

Rural America watches pandemic erupt in cities as fear grows

Tiny towns tucked into Oregon's windswept plains and cattle ranches miles from anywhere in South Dakota might not have had a single case of the new coronavirus yet, but their residents fear the spread of the disease to areas with scarce medical resources, the social isolation that comes when the only diner in town closes its doors and the economic free fall that's already hitting them hard.

My goal is that by the time we complete some of our first studies, we will know what the Bible, as well as contemporary history, has to say about the world we currently live in and what our response and reaction should be.

Tonight, we're going to be looking at the subject of "fear".

A European statesman in an address given at a meeting of the United Nations said,

"Give us a man who will solve the problems of our world, and we will follow him, even if he be the devil, himself."

Nearly every dictator in history has initiated or taken advantage of a crisis to bring fear and then exploited that fear to present Himself as the only one who can bring hope, stability and resolution.

This is being done by the spirit of antichrist in our generation.

A growing frequency of crises, such as wars, pestilences, earthquakes, etc. are filling the world with confusion and fear. When that fear reaches its zenith, the church will be removed and the antichrist will step onto the world stage as the savior of our planet.

The Corona virus is simply the first in a series of coming global events that will bring in the antichrist to a world ready for him.

Satan's greatest tool has always been fear.

Faith has always been the Christian's greatest weapon against him. In Hebrews 2:14-15, the author wrote,

Since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.

What we are experiencing with the Corona virus and the ramifications of its outbreak (as well as numerous other global events) was clearly predicted 2000 years ago.

The things that will soon be coming upon this planet are intense – they will terrify the world – but they should not terrify us (but we'll save that for another study)

When Christians read passages in the Bible that tell us not to be afraid, some people seem to think the exhortation to "fear not" is some kind of burdensome commandment we must struggle to obey – or else.

Like, 'fear is a lack of faith, so if you fear, you are sinning.'

That's not even close to what is really being taught and offered in the Bible.

It's a promise, a provision of grace. We're offered the *privilege* of rejecting fear so it can't take away our peace.

God is not threatening us, He's offering us Himself as the solution to a devastating mental attitude of fear, and all of fear's companions like worry, anxiety, stress, restlessness and despair.

Providing us the option of faith as over against fear is actually our Father's delight,

Fear not, little flock, for your Father's delight is to give you His kingdom. . .
Luke 12:32

Fear is a destructive force which increases our capacity for mistrust.

The solution to fear is always the same; a true, accurate perception of God and of His desire toward you and me.

I want to read something from an author, Alva McClain that was very encouraging to me,

“The strange notion that the devil is thinking of ruling in hell has no basis in divine revelation. God is the King of all things in time and space. And because this is so, that everlasting prison-house of the lost will not be the noisy and disorderly place that is sometimes imagined by the popular mind. There will be no riots in hell. For all those who reject the mercy of God in Christ and recognize no final argument but force, there will be force without stint or limit, the force of a divine judgement from which there can be no escape, either now or hereafter. As for the Lord’s own people, Sheol holds no terror for them.”

When I first read that section, I felt a wave of relief and gratitude I have seldom felt before. Hell is real and eternal, and if not for the grace of God, I would be going there.

But we’ve been spared – the Second Death cannot touch us. We are completely safe.

We’ve been saved for no other motive but that . . .

God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever would believe in Him would not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.

This is our God.

His love is from everlasting to everlasting.

He set His love on us before creation even existed. We were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.

As Christ Himself said in John 6:37-39, “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me . . . and that of all He has given me, and I will lose not one.

And Paul tell us in Romans 8, “Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We are safe; our eternity is as certain as the faithfulness of God to keep His word.

The apostle Paul suffered greatly in this life. He knew what it was to face fear. He was poverty stricken, persecuted, and had no family to support him.

But Paul continually reminded himself of those truths he had learned about Who the Lord really was and how much God loved him, even when everything in his life, both inward and outward, screamed the opposite.

Even when he was tempted to the point of despairing of life itself in (as he stated in 2 Corinthians 1:8b).

He fought to choose faith over fear and move forward, trusting in the only hope he had – the integrity of God.

There is value in the things God uses to deepen our faith – to make it less shallow and fleeting and more indestructible.

Listen to this testimony from one who escaped from Nazi Germany,

“I thank God for all the strokes with which I was driven from darkness to light. It is better that we arrive beaten and bleeding at the glorious goal than that we decay happily and contented in darkness. As long as things were well with us, we did not know anything of God, and the salvation of our souls and the world beyond. Hitler’s arrows and our suffering have led us to the innermost heart. We have lost our earthly home but found the heavenly one. We have lost our economic support, but won the friendship of the ravens of Elijah. On the bitter ways of emigration, we have found Jesus, the Riches of all worlds.”

Millions of people are coming to Christ because of this virus, because of fear. What Satan has meant for evil, God is using for good.

Also, think about this: We are so quick to assume that the way others see us, and the way we see ourselves, must somehow reflect the way God sees us.

But God is not like us; He doesn't hold us against us . . . He doesn't change or withdraw His love just because we believe He should. Or because we would if we were Him.

