

Saturday - Sunday, April 21-22, 2007

*When God Has More in Mind*

## “Overcoming Fear”

Acts 5:12-42

### INTRODUCTION

What are you afraid of? (spiders, high places, driving, my marriage, my future, death, not having enough money, other people, opening up, my children’s future, my boss; nothing!; robot).

Human beings were created by God with the capacity for healthy and appropriate fear; fear meant to protect them from harm and to keep them in right relationship with their creator; fear the Lord, fear that one tree.

With their act of disobedience, appropriate fear was corrupted and has been out of control, attempting to overwhelm our lives ever since. The battle still rages today!

Millions of people live their lives controlled by fear of all kinds, both real and imagined; phobias leaving them immobilized; personally paralyzed from becoming the people they were meant to be. (Landers; Fear Factor – interest in seeing people attempt to overcome their fears)

The Apostle John wrote these ancient words, so relevant and helpful today in overcoming fear when he said; *There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.*

John was talking from personal experience coming from his many years of following Jesus.

**Perfect love drives out fear** – antidote/cure for unhealthy fear is love (ex. child & parent); process takes time.

Overcoming fear does not mean that you experience a total absence of fear in your life but that it no longer exercises its debilitating control of who you are, what you do and who you are meant to become; that the love and truth of Jesus Christ keeps growing within you, setting you free from the stranglehold of fear.

In today’s passage we are going to see this truth in action in the lives of Jesus early followers. A truth that helped them to be who they needed to be in spite of the fear they must have been experiencing.

*To overcome fear in your life ...*

### 1. **PARTICIPATE, don’t procrastinate! (read 12-16)**

<sup>12</sup> *The apostles **performed** many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers **used to meet together** in Solomon’s Colonnade (temple). <sup>13</sup> No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. <sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, more and more **men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.** <sup>15</sup> As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter’s shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. <sup>16</sup> Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and **all of them were healed.***

The disciples were facing an increase in the amount and the intensity of persecution and threats from the religious leaders within Judaism, the religious force of their day.

They had already experienced the reality of the dark, damp, smelly confines of prison life; a severe beating following their release along with the promise of even greater punishment if they continued to declare Jesus is alive instead of Jesus is dead.

I think Peter and John experienced some degree of fear. They were not supermen, just men. Men who had already faced and experienced the beginning of what they knew would only get worse (Jesus promised and warned them that they would be persecuted and face the same fate he faced). Fear would be expected at some level.

Fear that could have caused them to entertain alternative responses:

1) Let’s be **less forceful/forthright** when facing the questions and accusations of those who oppose us; or 2) Maybe we should consider a **new strategy** that reduces our public exposure and reduces the threat of persecution; or 3) Let’s just **not do anything** for awhile, let’s wait, put it off; to some that would make sense, it would be a reasonable response at least initially. (fear can lead to procrastination; inactivity that allows fear to reign, examples)

But that's not what happened; their ministry remained public, they didn't hide in the shadows; they kept speaking the truth with great boldness as they passionately maintained that Jesus is alive.

They overcame fear's attempt to control by continuing to do what they had been doing; the work they had been given to do, avoiding the plague of procrastination, (v. 14) resulting in more and more people believing in and following Jesus.

***They believed that the Christian life is a launching pad not a parking lot!*** (Kennedy Space Center – meant to go somewhere, to launch with a demonstration of awesome force and power)

To overcome fear keep active in what you know God has called you to do and to be.

*To overcome fear in your life ...*

## 2. Remember (that) you are not ALONE! (read 17-24)

<sup>17</sup> Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. <sup>18</sup> They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. <sup>19</sup> **But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out.** <sup>20</sup> **“Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people the full message of this new life.”** <sup>21</sup> At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people. When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin—the full assembly of the elders of Israel—and sent to the jail for the apostles. <sup>22</sup> But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, <sup>23</sup> “We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside.” <sup>24</sup> On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were puzzled, wondering what would come of this. (similarities to the empty tomb that was well guarded)

- **Your support comes from the INVISIBLE world (v. 19-20)**

*But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out.* <sup>20</sup> “Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people the full message of this new life.”

Open doors, brought them out, told them what to do/say next.

***Who are these angels?*** God's special messengers who serve at God's pleasure; w/special attention to those who know Jesus.

(Hebrews 1:14) *Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?*

(Hebrews 13:2) *Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.*

Very different from the cute but less than biblical stories we often hear about angels (read 2-3 examples)

The unseen, invisible world is more real and lasting than the one we see with our physical eyes. We are meant to live in light of this reality; a reality that enables us to overcome fear's control.

This is what the Bible tells us when Paul writes in 2 Cor. 5:7 that ... *We live by faith, not by sight.*

According to the writer of Hebrews 11:1 this is a .. *Faith (that means) being ... certain of what we do not see.*

- **Your support comes from the VISIBLE world (read 25-40)**

<sup>25</sup> Then someone came and said, “Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people.” <sup>26</sup> At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them. <sup>27</sup> **Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest.** <sup>28</sup> “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” he said. “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood.” <sup>29</sup> **Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than men!”** <sup>30</sup> **The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—Whom you had killed by hanging Him on a tree.** <sup>31</sup> **God exalted Him to His own right hand as Prince and Savior that He might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.** <sup>32</sup> **We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, Whom God has given to those who obey Him.**”

<sup>33</sup> When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. <sup>34</sup> **But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while.** <sup>35</sup> **Then he addressed them:** “Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. <sup>36</sup> Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. <sup>37</sup> After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. <sup>38</sup> Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. <sup>39</sup> But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.” <sup>40</sup> His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

**Gamaliel** – Pharisee, highly respected, unbeliever, trained Saul.

Reminds them of two previous threats to their authority that failed (Theudas, Judas).

So don't sweat it, if this current threat to our authority is not from God it will fail but if God is the One behind it then your efforts to stop it will fail and you will be guilty of fighting God Himself ... odds, you lose!

He persuaded them to take less severe action (just beat them) and to wait and see what happens (over time ... u too).

God is not limited in who He can use to come to our defense so that His plans can be accomplished. (examples)

In your efforts to overcome fear remember that your support and help comes from both seen and unseen places.

*To overcome fear in your life ...*

### 3. **PERSIST** in God's purposes for your life! (41-42)

<sup>41</sup> The apostles left the Sanhedrin, **rejoicing** because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. <sup>42</sup> **Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.**

*It's not about you!* (Warren's book)

- Don't let discouragement **DERAIL** you

Gain a new perspective on perceived setbacks; meant for evil God meant for good; all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose.

- Stay in the company of **LIKE**-minded believers

Fear isolates ... community brings healing

In overcoming your fears continue to remember God's big purpose for your life and keep pursuing Him!

### Closing Remarks

*There is no fear in love. But **perfect love drives out fear** because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.*

### Invitation/Response

Are your fears the healthy, life-giving ones that protect you from harm and keep you walking vibrantly with Jesus?

Or are some of them the unhealthy, controlling, life-altering kind that keep you in your own personal prison, bound and gagged from becoming the person you know God wants you to be?

Getting free from controlling fears is not usually a simple, one-time event but the beginning of the process can be. How?

Acknowledge your fear for what it is, crippling; ask God to give you a fresh experience and knowledge of His grace and love that is in His Son, Jesus Christ; allow others into your healing process.

Pray (Eph. 3:14-21)