

## Psalm 34

### *Be Afraid*

**Main idea:** Fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

We're going to start this morning by getting out of our comfort zones. We're going to face our fears! Many of you have probably heard that one of the biggest fears that people have is public speaking, and since that's probably true of many of you, that's what we're going to start with. So in order to face our fears, I'm going to have each one of you this morning stand at the pulpit and share about how God has worked in your life this week! Okay?

Now how many of you just had a panic attack? Some of you probably wanted to quickly slip out the back.

I'm sorry, I had to do that. I'm not going to have you do that, so you can breathe a sigh of relief. But I wanted to point out how easy it is to suddenly become afraid. Why is that? We do it all the time. We have so many fears. And if you're not afraid of public speaking, then maybe you're afraid of being inadequate, or you're afraid of failure, or you're afraid of rejection.

So some of you probably saw the sermon title this week, "Be Afraid," and were a little confused. Maybe you thought, "Well, that's easy. I'm afraid all the time. But how is that a good thing?"

Well, now that VBS is over, we're getting back to our series "You're So Emotional," looking at several emotions displayed in several of the Psalms. So far, we've talked about happiness, sadness, hope, and even anger, and today, we're talking about fear. For the other emotions we've talked about, we've seen how all of these can actually be good and glorifying to God when we utilize them the way that God intended for us. So we've talked about how all these various emotions are actually gifts from God. But does that even include fear? Simply put, can even fear be good and glorifying to God?

Well, in most ways, no. Fear seems to be the complete opposite of the type of emotion that God wants for us. I've never counted them, but over and over again, well over a hundred times, the Bible instructs us to "fear not," making it one of the most repeated commands in all of Scripture. Here are just a few.

In Exodus 14:13:

Moses said to the people, "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today." (Exodus 14:13)

In Joshua 1:9, God said to Joshua:

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:9)

And in Isaiah 35:4, God told Isaiah to tell the people of Israel:

"Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you." (Isaiah 35:4)

And the New Testament gives us the reason why. It tells us in 1 John 4:18 that

“...perfect love casts out fear...” (1 John 4:18)

In fact, that’s kind of how Psalm 34 begins as well. We read in verse 1 about the circumstances in which the song was written. It says:

Of David, when he changed his behavior before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away. (Psalm 34:1a)

This is referring to a time before David was king of Israel, but the current king, Saul, was jealous of David and wanted to kill him. We can read the story in 1 Samuel 21, starting in verse 10. It says:

And David rose and fled that day from Saul and went to Achish the king of Gath. And the servants of Achish said to him, “Is not this David the king of the land? Did they not sing to one another of him in dances, ‘Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands?’” And David took these words to heart and was much afraid of Achish the king of Gath. So he changed his behavior before them and pretended to be insane in their hands and made marks on the doors of the gate and let his spittle run down his beard. (1 Samuel 21:10-13)

So we see that David changed his behavior, and acted crazy, out of fear. Surely we never do that, do we? And yet, in the midst of this fearful situation, David wrote in Psalm 34:

I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad. Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together! I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. (Psalms 34:1-4)

So when you trust in God, you have nothing to fear. God delivers you from your fears. Even when you’re still in the middle of situations that might cause you to fear, you can say with David from Psalm 23, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You, [God], are with me with me.”<sup>1</sup>

And yet, common sense would tell us that fear can sometimes be healthy. It’s healthy to fear getting burned by a hot stove, so that you don’t touch the stove. It’s healthy to fear fast-moving vehicles, so that you don’t play in the road. In this broken world, it only makes sense to fear that which can hurt us, right?

And not only that, but the Bible even sometimes commands that we should fear. The most famous is probably what Jesus said in Matthew 10:28. He said:

Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. (Matthew 10:28)

That’s God. God is the only One who has the power to do whatever He wants. Not even the devil can kill a soul. So Jesus was saying, “Don’t fear men, or circumstances, or demons, or even Satan. Instead, fear God.”

