

Love Casts Out Fear

Responding Biblically to a Climate of Fear

We sent out to the church family some documents this past week filled with links that connect you to a wealth of information about the so-called COVID vaccines.

I suspect that as you went through that information, a number of you were probably experiencing fear.

This morning we are going to talk about that fear.

Fear – A painful and stressful emotion or passion caused by an expectation of evil coming upon us, or the sense of approaching danger likely to harm us.

Many people in the world have been living in fear ever since the beginning of the COVID crisis which began fifteen months ago.

Often fear is caused by something tangible that you can see, or hear, like the people of Israel and Gaza who see the rockets flying overhead, and they can hear the explosions, they can feel their homes shake, and then they can step out their door and see the destruction and loss of life caused by the enemy.

That kind of situation creates fear.

However, in our case, it is a spiritual invasion of fear, prompting wide-spread irrational behavior, such as lockdowns, closed borders, restricted activity, and in some cases curfews, just as if we were living in a war zone.

Yet for 15 months most people have actually seen nothing frightening, nor have we experienced anything unusual. It is as if the air raid sirens have been sounding for 15 months but no planes or missiles have appeared on our horizon, people around us have not been dying in any unusual way—the only danger we see is what they keep showing us on the news—the only destruction is that caused by our own fearful actions.

But our nation has remained hiding in their bomb shelters living in fear.

The enemy is spiritual, the weapon is fear, after more than one year we continue to live as though we were daily experiencing the horrors of death and destruction all around us.

What will we do if we are ever in a tangible crisis that we could actually see and hear all around us?

Fear has driven us to distance ourselves from one another; to isolate ourselves from one another; to avoid social interaction; to not attend funerals, weddings, birthday parties, or anniversaries; to not play sports; to not take vacations;

We are under a spiritual attack, but our response is to act as though we were being attacked by a barrage of rockets falling from the sky.

And now, we are being told that there are vaccines available that will protect you from this invisible enemy that so many have been living in fear of for over a year.

And because of great fear of COVID, many are rushing desperately to receive their shot, not caring that it is an unproven experimental drug.

They just want freedom from the fear of COVID.

However, the COVID injections have now been out long enough that, as you can read from the documents you received by email this week, the body of evidence is growing, the spiritual enemy has already caused more irreversible harm to many people through these, so-called vaccines, than he ever did through the virus.

Now the enemy has a new fear-inducing weapon, because there are many who, having learned that there are great risks and dangers associated with these experimental vaccines, they are now being filled with fear of what the vaccine might do to them, and they refuse to be injected.

Fear is driving many to take the shot, and fear is driving many to refuse to take the shot.

Ironically, many of those who were not afraid of COVID are now afraid of the COVID shots.

The enemy is now using vaccines to bring more people under the control of fear.

However, the Bible teaches us that the life of a follower of Jesus Christ should be characterized, not by fear, but by fearlessness.

2Timothy 1:7, *“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”*

All throughout history, the hallmark of the people of God has been boldness in the face of danger.

Think of the long history of martyrs who boldly gave up their lives for the sake of Christ.

Think of the countless missionaries who have courageously gone into hostile lands carrying the gospel.

Look at the millions who every day risk their lives in order to worship and fellowship together in illegal house churches all over the world.

Our God is able to deliver us from those things the enemy has devised for the purpose of destroying us.

Do you realize that you have a protection from God that is far greater than any vaccine?

Let's look at some examples in scripture:

Daniel 3:13-18, "Then Nebuchadnezzar, in rage and fury, gave the command to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. So they brought these men before the king. ¹⁴ Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the gold image which I have set up? ¹⁵ Now if you are ready ...[to] fall down and worship the image which I have made, good! But if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?"

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷ If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. ¹⁸ But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up."

Daniel 3:21-27, "Then these men were bound ... and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. ²² Therefore, because the king's command was urgent, and the furnace exceedingly hot, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. ²³ And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

²⁴ Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished; and he rose in haste and spoke, saying to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king." ²⁵ "Look!" he answered, "I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." ²⁶ Then Nebuchadnezzar went near the mouth of the burning fiery furnace and spoke, saying, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here." Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego came from the midst of the fire. ²⁷ And the satraps, administrators, governors, and the king's counselors gathered together, and they saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power; the hair of their head was not singed nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not on them."

This message is preserved for us in the Bible to encourage us to trust in the Lord to protect us from the enemy. We teach it to our children, but do we believe that it is meant for us too?

Can this same God not also protect us from COVID-19?

And remember what God did for Daniel when the enemy, seeking his destruction, had him thrown into a den of hungry lions.

Daniel 6:20-22, “The king spoke, saying to Daniel, “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?”

²¹ Then Daniel said to the king, “O king, live forever! ²² My God sent His angel and shut the lions’ mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you.”

Why do you not believe that this same God would protect you from the enemy’s plans to destroy you, either by COVID or by the vaccine?

Turn to the end of the gospel of Mark. This is Mark’s version of the Great Commission. Remember that we have learned from our study of First Peter that we are all here on a mission. And we will remain here until our part of the mission is complete. Mark briefly summarizes that mission.

Mark 16:15-18, “And [Jesus] said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. ¹⁶ He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.

Each of us has a part to contribute to the accomplishing of this mission, and as long as we are actively participating in the mission, look at what kind of provision God provides us:

¹⁷ And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons [powerful offensive capability against the enemy]; they will speak with new tongues [special prayer and praise weaponry]; ¹⁸ they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them [supernatural protection—the armor of God]; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover [supernatural medical provision when the enemy inflicts harm].”

This is basic, foundational Christianity. This is part of the Great Commission—we have been equipped for serving in hazardous conditions.

