

The Power of Fear

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[0 : 0 0] All right. Thank you, Elliot. Appreciate the introduction and good morning, everybody. How are you doing today? All right. Looking outside, don't know if you're going to be, this sermon is going to be accompanied by the thundering of God, like literally.

So we'll see how that goes. If you're new with us, we are so glad you're here. I've already met a new couple and always pleased to make new acquaintances and trust that you feel welcome. And yeah, God's really meeting with you today.

Those who are listening online, you know, we have dear friends that can't be here because they are sick. We have friends that because of their duties in the Marines or the Coast Guard or the Navy, whatever it may be, they might be out on deployment or doing trainings somewhere else.

And if you're catching this online, we just want to say to you, we dearly miss you and look forward to having you back in the place with us. If you've got a Bible, go ahead and turn to Mark chapter 6 and verse 14.

And if you don't have a Bible, do not worry about that. We also are going to have the verses up on the screens as well. And I just want to say this, you know, oftentimes we can, you know, get into like reading the big chunk of verses and we can approach it in a way of like, man, yeah, yeah, yeah.

[1 : 1 3] Read it along. I just can't wait to hear what the preacher says. Actually, there is something beautiful about opening your heart to just receive the Word of God as it is because it does something in us. Now, I want to say this because I don't usually give that disclaimer before I read.

This isn't the most uplifting passage, let me say. But, however, there is a lot of beautiful stuff in here. So, Mark chapter 6, verse 14. Let's read from there.

King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some said John the Baptist has been raised from the dead. That is why these miraculous powers are at work in him. But others said he is Elijah.

And others said he is a prophet like one of the prophets of old. But when Herod heard of it, he said, John, whom I beheaded, has been raised. For it was Herod who had sent and seized John and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because he had married her. For John had been saying to Herod, it is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife. And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death. But she could not, for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe.

[2 : 2 6] When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed. And yet, he heard him gladly. But an opportunity came when Herod, on his birthday, gave a banquet for his nobles and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee.

For when Herodias' daughter came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests. And the king said to the girl, ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it to you.

And he vowed to her, whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom. And she went out and said to her mother, for what should I ask? And she said, the head of John the Baptist.

And she came in immediately with haste to the king and asked, saying, I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter. And the king was exceedingly sorry.

But because of his oaths and his guests, he did not want to break his word to her. And immediately, the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. And he went and beheaded him in the prison and brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl.

[3 : 3 3] And the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard of it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb. This is God's word. So, pretty crazy story.

If you're John the Baptist, quite a bummer, right? But, seriously, the story is fascinating. Partly because it seems to just come out of nowhere.

I mean, so far, we've been following the activity of Jesus through the book of Mark. And what he's been doing with his disciples and healings and teachings and miracles. And that's been going on for a while.

But this just pops in. Why? Well, it wasn't included so we could be outraged at the injustice of how John the Baptist was treated and how he was unjustly killed.

And this isn't a smear campaign that Mark is using because he has some kind of grudge against Herod and Herodias. Actually, when you look at the stories in Mark that are in close proximity to this one, we see that it is telling us a common theme.

[4 : 42] And this is it. These stories that are surrounding, they seem to be touching on this thing called fear over and over again. You see Jesus dealing with his disciples' fear as they're in the boat crossing the Galilee in a storm.

And they're afraid. When Jesus walks on the water to them at another time and they're afraid when they see him. You see fear at play in the healing stories of Jairus and the woman with the issue of blood.

So why all this focus on fear? Well, fear is a powerful influence in our lives. More than I think we would care to admit.

Growing up in the 90s, I was a teenager in the 90s. There was a men's clothing brand called No Fear. And it was this logo that just had angry eyes.

It was just like a furrowed brow. Now, that was the logo. And apparently, their thought was having no fear was a possibility. But the brand's idea of no fear was kind of cheap and superficial.

