

## There is nothing to be afraid of

Jesus assures His disciples they have nothing to be afraid of. I have been fearful and afraid at many times. But I am no one's exemplar. Jesus is our exemplar. Jesus is confident there is nothing to fear—except God Himself. Jesus said that God could, if He wished, cast us into hell for our sins. (Lk 12:4) But from His heart, God is a forgiving being, who has done everything possible to spare us from hell. He has provided us a savior, His Son, Jesus. To the extent we place our confidence in Jesus (become His disciple) we are forgiven. But those who come before God in the arrogance of rebellion and stiff-necked in sin have only the certain expectation of hellfire. God will “by no means let the guilty go unpunished.” (Ex 34:7) Jesus assures His disciples though, that we are safe and secure. “Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.” (Lk 12:6)

Fear is contagious. It spreads more quickly than faith. Our newscasters have become broadcasters, not of news, but of fear. One of the devil's great tools is fear. He knows that fear undermines our confidence in God, which then leads to taking matters into our own hands. Taking matters into our own hands then leads to sin, to the further propagation of evil, and to the dishonoring of God's good name. Even in a violent, unpredictable world, Jesus promises freedom from fear for His disciples. “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” (Jn 14:27)

How then does freedom from fear work out when Scripture also tells God's people that in this life we will experience tribulation and persecution? The Apostle Peter wrote to believers, “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.” (1 Pe 4:12) The Apostle Paul similarly wrote Christians in the midst of their various trials and said bluntly, “You know quite well that we were destined for them.” (1 Th 3:3) Jesus Himself, while promising His peace, also acknowledged the troubles we will face: “I have told you these things, so that in



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me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (Jn 16:33)

Ah. There is the answer. Jesus has overcome the world. We are in Jesus and Jesus is in us. The promise is not freedom from harm, but freedom from fear itself. Harm itself will all be relative. What can truly harm us? Nothing irredeemable can ever happen to the follower of Jesus Christ. This world and the devil can do its worst—we will be resurrected into eternal life!

Though we long for the unending peace of heaven, this present life is not, nor will it be, a static life of ease, but more one of battle. We advance, stumble, fall in confusion, rally, resist, and charge. We receive wounds, retreat for a while, heal, recover, limp on, charge again, run to help others, call for help, receive help, take directions, cry out for weapons and equipment, find new supplies, and move out again. Our end is sure. Our Captain and the Company He leads are victorious.

Now, let us admit, that if the horizons of our thinking extend only to our pleasure, comfort, and financial security, we will be sorely disappointed. This present age is not heaven. This is the battleground age where eternity is determined. But those who trust Jesus are both safe and secure. We can really count on Jesus. He said there is nothing for us to be afraid of. We believe Him. We trust Him. Nothing will separate us from Him. Jesus said, “I give my sheep eternal life and they shall never perish; No one can snatch them out of my hand.” (Jn 10:28)

Our needs are all met in God's grace. Even if those needs include the need to die a martyr's death in faith. We are in

covenant with God. Our part in this covenant is to trust Jesus Christ. God promises to provide everything else. He promises us that we will, by grace, rise above all that life can bring: trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, or sword. And we will not only withstand, but we will “more than conquer!” (Rom 8:28) You, believer, you and your family, will be taken care of a fully competent, almighty God.

This is why we are taught to rejoice in our sufferings. It is in our weakness and vulnerability, our pain and confusion that God is not only able, but WILL bring about our deliverance. We praise God in the midst of trouble, not because of the trouble, but because in these situations that are beyond our control, we have the opportunity to witness God coming through for us. We praise Him ahead of time. And He will come through for us.

God's peace and our consequent freedom from fear come to us from at least three avenues. One is just by sheer gift. Jesus imparts feelings of peace into anxious, fearful emotions. A friend once told me that when he first landed in Vietnam during that war, he was seized with fear. He cried out, “Lord, I claim your peace!” Immediately, he said, peace came to him and never once left him during that 12 month tour of duty. Jesus has already given His peace to His followers. “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.” (Jn 14:27) I believe it is appropriate to claim that promise by faith. Secondly, we experience God's peace as we obey Him. How much anxiety, guilt, anger, frustration, and fear do we experience because we are not “living right?” A bunch. Thirdly, at the deepest level of all, we experience God's peace after we have persevered through hard times with Him. We “know that we know” we belong to God and that God belongs to us. There is steel in our belly. We have been tested by fire.

Barak Obama is not our savior. John McCain is not our savior. Jesus Christ is our savior. He tells us to trust Him and to not be afraid. Will we take Him up on that?

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