December 20/21, 2008

# Fear Not

**Luke 2:1-11; 8:22-56**

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If I could take one word that seems to describe a lot of people this Christmas season, maybe the word I would choose would be the word "fear". I was talking to a banker this week and he said he's never seen so much fear in people. I understand that; I think there is good reason to be afraid. The economy is shaky at best. Wars and terrorism seem to be on the rise. It seems like it's a new disease every week. There are people saying we're destroying the planet. I think there's every reason to be fearful...unless the story of Christmas is true. If the story of Christmas is true, that changes everything. Isn't the message of the angels that night, "Fear Not"? If you have a Bible this morning, turn with me to Luke, chapter 2...a familiar passage.

Starting in verse 1:

> **Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, in order to register, along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child. While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. She gave birth to her first-born son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields, and keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which shall be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.** (*NASB, Luke 2:1:11)

That first Christmas night the angels said, "Fear Not". Why? Because ... "unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." Jesus, the long awaited Messiah, God in the flesh, has come. Now you might say, "*I think those words were just for the shepherds that night."* Really? I think they said, "*This is a message for all people for all time."* You see, if the story of Christmas is true, it changes everything. Let's skip ahead six chapters to Luke chapter 8...six chapters but thirty years. It's interesting when you read through the Gospels how many times this issue of fear comes up and how many times you find Jesus saying in one way or another, "*Hey, what are you afraid of? It's Me; I'm here. Because I'm here there's no reason to be afraid."* It comes up over and over again.

Luke chapter 8, starting in verse 22:

> **Now on one of those days...**(I love the way this story starts; we all have "those" days)**.**
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> **Now on one of those days, Jesus and His disciples got into a boat, and He said to them, "Let us go over to the other side of the lake." And so they launched out. But as they were sailing along He fell asleep; and a fierce gale of wind descended upon**

**the lake, and they began to be swamped and to be in danger. They came to Jesus and woke Him up, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" And He got up and rebuked the wind and the surging waves, and they stopped, and it became calm. And He said them, "Where is your faith?" They were fearful and amazed, saying to one another, "Who then is this, that He commands even the winds and the waves, and they obey Him?"** (Luke 8:22-25)

It was one of "those" days when they got in a boat and headed across the Sea of Galilee. It is good to remind ourselves these weren't amateur fishermen; these were professionals. They made their living on the water. If there was anyone who knew what they were doing in a boat, it was these men. The storm comes up and they begin to become concerned and it moves quickly to a state of panic. Because they were professionals they knew what to do in a storm, but they also knew when it was time to panic. In the opinion of these professionals, "We're going down!" So they wake Jesus up and they ask Him the question, *"Hey, don't You care? We're perishing here."* It's pretty tempting to ask that question in the storms of life, isn't it? *"Hey Jesus, You might want to wake up; I think the ship's going down."* Jesus wakes up; He calms the storm, looks them in the eye and asks the question, "Where is your faith?" It's an interesting question. He didn't ask them "why" they had such little faith. The question is, "Where is your faith?" The question points to the object of their faith. In other words what Jesus was saying is, "*Obviously your faith is not in Me or you wouldn't be fearful, so where is your faith?"* Their faith was in themselves; they were professionals. This was their area of strength. If anybody could handle it, they could.

It's a good question to think about. If you find yourself this morning struggling with fear, I would ask you the question, "Where is your faith?" because it's hard to imagine your faith could be in Jesus if there is fear in your heart. I think that is part of what we have learned over the last 60 days: that we do put our faith in our bank accounts, we do put our faith in the market, we do put our faith in the government, we do put our faith in our abilities and skills; we do put our faith in ourselves. That is why we are fearful, because we are not up to the task. When the storms come on and the boat is going down, at that moment we know we don't have what we need to survive the storm. What Jesus was saying is, *"Men, don't you realize that God is asleep in your boat. If God is in your boat, you've got nothing to fear."* They were still trying to figure this out. It says that after Jesus calmed the storm, they asked the question, "Who is this man that even the wind and the waves obey Him?" They hadn't yet understood the implications that when Jesus is in your boat, there is nothing to be afraid of. The stories that follow are intended to answer the question: "Who then is this man?"

