

Dustin Blumer
Sermon 442 - Psalm 34:1-10

OVERCOMING THE FACE OF FEAR

Hey welcome to Amazing Love this the first time we gather in the New Year 2018. And who is ready for another good year. Who wants to believe God can continue to change us and bring good things to our lives according to his grace and favor? I know resolutions are out of style, I'm not going to ask if you made any. But I would remind you that if you walk with God, he has mercies that are new every morning. So every morning, not just every year is an opportunity to walk closer to him, and to be made more like him.

And as we launch into this New Year I could think of nothing better than tackling some tough topics that we all face. Things like fear, apathy, comparison, and labels. Why not spend some time seeking God on all of these things - his help and his power to overcome. To understand His power that can be at work in all of us. Consider this verse from 1 John about overcoming, "You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world." (1 John 4:4) And today we get to kick it off talking about fear.

So let me ask, "What are you afraid of?" In 2018, for life in general. What makes you afraid? In December we were celebrating my wife's birthday and I found out what my daughter Nadia was afraid of. Someone had give us a bundt cake, and we did the traditional thing of putting candles and lighting it on fire. And well I have the moment for you. Nadia is terrified of the fire. She couldn't wait for the fire to be out. We have a theory that it goes back to the moment where Dad almost set his beard on fire Christmas 2015.

But we all have fears don't we. I don't just need to pick on Nadia. How many like Nadia afraid of fire, or spiders, or snakes, or darkness. We watch the news and we start getting afraid of nuclear warfare, or terrorist attacks. Me I am afraid it will continue to stay cold or colder - it's been a rough stretch here in Chicago. I don't know how much more our buildings can take with furnaces out, and bursting pipes, and sprinklers. I was at LA fitness the other day when the sprinkler popped and the entrance was flooded. Nadia's afraid of fire, I'm afraid of the cold.

But then there are the serious emotionally draining fears. There is the fear of loss. Of losing a job, a spouse, a relationship. There is the fear of failure. That the world will look at us and say we're not enough, that we didn't do it good enough. What if we don't make it financially? The fear of uncertainty - what will 2018 bring anyway. Will anything bad happen to me this year? What if the worst happens?

And fear if left untreated, left alone, left to run rampant through our hearts and lives has the potential to cripple us. I was reading from Forbes magazine why we shouldn't lead from fear, and 5 characteristics of fear based leaders. And the one that stuck out to me, is that they don't step outside the box. A fear based leader isn't willing to try something new or take a risk or learn something new. Fear left untreated leaves us looking like this turtle. I don't want to come out. I don't want to try. Something bad is out there, something that will attack me. Let me stay here. Yes, fear can be a crippler that leaves us locked inside not wanting to come out.

But we find ourselves in the presence of God. And I wanted to welcome you if you are just joining us. Maybe you're just visiting or don't even consider yourself a Christian so glad you are here. And I want you to see what God is able to offer, and what he is able to do to enable us to be overcomers. Look at this, "7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline." (2 Tim 1:7) See the reality is if you are in Christ there is no reason you need to live like that turtle in a shell? You can branch out. Stick your head out, your feet to and walk around. For in him and with him is a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline.

And I have the privilege of working out this idea with you this morning. You ready to dig into the Word of God, pick it apart and have some fun? Today we meet David, and he has a real free. It's of dying. Saul his father-in-law is after him to take his life. Saul has tried before. David would be sitting playing the harp for him, and he would pick up a spear and try to pin him to the wall. This time Saul has his army with him, trying to take David out once for all. The Psalm gives us the circumstances, v.1, "When he pretended to be insane before Abimelek, who drove him away, and he left." He found Abimelek the priest at Nob, but then went to the king of Gath called Achish. And he was afraid that this king also might look to take his life. So look what he does. "So he pretended to be insane in their presence; and while he was in their hands he acted like a madman, making marks on the doors of the gate and letting saliva run down his beard." (1 Sam 21:13) If you thought foaming at the mouth or using insanity as a defense was something new, no - it originated here with David. And this may even be a picture for you, that fear if not properly processed with God can lead to some very bad things. But in the midst of this whole ordeal - he leaves for us these words. Words that point to a pathway out of fear. Let's read Psalm 34. And can I ask you to do something, can I ask you to stand out of respect for the very words of God. And turn to the person next to you and say, "In Him we overcome."

Anyone here play hockey or are into hockey? I have to admit I don't know much about the sport, but I heard something recently that make sense. That if you want to get good at shooting at the goal, don't focus on the goalie, rather put your focus on where the goalie is not. The sides above him and the space below him and this can help you with puck placement. I have heard the same with race car driving, don't focus on the other car or be worried about crashing. Focus on where you want to go and you will go there. It reminds me of walking through the forest, and have you ever been a trail so rugged with roots and rocks that you had to focus on every step. Couldn't look. Had to focus on where you were to go. And what we find is that focus determines direction.

