

From Fear to Power, Love and a Sound Mind

By Bobby Schuller

We're in a season of talking about the mind. The season is called Putting on the Mind of Christ. If you change your thoughts, you'll change the world. And today we're talking about fear. We're talking about the idea that you don't have to be afraid, and that you can move from fear to a power, love, and a sound mind. That is a promise from God in his word.

If we talk about the mind, fear is one of the most important things to talk about. And, although we have control over many of our thoughts, the way we view others, the way we think about our situation, one thing that's really hard to control directly is fear. All of us, when we're afraid, we feel plagued. When you're afraid, it feels like your life has been completely poisoned. Every aspect of your life, when you worry or you have fear, anything that would be enjoyable - a movie, time with loved ones, learning - all of these things lose a bit of their goodness because this fear thing, this worry thing is poisoning everything.

And so we try to will ourselves to be free of fear but we find that's very hard to do, don't we? It's hard to just not be afraid anymore, not worry, especially when you get something scary that's very personal to

you, especially when you feel alone. We do, however, have control over fear, though not in a direct way; we do have control in an indirect way. This church really believes in the power of indirection. That the third party things I do, the media I consume, the friends I have, that those things actually do affect my life in a big way.

And so today we won't be able to spend as much time on some really important things like meditating on scripture, like keeping track of the kind of media you consume, like not watching news too much. I mean, honestly, things like that that we know are causing us to worry. And the friends we keep - don't keep company with people that are really, really worried. Don't keep too much company with them unless they change their ways or you have a serious talk with them. So there are things that indirectly affect us being afraid. But the biggest thing that you have control over, and this is what we'll talk about today, is facing your fears. Face your fears. That's what we're talking about this morning.

The method we have for finding peace in our world today isn't working. Most of us, when we feel afraid of something, when something scares us, our gut response, the way that we're trained to respond is to withdraw; to avoid it. To not attack it. To pretend like it's not there and then go to bed at night hoping that I'll just forget it. And the thing is very often you do forget it up here but it sometimes goes to a deeper place,

and if you don't face your fears, you still have that fear in your body. You become a worrisome person. And so today, I want to encourage you, face your fears. Face your fears. Face 'em. No matter how scared you are of whatever it is that's happening in your life, be courageous, have faith, and face your fears with God. He is a good God and he will carry you through. You don't have to be afraid.

In the passage Hannah read today from 1st Timothy chapter one verse three, Paul the apostle is in Rome and we believe that this is his farewell address to his protégé Timothy. He's probably about to die and so these are his final words to this pastor in Ephesus that he loves dearly. And we included this part of the passage but he begins by talking about Timothy's mom and grandma. He says, "I remember your grandmother Lois and the deep faith that she had and I remember your mother Eunice and the deep faith that she had." And he says, "Timothy, that faith is in you." That faith is in you. And he says, "Fan into flame the gift of God for God has not given you a spirit of fear but of power, of love, and of a sound mind."

When I read this passage I think that, and I don't know but I think grandma Lois and mother Eunice died. I don't think they're around anymore and that's why their faith lives on in Timothy. Here Paul is

about to die and Timothy is going to feel very lonely, he's going to feel afraid, and this is a commandment from Paul to a pastor, to an important church, to Ephesus to be courageous, and to remember his example and the example of his mother, and the example of his grandmother. And the idea that, though people have died and suffered, their faith lives on in the next generation. That's a reminder to all of us that we can remember the great faith of the spiritual ancestors and the people in our lives that helped make you who you are. God did not give you a spirit of fear. God did not give you a spirit of fear. He has given to you a spirit of power, a spirit of love, and of a sound mind. You don't have to worry. Amen?

I think Paul is encouraging Timothy to have courage. That's quite what the word encouragement means, right? To give courage. To put courage into someone. Courage is not fearlessness. Courage is doing what is right and good even when you feel afraid. Courage does not mean being fearless. Being fearless means you're insane, literally. Being brave, having courage is admitting I am afraid, I feel fear, but I refuse to allow fear to dictate my future. I refuse to allow worry to dictate the decisions I am going to make. I have the ability and the freedom to do what is right, to do what is good, to follow God's calling even though I feel afraid. Courage is moving forward in spite of being worried or afraid. And the

only way you diminish fear in your life is by facing the things you're afraid of. Only when we go to fight the monsters do they go away. Amen?