I think that’s the same message that David wrote in Psalm 34. It says, starting in verse 5:

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 23:4

Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed. This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them. Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack! (Psalms 34:5-9)

So we find this strange paradox in Scripture that tells us, “Do not fear!” And yet it also tells us, “Fear the Lord!”

And it also comes with a promise. God delivers those who fear Him. And, not only that, but it says that those who fear Him have no lack! I mean, what a promise! The God who made and owns and controls all things says that you won’t lack anything if you fear Him.

But if we’re honest, I think many of us would say that we often feel like we do lack. We feel like we lack strong relationships with the people we love, or things we want, or sometimes even what we would consider basic needs. So, you who fear the Lord, why do we still so often feel like we lack things? Maybe it’s a testament to still needing to grow in our fear of the Lord. Verse 10.

The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing. (Psalm 34:10)

And that’s interesting, because the Bible is clear that no one seeks the Lord.<sup>2</sup> Before Jesus rescued us, we were dead in our sins<sup>3</sup>, incapable of seeking God. And maybe, in those circumstances, it’s healthy to fear inadequacy, failure, and rejection, because those fears ought to clue us into something that’s deeply wrong.<sup>4</sup> The problem has always been that we haven’t sought God, and that we were incapable of doing so. But the Bible is also clear that Jesus is the One who sought us, because He came to seek and to save the lost.<sup>5</sup> So maybe we’re not much like those who seek the Lord and lack no good thing, but rather, more often, we’re like the young lions who suffer want and hunger.

But maybe even, as young lions, even our fears, suffering, and hunger has a purpose.

You know, Jesus is called the Lion of Judah.<sup>6</sup> He’s our Savior, the Christ.<sup>7</sup> And we’re called Christians,<sup>8</sup> or literally “little Christs.” So we’re kind of like young lions, still suffering want and hunger, and yet God is there all the while inviting us to seek Him, fear Him, and lack nothing.

But if we’re incapable of seeking God by our own initiative, how do we do that so that we would lack nothing? Verse 11.

Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. (Psalm 34:11)

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<sup>2</sup> Psalm 14:1-3

<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 2:1

<sup>4</sup> Ecclesiastes 3:11

<sup>5</sup> Luke 19:10

<sup>6</sup> Revelation 5:5

<sup>7</sup> Luke 2:11

<sup>8</sup> Acts 11:26

So, like we talked about during VBS, we come back to this idea that we shouldn't think of ourselves as mature grown-ups, but as little children. God calls us to have childlike faith,<sup>9</sup> who simply listen to Him and look to Him to transform us. And God makes us a promise: "I will teach you the fear of the Lord."

You know, we don't want fear to be the primary feeling our children have towards us, but we do try to teach them fear to help them obey. It's amazing how fearless children usually are. They'll do anything just out of curiosity. But since we know that curiosity killed the cat, in order to keep them safe, we teach our children to fear. "Don't run with that pencil, you'll poke your eye out!" "Don't stand so close to the street, you'll get hit by a car!" "Do that again and you'll get a spanking!" We want our children to be afraid to disobey, not because we want them to be afraid, but because we want them to turn from what will hurt them even more. So we teach them to fear.

And God tells us, "I will teach you the fear of the Lord."

In other words, the fear of the Lord isn't something you have to will yourself to do, as if it depended on you, but it's something that you receive from God. God Himself teaches you to fear Him.

So what does the fear of the Lord look like? Verse 12.

What man is there who desires life and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. (Psalm 34:12-14)

Simply put, the fear of the Lord is displayed in a life that honors Him. According to the psalm, you honor God both in your speech, and in your lifestyle. But notice that how well you do these things isn't really the measure. Otherwise, we'd all be in trouble, because we all fall short,<sup>10</sup> and it's for that very reason that we deserve death and hell. Rather, the measure is found in the first part of verse 12 which says, "What man is there who desires life?" In other words, the fear of the Lord shows itself through a person who truly desires life. And all sin, as fun as it is, is actually what leads to death.<sup>11</sup>

And yet, we sin. It's like we're crazy. In fact, apart from faith in Jesus, we are crazy. Holding onto our sin is like choosing to worship the created rather than the Creator.<sup>12</sup> We treat the things in our lives as if they are idols to be worshipped, and allow them to take the place of God in our lives. Embracing sin always leads to insanity and death.