God cares deeply for us no matter what our circumstances or condition; including being afraid.

This confused and troubled world we live in is a testing ground.

It's a place where we learn to see beyond our inward and outward shame and failure and look intently and consistently into the eyes of Christ Who loves unconditionally.

Inner virtues are not developed in comfort and pleasure; they are developed in enduring life's trials with our faces set like flint on the goal of honoring God.

Aristotle said that fear is the pain that arises from the anticipation of harm.

Because of things that have happened to us in the past, we can become afraid of what hasn't happened – but what we imagine will or could happen.

All it takes is one or two personal disasters to convince us that a million more are coming.

1 John 4:18 says,

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear anticipates punishment. He that fears is not mature in love.

What does God have to do to convince us that we need not fear?

Would it help if He died for us, saved us, promised to never leave us, promised to return for us?

Apparently not.

All of these things are true and we still fear.

There are 365 verses in the Bible that tell us to not be afraid – for example, here are a few:

Matthew 10:31, Fear not, you are of more value than sparrows

Luke 2:10, And Jesus said to Simon, ‘Do not be afraid.’

Luke 8:50, Do not be afraid, only believe. . .

John 12:15 Fear not, daughter of Zion

Mark 6:50, Do not be afraid, it is Me

Psalms 56:3, When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You

Psalms 23:4, Yay, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me.

Fear is always a possibility for us; just as faith in God is always a possibility. The choice will always be there.

Adversity is inevitable; fear is optional.

As 1 Peter 5:7 tells us, “The devil roams about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour”.

Why a roaring lion? Have you ever studied how lions hunt?

They’re fast, but they’re lazy.

Lions roar to paralyze their victims with fear.

It makes them much easier to catch. Why work any harder than you have to?

They will expend whatever energy is needed to chase and kill something, and then lay around all day eating and basking in the sun, until it’s dinner time again.

All the better if you can just ‘roar’ and your snacks line up, frozen, ready to be snatched up at your convenience.

Sophocles said, “To him who lives in fear, everything rustles”.

But faith establishes an incredible capacity for life.

Faith gives energy; fear drains it.

Faith will do all it can to look beyond the seeming impossibility of our circumstances and hope in God.

These are just some of the reasons God has given us so many passages that address fear. It can be a much bigger issue than we realize.

It affects more layers and levels of our lives than we know, just as hope or faith opens up more nuances of real life than we can imagine.

People who have a strong, child-like faith in God are absolutely indestructible, just as people who are always afraid are nearly impossible to encourage.

Dr. Paul Tournier said,

“Fear creates what it fears. Fear of losing the love of a loved one provokes us to that lack of frankness which undermines love. The skier falls as soon as he begins to be afraid of falling. Fear of failing an exam takes away the student’s presence of mind and makes success more difficult.”

Martin Lloyd Jones even went as far as to say,

“When a person is defeated by life it is always due, ultimately, to a spirit of fear. Fear is the real, the ultimate cause of all unhappiness.”

I’m sure we’ve all had those experiences to some extent. Peter certainly did when he tried walking on water. It was easy as long as his eyes were fixed on Jesus.

But when fear took over, he went under.

Part of the reason for that story is to show the importance of faith and its relationship to fear, but the other point Matthew makes is just as important to those of us who tend toward fear.

When Peter began to sink, Jesus didn’t let him drown, He reached down and pulled him up.

Yes, we aren’t supposed to fear, we’re supposed to be faith giants.

But most of us aren’t faith giants and we still need to be reassured that God’s hand is on its way to us whether we measure up on the faith-scale or not.

Our goal, our challenge, is to find a way to so saturate our minds with the truth of Who God is that we take on a whole new perspective on life.

Maybe someday we can see the path ahead of us in the way this missionary did, and wrote,

“Why should I fear? I am on a Royal Mission and I am in the service of the King of Kings.”

Is anything too difficult for God? In our weakness and failure, are *we* too difficult for Him?

In the hand of the Potter, the clay vessel is always marred at first.

Jeremiah 18:4,

But the vessel that he was making of clay was spoiled in the hand of the potter; so, he remade it into another vessel, as it pleased the potter to make.

He chose us in Christ. There is absolutely nothing that can or has or ever will enter our life that takes God by surprise.

He will complete what He has begun in each of us.

The early Native Americans had a unique way of training young braves. On the night of a boy's 13th birthday he was placed in a dense forest to spend the entire night alone. Until then he had never been away from the security of family and tribe. But on this night, he was blindfolded and taken several miles away. When he took off the blindfold he was in the middle of thick woods and he was terrified. Every time a twig snapped; he visualized a wild animal ready to pounce. After what seemed like an eternity dawn broke and the first rays of sunlight entered the interior of the forest. Looking around the boy saw flowers, trees, and the outline of a path. Then to his utter astonishment he beheld the figure of a man standing just a few feet away armed with bow and arrow. It was his father. He had been there all night long.

In Hebrews 13:5 the Lord says plainly,

I will never leave you; I will never forsake you.

That is what God has given to us in His Son. This is what He is offering to those who are afraid.
