

CITY CHURCH-EASTSIDE WEEKLY WORSHIP GUIDE

May 9, 2010



Real Spirituality: God and Fear

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”...

Most of us can readily admit that we are haunted by some sense of fear, anxiety, or dread. It's the stuff that keeps us up at night or that which looms on our mind as we drift to sleep. It's the fear of failing at our jobs, the tension of a relationship, or even true enemies. What do you do with your fears? What do you do when your fears become reality?

Where is God amidst our fear? Psalm 22 gives us unique insight into the world of fear. In summary, it speaks to the fear that overwhelms us and, ironically, the kind of fear that saves us.

The gospel is very intriguing. The good news of Christ says that even the most powerful are broken and subsequently it's the broken who receive power. Our culture is one of justification. We're always trying to prove ourselves to others; how beautiful, successful, and put together we are. Yet David, the king of Israel, second to none, is not hiding

behind such masks. The imagery in verses 12-18 show us that even the most powerful are vulnerable and in great need of God's power. Our ability is insufficient to meet the demands of life. David, the most powerful, feels the dread that all of us feel from time to time. The question arises “how do we know when our fear is sinful?” Ask yourself “how do I initially respond when I feel my power is being challenged?” Fear exposes what we value most (relationships, health, reputation, etc). In order to resolve the tension that results from fear we often take matters into our own hands which in turn creates a distorted reality. Fear fools us into thinking that if we just climb aboard the hamster wheel we'll maintain some semblance of control. Yet Psalm 22 shows us that fear does not have to overwhelm us.

The phrase “let go and let God” has haunted the church for some time. Psalm 22 advocates a radically different

approach and it's “grab God and don't let him go.” This is the crux of Jacob's wrestling match with God on the banks of the Jabbok (Gen 30). In their own disorientation the disciples forgot that Lord of Heaven and Earth lie asleep in the hull (Mark 4). We forget that the anchor of our soul now sits at the right hand of God our Father. “Why are you so afraid” he asks as if we've run across the most profound paradox. The cross ensures that we will not ever be abandoned because Christ has been utterly abandoned in our stead. Our spiritual union with him helps us to realize that the presence of God's absence is merely an unknowing. Just because we can't see the Milky Way doesn't mean it's not there. He's there because of his covenant promise. How do we respond? We respond uniquely in prayer crying out “Abba, Father” as we realize our weakness. We also remember his greater narrative, the one that puts ours into perspective.

Sermon Application

The questions and thoughts below can be used for further reflection this week. Seek to use a journal or discuss with a friend. Most of all use this to consider how the gospel of Christ can be transforming. Enjoy!

Application Questions: Psalm 22

1. If you caught the sermon what impacted you most?
2. What role does fear play in our larger society?
3. What sorts of fear do you deal with on a regular basis and how do they impact your life? What does fear truly express?
4. How do we know when fear becomes sinful? How can we even say that fear is sin?
5. Why could we say that “fear distorts reality”? How can we flesh that out?
6. Looking back at your own story how were you taught to deal with fear? What feels positive and what feels negative?
7. Read Psalm 22:23. How can fear be understood in our relationship to God. How does Mark 4:35-41 help to shed light on this question?
8. If you’re comfortable, share about or consider a time when you’ve experienced the “presence of God’s absence”. How did you ultimately move forward? Did God make himself known?
9. How does the death and resurrection of Christ transform the way we deal with fear?
10. How have or could these two application points from the sermon make a difference as you face your fear?
 - a. *Praying*-Crying out to our “Abba, Father” expressing our fears.
 - b. *Remembering*-There is a greater narrative than our fears. Consider the greatness of God and his redemption. Lean into him.

Processing Fear: Prayer & Memory

The sermon on Sunday left us with two points of response in regards to our fear. First, the gospel would call us to pray. Can you sense the radical nature of grace in this response? World religions are dominated by the flattening of Creator/Creature distinctions which consequently have a destructive affect when it comes to dealing with fear.

Worldviews where followers report to totalitarian deities (Creator-centric) only serve to heighten fear. In such systems, dealing with the normal fears of life is only coupled with the insecurity of pleasing a demanding God. Worldviews where creatures or creation reigns (Creation-centric) also serve to heighten fear. If we as creatures are in control what recourse do I have when life feels out of control (the problem with karma)? Both Creator-centric and Creation-centric models place the burden of control back on the very people who feel powerless (that would be us!). The gospel, the good news of what Christ has done for us, resolves the tension between Creator and Creature.

A simple way to define sin is when we as Creatures fail to trust in the Creator. When we choose to live life in our own strength and wisdom we rebel against our natural design to be in community with God. This generates all types of injustice of which God rightly condemns as evil. Thus, if we all are guilty how do we deal with the demanding judgement of God? Aren’t we right back to a Creator-centric dilemma? If left to ourselves the answer is yes. Just as we desire to see the perpetrators of gross evil brought to justice, we forget that a thorough dealing of justice involves the judgement of our own lives. The magnitude of this is almost unthinkable. Yet, in the gracious action of God he placed this level of judgement, the brokenness of the multitudes, upon his son that he might heap upon us, not the judgement we deserve, but his overwhelming love. Living in that becomes a game-changer. Living in that enables us to share our anxieties and fear with our Creator. God, through Christ, has welcomed us to communicate our fears knowing that we are accepted in his sight and he alone has the power to respond and thereby to resolve the tension in which we live. Peace floods our soul as we lean into him regardless if peace characterizes our circumstance. The process of this ongoing redemption between Creator and Creature begins to mark our story. We look back and see the hand of God like footprints in the snow. We recognize that our own narrative is inextricably linked to his greater narrative of redemption. Ah, herein lies our security!

“Fear is provoked when the threat of danger (physical or relational) exposes our inability to preserve what we most deeply cherish.”

Dan Allender &
Temper Longman
Cry of the Soul