So what are you afraid of today? What is God encouraging you to press against? What are you afraid of? Are you afraid of people? Are you afraid of sickness? Are you afraid of conflict or confession? Are you afraid of a break up? What are you afraid of? You don't have to be. You can trust in the goodness of God.

I want to talk a little bit about the story of Jonah. Now Jonah was an important story in the Old Testament and it models so clearly the human condition. Here's this guy Jonah who is called to the city of Nineveh. And the sad thing is, unless you're a big history buff, most people don't know about the most important city, one of the most important cities in human history, Nineveh.

In 400 B.C., there was a Greek commander named Zanephon and it's this amazing story. This guy Zanephon has this group of mercenaries. It's right out of a movie. I hope somebody makes this movie some day. And he was hired to fight the Persians and he loses big time. And so he's with this band of mercenaries and they're fleeing from the Persians and they keep fighting and running and fighting and running.

And Zanephon tells the story in his historic book called the *Persian Expeditions*.

And he ends up in the middle of Mesopotamia, somewhere he's never been, and they come across this skeleton city. A city of bones and sand that's bigger than any city he's ever seen. And in his reflection, he says there is this ghost town and he says the base of the walls was fifty feet high and plated with marble. And upon those fifty foot walls were hundred-foot walls totaling a hundred fifty foot high walls. This is 400 B.C., guys. This is 400 years before Jesus.

And then he says the parameter of these walls was eighteen miles. And he said we were marveling at the size of the city and what used to be here and we asked the locals and they said this is a Median city called I think Larissa. They had forgotten. Nobody knew what this city was. It was a mystery. Nobody knew what this was. That city that they came upon was Nineveh. Nineveh, when it was destroyed, was so hated by the locals it was literally wiped out of history. They burned and destroyed everything and nobody wept for the Ninehvites. Nobody wept for the Assyrians.

A little bit about this empire - the Acadian Assyrian Empire is the first empire, the longest running, most ruthless empire in human

history. These guys, it's amazing actually they existed. Depending on how you measure it, the Acadian Assyrian Empire went for two thousand years. An empire going all the way from us to Jesus, can you imagine the length of an ongoing empire. And the capitol of this empire during the Jonah story is Nineveh, which is the biggest, most powerful city in the world. And here it comes. Right?

There's an account on these reliefs, which are these walls of things that this guy Ashurbanipal and other kings did to their enemies, that are so disgusting I can't talk about them in church. Imagine like a really bad eighties horror film times ten. Imagine like a great heavy metal poster. This is what the Assyrians did to their enemies. These guys were ruthless. And Nineveh was the heart of Assyria, this major city. And it was like Saron's tower if he got the ring. It was like the Death Star. It was this thing that loomed over the whole known world. Everybody was afraid of Nineveh. It was this terrible place where they murdered and tortured and maimed people. Where these different kings did horrible things to their enemies and had a terrible grip. And God says to Jonah to go to that city and tell them I'm going to destroy it. What would you do?

Jonah hates the Ninevites. Jonah is afraid of the Ninevites. Jonah doesn't want to go to Nineveh because he doesn't want them to

turn and fear God. He wants God to destroy Nineveh; everybody does. And more than that, he's terrified of the place. I would be, too.

In this brief story in the Old Testament, God calls Jonah to go to Nineveh. And do we have the map? Nineveh is 500 miles or so to the East of where Jonah is. He goes to a place called Tarshis in Spain way over there 2,500 miles the other direction. Now anyone reading this story, this is what they see. God says go east and Jonah goes west as far as possible.

