from reading the Bible that difficulty and trial actually benefit us.

James 1.2-3 - My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

Trials and difficulty are meant to produce fruit in our lives. They're meant to burn away those things that don't matter. They're meant to draw us nearer to God. And if we're willing to accept adversity as a training and purifying from God, then our lives will be incredibly useful in accomplishing God's work.

Paul had figured this out. That it's God's will that matters, not all the things we worry about. It's God's loving plan for our lives that matters, not our level of comfort. Do we have real difficulty in our lives? Yes. Absolutely. Sometimes excruciating difficulty. The answer is to focus on Christ and understand that it is an opportunity to not only scramble closer to the One who made you and saved you, but also to further the Gospel, as the world around you looks at your endurance and your patience and your joy and your confidence that God is all that matters and He is in control, even through adversity.

Philippians 1.13 - so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ;

These people understood what was going down in Paul's life. These soldiers knew that he was on his way to death. They knew that he was this influential teacher and writer. But most importantly, they knew him personally. As he shared his testimony. As he explained how God had changed his life. As he talked about *and demonstrated* the peace that he had. In fact, it must have blown their minds that in many ways he was **looking forward** to the moment where he would leave this life and enter into this heaven to meet with Jesus Christ, a God unlike any other deity they had ever heard of.

And, make no mistake, this was an *incredible* audience that God had brought to Paul. Soldier after soldier. Roman after roman. People who God was reaching out to with salvation and hope. And Paul

had the understanding that every situation in his life was a conduit for God's power. Whether he was in a time of blessing or a time of suffering, he would not shut down that channel by which God was moving. He didn't sulk because he was in prison. He didn't doubt God and say to these guys, "Well, I don't know what I believe anymore."

He looked at the situation and said "All of this, everything that's going on right now has been coordinated by the Living God so that lives can be changed. *Not* so that I can complain. *Not* so that I can kick back. *Not* so that I can let someone else do God's work." It was all put together so that a person could hear that there is hope for them, Jesus Christ. And then so that another person could hear that there is forgiveness for sins. Then another person and another person and another.

Paul understood what was at stake. Lives and eternities. And as he explained his situation to them and *THEIR* situation to them, they would've seen how loving and heroic he was. That he was willing to give up his own comfort, give up his own wealth, give up his very life so that he could tell them that there is a person named Jesus Christ and that they need to know Him.

Your life is being displayed before an incredible audience. Just you guys in here have incredible influence on so many different people. Policemen and firemen and political leaders. Teachers and soldiers and businessmen. People who God loves so deeply and who need Him so dearly.

And a big part of your testimony is breaking free from fear. Breaking free from worry. Those are things that God has gone on record as saying that He wants to save us from. But so often we hold onto those things. We choose *not* to trust the Lord. We grab hold of the fear and refuse to walk in confidence.

If that is the case, then we need to rethink what our function here on earth is. Because in this capacity we need to remember that we are very much like firemen. Our function is to run into danger and try to save people from fire.

This is what Paul says in verse 14.

Philippians 1.14 - and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

As they looked at Paul they saw God working in strength. They saw confidence. They saw function. They saw faith. They saw fearlessness. His testimony said to them, "You do not have to be afraid. Death means nothing. Suffering means nothing. Adversity means nothing. All of those things have been given over to the power of God and we have become victorious over them." This mindset brought courage to the other believers, who then took that courage and turned it into Gospel preaching. They looked at Paul and saw that there was nothing to fear and everything to gain in life. And it caused them to go out in boldness and effectiveness and fearlessness.

Our reaction to life dramatically and powerfully impacts the people around us. Your reaction to life, whether it is biblical or not, is going to influence the unsaved one way or another and it is going to influence other Christians one way or another.

So often we get our eyes set downward. We get focused on the imprisonment, the difficulty, the suffering. And I'm not discounting the hardship of these trials.

Real life example.

2 months ago, our house was burglarized. It is a very stressful and very frightening thing to have that happen. It's hard to feel safe in my natural heart. When we're going to bed, I feel this anxiety stirring up within me.

But as I read this passage it started to click that we have to make the decision to let go of fear. Not in the psychoanalytical way, but in the spiritual way. Choosing to quiet our hearts and say, "You know what, I trust God. I know that God plans things for me and I want to sail with Him."

We don't have time for worry. We don't have time for fear. For one thing, those burdens will stop fruit production in our lives. But, not only that, it will keep us off the job. And all of us are called to emergency service in God's Kingdom. We are called to pull people out of the fire. Sometimes it's easier to do that, sometimes it's harder. Sometimes it's very simple, sometimes it's very stressful.

No matter the situation, God's call persists, because God's love persists and the enemy's claim over lost souls persists.

Paul comes and says, "I'm the extreme example of overcoming fear and stress. I can show you what it means to fill your life with spiritual function no matter what the situation is."

So how do we do it this morning? What is a practical way we move away from fear and toward function? Toward furthering the Gospel like we all want to do?

I've got 3 simple ones for us.

First - invite someone to church. Coworker. Friend. Family member. Stranger. Hand them an invitation and demonstrate to them that you have hope and confidence and that Jesus Christ is worth knowing.

Second - if you're going to work today, put your Bible on your desk. Physically show the people around you that God's plan for your life is important to you. If someone asks you about it, take that as an opportunity to share your testimony, like Paul did when the new shift of soldiers came in.

Third - take time to get alone and discover those areas of fear or worry in your life. I would guess that most of us have at least one. And make a conscious decision to give that to God. Make a conscious decision to not dwell on that anxiety, but to think of the bigger picture. Because in the bigger picture God has filled you, He has a plan for you, He has gifting for you, He has wisdom for you, He has a function for you and He has a great desire to use you to save lives.

I'll paraphrase Paul's verse:

I want you to know, brothers, that the things which are happening to you and to me right now, whether they be easy or hard, good or bad, trial or deliverance, are actually turning out for the furtherance of the Good News of Jesus Christ.