Verse 26:

**Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. And when He came out onto the land, He was met by a man from the city who was possessed with demons; and he had not put on any clothing for a long time, and was not living in a house, but in the tombs. Seeing Jesus he cried out and fell before Him, and said in a loud voice, "What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me." For He had been commanding the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For it had seized him many times; and he was bound with chains and shackles and kept under guard; and yet he would break his bonds and be driven by the demon into the desert. And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Legion"; for many demons had entered him. They were imploring Him not to command them to go into the abyss. Now there was a herd of many swine feeding there on the mountain; and the**

**demons implored Him to permit them to enter the swine. And He gave them permission. And the demons came out of the man and entered the swine; and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake, and were drowned. And when the herdsman saw what had happened, they ran away and reported it in the city and out in the country. And the people went out to see what had happened; and they came to Jesus, and found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting down at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind; and they became frightened. Those who had seen it reported to them how the man who was demon-possessed had been made well. And the people of the country of the Gerasenes and the surrounding district asked Him to leave them; for they were gripped with great fear; and He got into the boat, and returned. But the man from whom the demons had gone out was begging Him that he might accompany Him; but He sent him away, saying, "Return to your house and describe what great things God has done for you." And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city what great things Jesus had done for him.** (vs. 26-39)

This is one of my favorite stories in all the Gospels. It is one my favorite stories because it is so filled with hope. I can't imagine a more hopeless situation; I can't imagine anybody more desperate. I can't imagine that you work with anyone worse off than this man. I can't imagine that any of your sons and daughters is worse off than this man. I can't imagine that you walked through these doors this morning in a worse situation than this man. We tend to dehumanize these stories, so it's important to remind ourselves this **was** a person. He had a mom and a dad. He may very well have been married, may have had children, certainly had friends, people that loved him. And it had to be an absolute agony watching this day after day after day. How would you like to be a mother watching your son chained like a mad man in the tomb? And on occasion the demons would rage and he would literally break his bonds and flee into the desert until he could be captured, brought back, and chained up again. Imagine the despair of that day after day after day!

I saw a similar situation years ago when Cary Peterson and I went to Thailand and crossed the river and went into Laos. We went into a number of villages up into the jungle visiting the Tai-Dam people, and while we were there we noticed a young man, probably in his late teens, literally chained to a tree. We asked why he was chained to a tree, and they said, "Because he's a madman. He's possessed by a spirit, and when he's let loose he's so violent to his mother and to other people in the village, we have to keep him chained to a tree." "How long has he been there?" "For several years, and he will stay there until he dies." As we were watching, his mom brought a plate of food and she shuffled up as close as she could get, put the plate of food on a stump that was there, and quickly backed away. You could see the absolute despair in her eyes over her madman son.

You get just a sense of what these people must have felt for the man in this story. But then he has an encounter with God in the flesh, the long-awaited Messiah, the Savior of the world. And in a matter of moments, he was changed from a madman, a lunatic, to a missionary of the Gospel... because that's what Jesus does. It just takes a touch of His hand and everything changes. I'm sure there are some of you that walked through these doors this morning and you live in your own bondage. Your addiction might be to alcohol, pornography, some drug, an eating disorder...maybe the bondage is just your stuff in the past. I don't know. You may feel in your heart it's hopeless. You maybe walked through these doors filled with despair and fear and think, *"It's never going to change."* See that's the whole point of the Christmas story: that the Savoir of the world has come! All it takes is the touch of His hand. He's got the power to change you in a matter of minutes...from whatever it is that holds you in bondage, to a missionary of the Gospel. That's what He does! Some of you walked through these doors this morning and you have a marriage that's unraveling; you

have a son or a daughter who's gone down a bad path; it all seems so hopeless and you're ready to give it up. This story reminds us that there is no such thing as *hopeless*. Every day is a reason for hope. There is no one beyond the reach of God's life-changing power.

It always saddens my heart when I read the part in the story when the people came out to see the madman...in his right mind, sitting at the feet of Jesus. But they don't know what to do with this. It so frightens them that they want Jesus to leave. *"Hey pack up your stuff and get out of here."* How many people in that region do you suppose were lame? ...were blind? ...were deaf? ...were sick? ...were dying? ...were living in absolute despair? And they had Jesus, God in the flesh, right there! And instead of experiencing His life-changing power, they invited him to leave, that they would continue to live in their bondage.