Jonah's on this boat and something crazy starts happening; the weather is horrible. Jonah is sleeping in the boat. These men come down and they say, "You're a man of God. Wake up. Something is going on. We need you to fix this right now." And Jonah says, "I don't know what's going on." And they say, "Well, let's cast lots and see what's going on." And the lots fall on Jonah and Jonah says, "I'm fleeing from the Lord," and he says, "Throw me overboard." And they repent to God, they throw him overboard, the weather stops, and a fish, a whale, a leviathan, a sea monster whatever it is, something comes and gobbles up Jonah. And for three days, this fish takes a journey back to Israel and spits him out on dry land.

Now I just want to pause. There are two things we can learn from this story. And the first lesson, especially when we're talking about fear, is this: life gets worse when we run from God's calling. It's just that simple. When we run away from what God calls us to do, whether it's the little things or the big things, whether it's just simply doing the next right thing, or embracing some big calling God's brought us to, life gets worse when we run from God because of fear. Jonah was more afraid of Nineveh than he was of God. Jonah hated Nineveh more than he loved God. And this was the heart of the problem.

The second lesson we learn from the Jonah story is this: if it's God's calling, D minus is a passing grade. That is true. Listen to this: when you read the prophecies of the Old Testament, they go pages and pages. When you see what these guys say to Israel or whomever, they go on and on and they rhyme and they use all sorts of colorful language. They say what the fire is going to look like and what it's going to feel like and there's going to be clouds and thunder and God will tear you asunder and it's like very violent, horrible stuff. You know what Jonah does when he finally gets to Nineveh? Do you know what his prophecy is? Here I have it right here. And he almost whispers it: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." That's all he says. In fact if you're reading the Old Testament and you're a scholar, you're like shocked by this is it: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown."

And the funny thing about this is that typically with these long poetic prophecies that the prophets give in the Old Testament, usually everybody ignores them. You know what happens to Jonah? Everybody goes into repentance! He says like one sentence, one time, and everybody decides to fast and to plead with God, and to ask God to save them. And then word gets to the king and the king says we're going to have the animals in sackcloth and no one's going to eat and we're all going to be covered in ashes and ask God to relent from harming us and to save our city. And God responds and saves the city.

Look, Jonah didn't even want to go there, even after the whale spit him up, he went kicking and screaming and barely tried and was totally victorious. In the kingdom of God, if you do what God has called you to do even a D minus is a passing grade. Look, we have to learn that faith pleases God. God's an expert at using people who you wouldn't think would be the right ones. He's an expert at using these kinds of people to change the world.

When Jesus was going around picking his disciples, he was picking fishermen and prostitutes and tax collectors and lepers, and women who in those days were not seen as having value. And he wanted them to follow him. I have seen in my life that some of the greatest men

and women of God are the people you thought never would do it and these are simply people who said I don't know how to do this thing God's called me to do but I guess I'll do it. And they came out with their D minus. They're just flinging it around, D minus everywhere, and God made sure that they were victorious because faith pleases God. Faith pleases God.

For every one victory you get, you're going to have ten failures. If you want to succeed in life, you have to fail first. Don't be afraid of failing. Don't be afraid of failing and don't be afraid of your future. If God calls you to do something, just respond with courage, do your best, and if you eke out a D minus, it will work. God can use that. Amen? Through your life, you see it happen over and over. If you have the faith, God has the power.

Sometimes we ask the question, I don't know if it's God's calling. Do it anyway. Look, another lesson we learn from Nineveh is this: if you think it's God's calling and you're not sure and you do it and it's not his calling, he will send a whale to get you back on track. Many of us know that. We take an action, we go to do something, and all of a sudden this whale comes out of nowhere and you're like no! And then it spits you out into your calling. There is something about that in life that even if you're not doing what God has called you to do I think God still loves courage.

God loves courage! God loves to see people say no to the things they're afraid of. To stand up with boldness. All of us love courage. Every great movie is about someone doing something brave. God loves it, too. We're his kids. We're like him in that way. Faith pleases God. Don't be afraid. Amen?