[5 : 44] It was the idea of a man who ain't scared of nothing. He'll fight anybody. He'll do daring things like wearing lame T-shirts with no fear on it. But here's the thing about fear.

It affects everyone. And you can't eliminate it. You can't cover it in a T-shirt and it suddenly goes away. Here's why. Fear is connected to our deepest desires.

Now, that's my argument. But let's consider what is at the heart of fear. At the heart of fear is losing something that we want. Or losing something that we need.

Now, if that is what undergirds fear, then it is impossible not to fear. Because we live in a world where loss is inevitable.

Things rust. Things break down. Things wear down. Things get old. Or people move on or reject us or run away or pass away. And the loss of these things are painful possibilities that we all will face at one point or another in our lives.

[6 : 50] And what makes it tough is that these are good things. And these are things that we can enjoy. And especially when it comes to relationships, it's things that we love. We love them and we want them in our lives.

We want to hold on to them. And we can't switch that off. Because God created us in his image and we are creatures of desire. We are not brains on a stick.

And God made us that way. But so often what happens because of sin, our good desires become warped and those good desires turn into demands. And when that happens, when a good desire becomes a demand in our heart, what happens is you end up with an idol.

An idol in your heart. An idol is any good thing we've turned into a God thing or an ultimate thing, which now becomes a bad thing. And idols are seductive.

They are because they promise us things. They promise to bring us joy or purpose or meaning or salvation even.

[7 : 53] But instead of helping us, idols, what they do is they turn on us and they demand our allegiance and our dependence upon them. See that switch.

That desire that became a demand, that is what you're afraid to lose. It now controls you and it does that by using the power of fear.

So the question for us is, what are we most afraid of losing? What are you and I most afraid of losing? And figuring that out is important because the answer to that question is the answer to what guides the choices and actions that you and I make.

Here are some common fears that control us. Losing our autonomy. Losing our personal freedom. Here's another one. Losing relationships. Here's yet another.

Losing our reputation. What are people going to think about me if they find out? Another one is losing the outcomes that we want.

[8 : 57] Losing my place. Losing my position. Losing my possessions. Losing the power. Maybe even a little bit of power that I think that I have. And all these fears are real and all these fears come at us from an unknown future.

What if someone takes away my choice to do what I want, to get to be who I want? What if I find out people don't like me or my friends or my family reject me?

What if I don't get my dream job or that dream house or the car I want or the spouse that I'm longing for? What if I lose my job, my health, my wealth, my investments, my retirement?

And these are all things we would like a guarantee on, but you can't buy insurance for. And here's our common ground problem. We live thinking that our joy in life, maybe even life itself, is dependent on those things turning out the way that we want.

And we expend so much emotional and physical energy trying to control future outcomes to be what we think we need them to be.

[10 : 06] But here's the tragic irony. The future we try to control becomes the fear that controls us. That's what happens. Fear will take us further than we are willing to go.

It will make us pay more than we are willing to pay. And we see that in the story. Herod imprisons John and then ends up killing him to please his wife to save face with his friends.

Verse 17. For it was Herod who had sent and seized John and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because he had married her. For John had been saying to Herod, it is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.

And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death, but she could not. For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe.

What we see here is that Herod is trying to placate his wife on the one hand and keep John alive on the other. Why? Because he fears them both.

[11 : 07] Herodias is the woman he cannot live without. So much so, he had to have her, even if it meant to betray his own brother and steal him from her.

And now that he has her, you can bet that he will do whatever he can to keep her. He can't imagine a future without her. So he's got to keep her happy. Now here's Herod's problem.

His wife hates John the Baptist. Her fear is her reputation. She doesn't want her sins broadcast and called out.

She doesn't want anyone saying publicly what you're doing is wrong. Your marriage is a sham. So her fear manifests as anger. Anger that is willing to murder in order to protect what matters most to her.