There are a lot of people at Christmas just like that. They just don't get the story. They just don't understand why Jesus came. They live their lives in bondage every day and the answer is right there. It plays over the speakers in almost every store, in almost every Christmas carol. The answer has come! Your life could be changed in a moment...everything you're looking for...but all you can think to say is, "Go away; go away."

> **And as Jesus returned, the people welcomed Him, for they all had been waiting for Him. And there came a man named Jairus, and he was an official of the synagogue; and he fell at Jesus' feet, and began to implore Him to come to his house; for he had an only daughter, about twelve years old, and she was dying. But as He went, the crowds were pressing against Him.** (vs. 40-42)

All of us as parents have no trouble identifying with the emotion of this story. What could be worse than a twelve-year-old child dying? Jairus had heard stories of Jesus and he knew there was nowhere else to go; there was nowhere else to turn, so he went to Jesus.

> **And a woman who had a hemorrhage for twelve years, and could not be healed by anyone, came up behind Him, and touched the fringe of His cloak; and immediately her hemorrhage stopped. And Jesus said, "Who is the one who touched Me?" And while they were all denying it, Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing in you." But Jesus said, "Someone did touch Me, for I was aware that power had gone out of Me." And when the women saw that she had not escaped notice, she came trembling and fell down before Him, and declared in the presence of all the people the reason why she had touched Him, and how she had been immediately healed. And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace."** (vs. 43-48)

For every year that Jairus' daughter had been alive, this woman had lived in agony...in a hemorrhage that would not stop---not only the battle of the disease itself, but in her culture that issue would have made her unclean, for all practical purposes, an outcast. And no one could heal her! What's implied in those words is she had tried, but no one could deliver the goods. She found one last hope in this One called Jesus. You can just imagine the scene as she works her way through the crowd and finally gets close enough to reach out and to touch His garment. In ways that only she could describe, she knew at that moment she had been healed, I'm sure hoping to slip back into the crowd; but Jesus knew. And when she knew that Jesus knew, she became filled with fear and Jesus said to her, *"Hey, there's nothing to be afraid of...because of your faith."* What Jesus is saying, is "*You understood there was nowhere else to turn; only I could give you what you need,*

*and you believed that. Because of that you've been healed. Go in peace."* That is the promise of the angels isn't it? Because Jesus has come, peace on earth; there is no reason to be afraid.

Now I understand that God doesn't choose to heal every disease. There are many of you sitting here this morning and you are battling something. That something may alter your life style dramatically for some of you; it may even be terminal. But I do understand this: that disease is not more powerful than Jesus. I understand Jesus may not choose to heal me of my disease until Paradise, but I do know that that disease has come through God's filter, and it is not more powerful than Jesus. For reasons I cannot understand, God has made that part of my story and I can accept that. I don't believe God is up in his heaven wringing his hands saying, *"Boy I just didn't see that coming. I had this wonderful plan for Bryan and then this disease overpowers him and the plan has been thwarted."* God is so disappointed because of what might have been? I don't think it is like that at all. If I can know that no disease is more powerful than the power of Jesus and whatever disease comes into my body, I will accept the fact that it has come through His filter and for reasons I cannot understand, God has made it part of my story. But the disease has not won. The disease has not altered God's plan; it is part of the plan, and for that reason I can accept it.

The disciples asked that question, "Who is this man?" The answer is: He is the One who has the power over the storms of life. When God's asleep in your boat, there is nothing to be afraid of. The question is, "Where is your faith?" He is the One who has power over the forces of darkness, the One who has the power in a matter of minutes to break the bondage of whatever it is that holds you in chains. He has the power to change your life like no other power. He is the power over disease. There is no disease that is more powerful than the power of Jesus.

But there is a problem and that is: this whole incident with the woman has taken some time.