So the way to annihilate fear of anything in your life is to fear one thing: to fear God. As a pastor, I've received questions about how fear was the opposite of love and all this stuff. Fear, the fear of God, which is all throughout the Bible, is an ancient way of understanding that God's the one with the power. That he's the only one that you should be afraid of and yet God is good. So because he loves us, we don't have to be afraid of him. Does that make sense? We don't have feel dread. In a way, the fear of God removes fear. It's an ancient way of understanding that, although there is this big scary place called Nineveh, God is bigger. Although there are all of these things in our life - there's sickness, there's disease, there's death, there's challenges, there's deception - God's bigger. And I trust that God has the power and that those things should be afraid of him. Amen?

Dallas Willard said God is not mean but he is dangerous. Huh? He's dangerous but he's on your side. He's on the side of good. He's on the side of what is right. So to fear God is the same way that a camper

fears a campfire. To fear God is the same way that a sailor fears weather. To fear God is the same way that an engineer fears electricity. Or the same way a chemist fears his lab. To fear God is the same way that a son fears his father.

I remember when I was a kid I loved my dad, and I still love my dad, we're very, very close, but there is a fear component of your parents that is healthy and good. It's a respect that, if I cross the line, dad's going to uncross it for me. And this comes into play if I were to go on the playground. Let's say it's a place where I might be bullied or I might be afraid of some kid or there are scary things on the playground. If Dad is there, I'm not afraid of those kids, I'm not afraid of teachers, I'm not afraid of anything because I have fear for Dad. Does that make sense?

In the same way, when we fear God, we're intimate with him, but we know his power, we know that he's dangerous, we know that he has control, and we know that he loves us. It takes away fear in our life. That's why intimacy with a dangerous God is central to growing as a disciple with Jesus. Intimacy with a dangerous God is central to growing as a disciple of Jesus.

God is bigger than Nineveh and everything else that you face in your life. And when you realize that in your guts and bones, it doesn't

always make the fear go away but it gives you courage to say no. It gives you the courage to say yes to God's calling. Amen?

Show the dog picture, please. This is Mozart. Now this is a picture that looks like Mozart. This is Hannah's dog growing up. It's a Shih Tzu. Yes, I said Shih Tzu in church. It's okay. He's very cute. This dog was a scared dog and he would always be afraid of the mailman and things like that until Hannah's dad would pick him up. And once Hannah's dad would hold Mozart, Mozart would go bark, then you'd put him down, and he'd go and hide.

That's how I feel. That's how I feel. When I know God is holding me and God is carrying me, I'm like a cute little puppy normally, but when God's holding me, I know that I don't have the power but he does and I'm going to bark on his behalf. And that's what we do. We aren't the ones with the power, we aren't the ones with the ability; God is and that's good news. We don't personally have the power to defeat these things but God does. That's why God likes to use people who are blind and people who are deaf. People like Nick Vujicic who's perhaps one of the most powerful Christian voices in the world today. No arms or legs.

God loves to use the people that you don't expect he's going to use, and God wants to use you, and he wants to use you today to do the next right thing. The little things and the big things, but you can't be afraid because fear is the greatest obstacle to your destiny. Don't be afraid. Take courage and do the next right thing. So don't be afraid of your future. Don't be afraid of global politics. Don't be afraid of the doctor. Don't be afraid of tiger moms, or bridezillas, or your boss. Don't be afraid of an AA meeting or of a professor. Don't be afraid of that girl whose number you've been wanting to ask for for a long time. Don't be afraid of surgery. Don't be afraid of confession. Don't be afraid of conflict. Don't be afraid of a break up. And don't be afraid of a break down. God has your back. You can trust that God has not given you a spirit of fear but that of power, that of love, and of a sound mind. Amen?

Let's pray: Lord, we're not afraid and when we feel afraid, we can have confidence and trust in the chain-breaking name of Jesus Christ. And so we do, Lord. And so I offer to everyone who's hear this morning to pray with me if you want to become a Christian. Repeat these words after me: Father, in the name of Jesus, forgive me of my sins. Mark my name in the Lamb's book of life. Teach me your ways and fill me with your Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name, amen.

If you prayed that prayer with us, we believe that you've become a Christian and we want you to plug into a church. And, if you live close by, come here.