And some of you, in your part of the mission, have been called to take the gospel to foreign countries where you may not be allowed to enter unless you have received a COVID shot.

What will you do? Will you allow fear to drive you so that you refuse to go to that country, because you are afraid to take the injection?

Or will you trust God’s word that says, that until our part of the mission is finished, serpents and deadly poison will by no means hurt us?

And what about your work-place? Are you just there for the paycheque, or are you there because you believe that is the mission field God has called you to serve in?

If you are sincerely there on mission, and **if** you have no option, they require you to either be vaccinated or lose your job, and **if**, as you pray, you firmly believe God wants you to continue to serve Him in that place, then what will you do?

God does not call us to stay safe. He sends us out as sheep among wolves.

He calls us to deny ourselves, to take up our cross, and to follow Him, wherever He leads, whatever the cost.

Take a look at one example of how this promise, from Mark 16:18, played out for Paul in the passage that ____ read earlier. Paul suffered a lot for the sake of the gospel, but God preserved him when the enemy tried to destroy him in a storm at sea, followed by a shipwreck, followed by an attack by a poisonous snake:

Acts 28:3-5, “But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand. ⁴ So when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, “No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped the sea, yet justice does not allow to live.” ⁵ But he shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm.”

Look at Paul’s reaction. He did not panic when the poisonous snake injected its venom into Paul’s hand. He simply shook it off and carried on.

When I first was getting involved in gospel ministry, I was really struggling to trust the Lord’s protection. I was afraid to surrender my life to Christ because I was afraid of the danger He might lead me into.

When I took the plunge and finally surrendered it all, the first thing He did was to take me to a large city in the tropics where I lived for ten months in a slum. The house where I was boarding in was located just meters away from the city dump, I could trap up to 9 mice a day in broad daylight in my bedroom, and a pig lived tied up outside my open window.

The cockroach infested refrigerator, where our food was stored, didn’t work and was just as warm as the rest of that sweltering hot kitchen. It was recommended that we not drink the tap water, but that is all I drank.

I will never forget the fear that filled me and robbed me of sleep the first few nights I was there—fear of getting deathly sick.

But I went for the entire year without catching so much as a cold. It was possibly the healthiest year of my life, and it was definitely the most exciting and fulfilling year of my life.

God used that experience to teach me that He can be trusted to take care of us while we are on mission.

The promises of Mark 16 don't mean that we will not experience sickness, or even death. I am still on mission and have been sick numerous times—and the Lord has always kept me going—my mission is not done yet.

But the promises of Mark 16 mean that while we are on mission, His purpose for our lives will not be hindered by anything the enemy brings against us.

I don't expect to never die, but I do believe that until my part of the mission is over there is nothing the enemy can do to stop me from finishing the task, as long as I am trusting in the Lord. And the Lord is able to keep me trusting.

How do we get over the fear? Fear is unbelief—fear is not trusting in God to protect you, or not trusting in your relationship to God.

1John 4:18, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear...”

The Greek word, translated here as “love,” is the word *agape*, which is the love of God, or the love that comes from God. It is not human love; it is God's love.

And this is confirmed by the adjective, *perfect*. Perfect love casts out fear. There is only one love that is perfect love, and that is God's love.

So, when we yield our lives to God, and let Him have His way in us—in other words, when we are abiding in Christ, trusting Him for the power and the ability to live the Christian life, then God's life, living through us, will cast all fear out of us.

This is illustrated by Peter, when he was called by Jesus to step out of the boat and walk on the water. As long as his eyes of faith were fixed on Jesus he was without fear and able to fulfill what he was called to do.

Matthew 14:30, “But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, [he took his focus off of Jesus, His source of courage and strength] he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, “Lord, save me!”

John 13:35, “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

The fear of catching COVID has been keeping many people from reaching out and caring for one another, and spending time with one another, sharing meals together, and connecting in love.

We need to demonstrate to the world that we are carriers, not of COVID, but carriers of Christ—taking His life to those in need.

How did Jesus minister to the lepers? ***Matthew 8:3, “Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, I am willing, be cleansed.” Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.”***

Jesus didn't have to touch the leper, He could have stood two meters away and simply spoke to Him, and he would have been healed.

Why did He reach out and touch this contagious man? To show that the power of God is greater than any disease of this world.

And that is the same provision that has been given to each of us to enable us to carry out the mission in a hostile land.

I'm not saying that we cannot get sick or even die. We can.

But the only one we are to ever bend our knee in fear before is God.

We must never bow in fear before any other. We are sent as sheep among wolves, but we do not fear the wolves—Christ is in us.

1John 4:4, *“You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”*

We need to remind ourselves of who we are, and of where we are. We are children of God, and we are in Christ.

That means that God takes care of us, and we are surrounded by Him.

Should we get vaccinated because we are afraid of catching COVID?

Should we avoid God's call to any mission field, at home or abroad, if they require a COVID shot to be there, because we are afraid of the potentially devastating side effects of the injection?

Fear should never be a Christian's motivation for making any decision. Be led by the Spirit and Word of God—never by fear.

Should we feel safer because we got the COVID shot?

Should we feel safer because we didn't get the COVID shot?

A Christian should never place their security in anything other than God.

Hebrews 13:5-6 AMP, *“[God] Himself has said, I will not in any way fail you nor give you up nor leave you without support. [I will] not, [I will] not, [I will] not in any degree leave you helpless nor forsake nor let [you] down (relax My hold on you)! [Assuredly not!]”⁶ So we take comfort and are encouraged and confidently and boldly say, The Lord is my Helper; I will not be seized with alarm [I will not fear or dread or be terrified]. What can man do to me?”*

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