Herod has this other competing fear, not just Herodias. He's afraid of John. John, he recognizes as a holy man. He's a man of God and he doesn't want to mess with them because he doesn't want to get in God's bad books.

[12 : 15] Herod's fears, he could see, just imagine them dueling within him. No peace. He knows he shouldn't do anything to John, especially not kill him, but the fear of his wife.

That fear is controlling him. So what does he do? He puts John in prison. Now he thinks he's come up with a good compromise here. And that's the insidious thing about fear's control.

Fear's control over you and me, it will start with a little compromise. But look how it ends. Verse 26, And the king was exceedingly sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests, he did not want to break his word to her.

And immediately the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head, and he went and beheaded him in prison. The arc of this story proves an immutable truth.

At some point, you and I will be forced to decide on what we fear most. We will. It is possible to recognize and respect righteousness while rejecting it for yourself.

[13 : 27] That's what Herod did here. He feared John because he acknowledged that he was a righteous and holy man. It even says that he would hear John's messages, be perplexed by them, and yet he was still glad to hear them.

There was a strange relationship Herod had with John. He both didn't like what John was saying, but realized that what he was saying was true. There was some kind of fear of God that Herod had, but it wasn't enough.

Herod didn't listen to John's call to repent. Herod was trying to play both sides. Please God and please his wife. And we do this today. It's the Southern Fried version of Christianity.

We say we believe in Jesus, but willingly choose to continue in sin. Florida Georgia Line, a country band, they kind of captured this, proudly wrote about it in a song.

We cuss on them Mondays and pray on them Sundays. What's the idea that they're getting at here? Well, we're good because we give God his time on Sunday. We give him the lip service because that's what we do in the South.

[14:36] But Monday to Saturday, that's us. We live life on our own terms. We do what we want. God says you can't do that. First John 3, 9 to 10 says, Herod tried to have it both ways, but in the end we see what he fears most.

It isn't John. It isn't John. It isn't righteousness. It isn't God. It's his reputation and it's his wife. Those are the things he can't lose.

So in the end, Herod has to make the ultimate decision. And his fears took him farther than he was willing to go and made him pay more than he was willing to pay.

And Jesus warns us that this is going to happen. There's no way around this. Matthew 6, 24, he says, No one can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.

The story of Herod killing John the Baptist shows us a lot about the power of fear. And what Jesus said, what we just read of him, adds a layer to this that gets to the heart of the matter.

[16:10] What we fear most will ultimately have power over us. And that's what Jesus is saying about trying to serve two masters, is that in the end, you will have to choose one.

And that one will demand that you despise the other. But I want us to recognize something deeper at play here. The master you serve, that is to say, what has power over you is all about what your heart loves.

And there's only two choices you and I have as to who our master will be. And it's either God or anything else.

There is no third option of you being the master over yourself. It's going to be God or it's going to be something else. And you will serve them.

Make no mistake. Now, you might be sitting here listening and disagreeing with me so far, but I want to ask you this. I want you to consider this from this story.

[17:14] Think about fear's power with regard to Herod. He is a king. A king. By all accounts, he should have ultimate freedom and power to do what he wants.

But we see a king brought to his knees and forced to submit to the wish of a teenage girl. Why? Because of the power that his fears had over him.

The greatest lie in our American context that has mastered us is around the idea of individual liberty. It has come to mean life without limits or boundaries.

The individual is their own authority. They are king. They are the ultimate source of their own truth, responsible to no one but themselves. I come and go as I please.

I belong to no one but myself. I get to be who I want to be. I just heard a song on the radio the other day by Miley Cyrus. It says, I can love me better than you can.

[18:18] All those platitudes make us feel more safe and more in control like a king should be. But that is not empowerment. It's actually just another kind of enslavement.

You can see the effects. We're more isolated than ever today. We are more fractured. We have more shallow relationships than ever.

We are more easily outraged than ever. Why? Because we are puppet kings with no real power or control because we've chosen the wrong master.