Verse 49:

> **While He was still speaking, someone came from the house of the synagogue official, saying, "Your daughter has died; do not trouble the Teacher anymore." But when Jesus heard this, He answered him, "Do not be afraid any longer, only believe, and she will be made well." And when He came to the house, He did not allow anyone to enter with Him, except Peter and John and James, and the girl's father and mother. Now they were all weeping and lamenting for her; but He said, "Stop weeping, for she has not died, but is asleep." And they began laughing at Him, knowing that she had died. He, however, took her by the hand and called, saying, "Child, arise!" And her spirit returned, and she got up immediately; and He gave orders for something to be given her to eat.** (vs. 49-55)

This was a great miracle that Jesus healed the hemorrhaging woman. But then word comes to Jairus, "*Your daughter is dead; there is no need to bother the Teacher anymore; let's just go home."* But Jesus hears this and says, *"Hey, wait a minute...wait a minute; you still don't understand who's here. This is God in the flesh. It's ok; she is going to be ok.*" As a matter of fact, He says, *"You don't need to be afraid; this is Me; I even have the power over death."* They get back home and there are mourners. For someone of a high rank such as Jairus, when a family member died, they hired mourners. These are paid mourners; that's what they do. So Jesus informs them, "*Hey, you don't need to keep mourning; you know your job here is over; she is going to be ok."* And they laugh at him; *"Of course she's dead."*

You know I see here a lot of people laughing at the story of Christmas. They think it's silly. The story of God in the flesh to them is as silly as the story of Santa Claus himself. But I've noticed something over the years. Those people who laugh at the story of Christmas are the same people that live each day in fear; they are the same people! You see, if the story of Christmas is not true, you **should** be afraid, because you've got nowhere else to turn. I'd be afraid too. They were laughing because they had no idea who was walking among them. It was God in the flesh; that changes everything! So Jesus enters into the room of this little girl and with a touch of His hand, she is brought from death back to life. That's what Jesus does. He even has the power over the grave itself. There is, in that miracle, the reminder that Jesus even has power over death. That's the whole point: that the grave is no longer the victor. Death has not won the battle because Jesus has the power even over the grave.

"Who is this man that even the wind and sea obey him?" Well it's the long awaited Messiah; it's the Savior of the world; it's God in flesh. He's the one who has the power over the storms of life. When God's sleeping in your boat, what is there to be afraid of? He is the one that has power over the forces of darkness...whatever it is that holds you in bondage. He is the one that has power over disease, and even when I struggle with disease, I know the disease has not won. It's not more powerful than the power of Jesus, and I can accept that, if it is part of God's plan for my story. And ultimately He has power over the grave, which is the promise of spiritual life today and eternal life forever.

So remind me again this morning: what is it in your life that is just too big for God? The question is, "Where is your faith? Is it in your bank account? ...in the market?...in the marketplace?...in the government?...in yourself?" If the answer to any of those is "yes", you **should** be afraid, because none of them are up to the task. But if your faith is in Jesus, I've got to ask you this morning, "What are you afraid of?" That is the whole point of Christmas: DO NOT BE AFRAID..."for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, the long-awaited Messiah, God in the flesh!"

We understand that the Christmas story gave birth to the Easter story, where Jesus would fulfill His mission to be the Savior of the world. Then, there, Jesus, God in the flesh, would be nailed to a cross in payment for the sins of the world, that those who say, "I need a Savior," those who say, "I need the touch of Jesus," those who know they need the forgiveness that only God can offer, put their faith in Jesus' death on the cross, embrace Jesus' death on the cross and say, *"Yes, He did that for me, because I needed to be saved from my sins, experience life, experience the forgiveness of sin, experience a relationship with God and the promise of Paradise forever."*

Carey talked about it and the choir reminded us this morning, we all have that thing deep in our hearts that says there's got to be more than this. There's got to be a world where there is not pain, and there is not suffering, and there are no more wars. We have to have been made for something more than this. And the answer is, "Absolutely yes,"...made possible by the death of Jesus on the cross. And He offers it to you this morning as a gift. I have to tell you if you trust Jesus as your Savior, your future is more wondrous than you could even imagine today. So I ask you the question, "What are you afraid of; what **are** you afraid of?"

*"Fear not, for unto you was born that day, in the city of David, a Savior, the long awaited Messiah, God in the flesh, Jesus."* If the story of Christmas is true, I've got to tell you, there is nothing to be afraid of.

*Our Father, we are thankful this morning for the story of Christmas, that gave birth to the story of Easter, which is the story of salvation. Lord, at one time every single person in this room was desperately lost, living lives of emptiness and despair. Lord, many, many, many of us have experienced the life changing touch of Jesus, and our lives have never been the same. Lord, remind us again this Christmas season, that if Christmas is true, everything changes, and if our faith is in Jesus, there is no reason to be afraid. Lord, for those here this morning who have never experienced the life changing power of Jesus, may this be their day. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen*

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