And I find this in a Bible story. Have you heard when Peter walked on water? Yeah, he did. Jesus was doing it so Peter was like, hey Jesus can I get a shot? Jesus is like yeah come on walk on water. So he gets out of the boat eyes focused on Jesus, and he's doing it. Peter is doing the improbable, the impossible. He is walking on water...until. His focus shifts. "Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. (If he is coming toward Jesus who does he have to be looking at) 30 But when he saw the wind (where is his focus), he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" (Matthew 14:29-30) And so because his focus was on the waves fear crept in. Which leads me to our first point. *Fear or the lack thereof is a matter of focus.*

When you are crippled by fear. When you feel like the turtle who doesn't want to come out of the shell. Is it possible it's because you are focused on what you're afraid of. You can't

get your eyes off the wave and wind that has come your way. What does this mean. I could drown. Look at the size of that problem. Or consider the great damage it could do. And we stare at the problem as if staring is going to make it better, but actually it drives us right to it.

But there is a better way. We shift our focus when afraid. And that's what the psalm teaches us to do. "I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame." (4-5) *When afraid focus on Him*. See him right there with you in the hospital bed, right there in the cubicle, in the emotional breakdown, in the midst of the blow up offering you his hand. He has promised to never to leave us or forsake. He has promised to be our helper in time of need and he can deliver us from all our troubles. What was interesting and even more helpful in his deliverance was understanding that fears can also mean terrors. You have terror look to him. In this country, in this life. When you see him reigning on his throne and holding you in the palm of his hand what is there to be afraid of. If you don't Oh what peace we often forfeit, as the hymn says.

This series follows one done by Craig Groeschel at LifeChurch, and while studying to preach to you they gave this great point. "Whatever you fear the most reveals what you value the most." And I thought that's pretty good. Actually makes me more insightful on life, thanks Lifechurch. But then they said and correlated with that is this, "Whatever you fear the most reveals where you trust God the least." And so I need to do a gut check with you. Church is like going to the doctor, we have to find what is wrong in order to give the prescription and path for healing. So as doctor I need to ask, "What are you most afraid of?" I'm not going to ask you to say this outloud, or show your neighbor. But can I tell you mine.

I've heard that vulnerability allows others to be vulnerable. Like most men I am wrapped up career. And I most afraid of this, "The church will fail because I was not enough." Now the good thing is it shows that I value this church, it's health, it's life, what we do together. But the bad thing is that I'm believing it's all on me. That's my sin. It's all up to me. And I don't know but does God have anything to say about this fear? Yeah, first he says I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. Second he says you're not enough. You will never be enough on your own. But I have strength that is made perfect in weakness, so much so that if you're willing to admit your weakness than I can be strong in you.

Ok your turn. Are there any moms worried about their kids, dads about their careers, and teens about their future. Worried that the money will run out, that health won't last. Maybe then today it's a day of repentance for you. Lord, I'm sorry I have trusted you with the kids you gave. You told me they were a reward from you. Lord, I repent over my over-pursuit of career, and all my fears of not being enough. You have told me I am enough in you, and that you know my name. And if you know me that's enough. I don't need legacy or earthly glory. Lord, I repent over my fear of the future. You said you'd be with me, guiding me by your right hand. You told me about plans for me Lord. Who here believes he has power over fear? Who here believes if you come to him, he can release you from that prison.

He can friends. I know it because of all the times he flipped the script and changed the day for me. I know it because of this psalm of David. The threat was real. Saul was a murdered who would do anything to kill David. But David didn't die at the hands of Saul. David was delivered.

And friends remember the greatest thing we have been delivered from. We've already been delivered from the punishment of our sin, and from eternal death in hell. Deliverance came in the form of Christ's cross for us and we are set free. And friends we are loved by God. You all have the right to be loved by God. And here this about love, "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear." (1 John 4:18)

Have you ever seen anyone operate without fear because love was compelling them? It's amazing what love can compel a person to do. I was reading up and found stories of husbands shaving their heads because a wife had breast cancer. Those who fell in love online and meet up in person and get married. Takes courage to meet. Or it takes a bit of fearlessness to ask someone out on a date or to make a romantic gesture. I'll never forget what my wife overcame for love. We were in Costa Rica and she knows I'm an adventurer. So ziplining is famous, and right next to our hotel is one of the top 5 longest Superman ziplines in the world. Superman means you wrap yourself up like a burrito, head first, and go. Here was the shot. I don't think she would have done this if not stuck with me. But here's the thing *Love can propel you past fear.*

How much more can't the love of Jesus push us past our fears. Waking up each day knowing he is with us and for us, what can't he help us do. He can help us work at something with all our might, even if the job isn't perfect. He can help us go into that social situation with many new people, new school, new neighborhood because he is with us. He can help us to step out in faith for him, because we know his love is with us.