And this brings me to the final point. What you fear makes all the difference. The Bible tells us that God alone should be the ultimate desire of our heart.

That he alone is worthy of our love and our affection. That place that God is meant to occupy. Him being the first in our lives and everything.

[19:21] In our loves and our affections and our allegiance. The Bible sometimes refers to that as having the fear of God. That doesn't mean we're afraid of him. Because we're in trouble.

Now the fear of God means loving him above all things. They are inseparable. To fear God means your relationship with him is preeminent. Now here's the good news about this kind of fear.

About having the fear of God which means he is going to be the master over you. It means that you're coming under his power. And he is good. He is just.

He is faithful. He is loving. He is merciful. He is gracious. He is generous. And he is the power that is for your flourishing.

But that doesn't mean we get to do what we want. Whenever we want. No, in the fear of God, our desires don't get to become the demands that we make of him.

[20 : 28] Actually, he is the good king and the good master. That demands that our desires line up with his. It's a big difference there.

And before we think that to be terribly restricting, consider this parable. There are two households. In one house, there is strife, anger, bitterness.

Every day there is fighting. There is conflict and argument. Some people get more food and better clothing at the expense of others. There never seems to be enough to go around.

And there is great disparity in many ways. The rule of that house is personal freedom to do what you want to get what you need. At the expense of others.

For the benefit of yourself. The rules of the house represent the heart of its master. Now, the other house is peaceful. It's loving.

[21 : 28] It's caring. It's kind. And the people in there look out for each other. They serve one another. They put each other first. And so no one goes without. Because they're all concerned with the welfare of one another.

And the rule of that house is loving sacrificially to give others what they need. The rules of that house represent the heart of its master.

See the difference between the two. The fear of God living in his house calls us to live differently. And this can seem restricting at first.

But there is no denying the goodness that the rules in that house produce. Throughout our lives there are moments that God gives us to choose.

Are we going to live by the rules of his house? Are we going to live by the rules of that other house? So we stand before him and we have the option. Do we get to live by sexual freedoms that I get to use my body in any way I want.

[22 : 31] To satisfy it in any way I want. With whom I want and how I want and when I want. Or do we come under the rules of the house? That says no we actually don't get to do that.

There are boundaries to that. Do we live our lives for greed? For the unending pursuit of wealth at all costs? To gain possessions and pursue that?

Or do we come under the rules of the house? Of his house? Do we live for our own dreams? For life on our own terms?

Or do we live for him? Do we live for our own sense of what we think righteousness is? Our own self-righteousness? Our own code of morality?

Or do we come under his? Do we live independent of him? Or do we live dependent on him? Maybe you're here and you hear this and you're just like, oof.

[23 : 35] Jesse, you're calling me out. Maybe God's calling you out. Maybe you haven't chosen the fear of God in some of those areas. Well, there is good news. God is patient and kind.

He is a God of second chances. And he is holding out to you and me another chance today. He is exposing our hearts to what we fear more than him. And remember this.

It's his loving kindness that leads us to repent and turn to him. And I just want to say if you're here today and you're struggling to believe that, I want you to know this. Jesus is the king worthy to be feared because he loved us first.

Herod, he was a king that loved himself. He loved his unlawful marriage. He was a king that really didn't have power, the power he thought he had.

He was controlled by his fears. And he did not use the little power and authority that he had to save a good man, but he used it to kill him. But Jesus is a very different kind of king altogether.

[24 : 41] And he is a king with real power and real authority. But he didn't use it to save himself. He used it to save us. 1 John 4.10 says, And this is love, not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the sacrifice, the perpetuation for our sins.

What that is saying is that Jesus loved you first. He was the king that loved you first. Real love. God love is willing to do whatever it takes because he wants real relationship with you.

And I want you to hear that. Now the fear of God will lead you into a life of self-sacrifice for the benefit of others. And that is the cruciform life, the way of the cross that Jesus exemplified.