But you know what will not be helpful. What ifs. Anyone ever get so crippled by fear because they are asking what if? I've recently been asked to be a keynote speaker for our WELS international youth rally. And while this is a great honor and I'm looking forward to it. There are some what ifs. Like what if I completely bomb, what if the teens don't track with what I'm saying, what if I say something wrong, what if I forget what to say at all. Ahh! Anyone have the fear of public speaking? My wife sometimes does the what ifs and because our what ifs are often irrational and extreme I love joking by taking it to the next level. Like she might say what if something bad happens to our kids today, or what if I'm dying. I like to say, "like what if we're abducted by aliens and they turn us into aliens and we have to live on planet Zolthar for the rest of our lives." What ifs aren't really helpful.

They weren't helpful for the guy in our first lesson. God is trying to convince Moses he is the man to lead the Israelites out of Egypt and what does he say, "Moses answered, "What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The Lord did not appear to you'?" (Exodus 4:1) *What ifs feed our fears.*

But look at a way past them, in v.8 it says, "Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him." When is the Lord good, in what situation is he good? And what is he. He is a refuge. Now we don't use that terminology so much anymore, but in the midst of winter we are familiar with snow forts. And a snow fort just as a snow fort can protect us from an onslaught of snow balls. So also God who is our refuge or fort, can protect us from any danger any onslaught and any what if. So here's another reason not to be afraid - *God's a refuge no matter the what if.* He is a fortress available to us every time we call on his name.

I was talking to my coach this past week a really great guy about passages he uses to work past obstacles, fears, and what ifs. He mentioned that his two favorite are these ideas. That God will never leave us or forsake us, and that he will even make the bad things work for good.

And I don't know what you think, but I feel there is so much security, so much refuge in those two ideas. In fact what I'd like to do in worship this morning is a bit of an exercise. I'm going to propose a what if. And you respond, "*God will never leave me or forsake me, and He will work even the bad for good.*" Can you practice your part. "God will never leave me or forsake me, and He will work even the bad for good."

So let's start with an easy one. What if this week is miserable because I have all these responsibilities and the flu? Your line. What if all my co-workers or students or family members around me are mean and unloving? What if I fail the test or the project goes poorly? What if Illinois never climbs out of the deep debt they are in? Ready for deeper. What if I never feel 100% healthy again? What if can't make it financially and file for bankruptcy? What if I or my parents get divorced? What if I lose someone I love? And a crazy sci-fi spin. What if we experience nuclear warfare and our world turns into the apocalyptic settings pictured in Terminator? What if we are abducted by aliens, turned into aliens and have to live on the planet Zolthar the rest of our lives?

Now because that is all true. We can do what David did. I think what I find most interesting about this Psalm is verses 1-3. I will extol the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. 2 I will glory in the Lord; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. 3 Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together." (That last line is where we get the song O Magnify, O Magnify, the Lord with me.) What I find interesting is that he is praising God and giving him glory, before he has every seen the deliverance. He might be safe acting all insane at the Philistine camp, but Saul is still hot on his heels. The war ain't won. But it doesn't stop David from speaking about deliverance, and giving God praise.

So here would be my encouragement to you *Praise God that he has already worked out what your afraid of.* I don't know exactly what is facing you in 2018. I don't know what you have to be afraid, but this is what I do know. God's going to work out. I often have conversations with my peer coach pastor. And we look at all we're facing, and sometimes we just end saying, "Yep there's a lot but I have this crazy idea that it's going to work and by next time this week, we'll be talking again with those things in the past." So I say to you. I have this feeling that whatever it is, we're going to gather again. I'm going to see you on the other side, and this I grant you, I don't know what the other side looks like. But I believe you can come through saying, "God you are my deliverer." God because of you I overcame. God you were with me and didn't forsake me, and you even worked it out for my good.

Let me pray that this happens: Heavenly Father I want to pause to praise you ahead of time. You are a deliverer, and you have been with me. This day, this week, this year will have things that make me afraid. Help first to seek you, focus on you, and call out to you. Then answer. I ask today that you would release many people from the prison the turtle shell of fear they've been hiding in. With you we can overcome. With you we can step out courageously because we know we are loved. We thank you for your cross that has overcome our sin and doubt. Be us. Amen.