But if you really fear the Lord, if you desire life, then that will begin to show in the way that you live. You will begin to repent of the things that you've allowed to take the place of God in your life, and fear only the Lord.

Finally, what's at stake in all of this? Verse 15.

The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry. The face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth. When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew 18:2-4

<sup>10</sup> Romans 3:23

<sup>11</sup> James 1:15

<sup>12</sup> Romans 1:25

them all. He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken. Affliction will slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned. The Lord redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned. (Psalm 34:15-22)

So you see, the fear of the Lord isn't just about getting everything you want. Heaven and hell are at stake. And yet, how many of you really want heaven? Heaven is the place not only where there is no lack, but where everyone honors the Lord not just with their lips, but with their hearts.<sup>13</sup> And honoring God with all their hearts, they serve God with all their lives.<sup>14</sup> So do you want to be there? Does your life show today that you want to serve God forever?

We saw earlier in Isaiah 35 that one of the reasons the Israelites should fear not was that God would come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. But I don't know about you, but thinking about God's vengeance doesn't make me fear not, but makes me fear, because I know that my sin deserves judgment. We even saw that in Psalm 34:21, where it said, "Affliction will slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned." You know, when we read such verses, we always assume that we're the righteous, but the Bible is clear that we're all wicked by nature.

Not all, but much of the affliction humanity suffers today is from wickedness.<sup>15</sup> Have you ever met an alcoholic or a drug addict? Are they are afflicted? It's their own wickedness that afflicts them, breaking down their bodies because of their sinful choices. Have you ever met a person with a shopping addiction? They can't sleep at night due to the debt that's overwhelming them, and they get phone calls from the collection agency, and sometimes when there is something they really need, they can't afford it because they bought a ton of stuff they didn't need.

These seem like obvious examples, and we sometimes condemn such examples as insane, but the truth is, most of us are afflicted in some way by our own wickedness. It's a natural consequence of sin. When we eat too much junk out of gluttony, we get afflicted with our fat bellies. When we give in to lust, we set ourselves up for disappointment in the real relationships that God wants to bless us with. When we hoard our resources out of greed, we can even afflict the people around us because we treat money as more important than relationships. So while all of our affliction isn't directly caused by our own sin, it's a certain thing that all our sin will lead to affliction.

And yet, even the Righteous One was afflicted.<sup>16</sup> Jesus, whose bones were not broken, took our affliction, our wickedness, upon Himself, so that we would be declared righteous in Him,<sup>17</sup> and be freed from all our affliction. And I think if we can get our heads around that, then we will begin to see what John meant in 1 John 4:18.

**"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love." (1 John 4:18)**

I think that means that all of the effects of sin on our emotions, that which causes us to dread God, will be gone when we're perfected by God's love, so that all that remains of fear is a holy reverence and awe of God.

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<sup>13</sup> Isaiah 29:13

<sup>14</sup> Revelation 22:3

<sup>15</sup> Romans 2:9, 3:12-17

<sup>16</sup> Isaiah 53:7

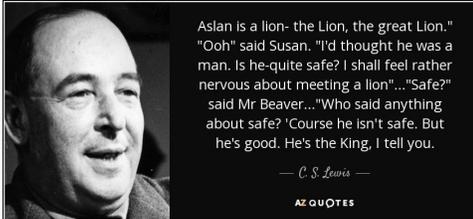
<sup>17</sup> Romans 5:1

You see, if you haven't received Jesus as Savior, you do have something to fear: punishment. Our sins deserve judgment, and hell. But there's good news. Jesus took the punishment upon Himself. Believe it, and you'll find that God is perfect love,<sup>18</sup> and that perfect love casts out all fear.

So here's the paradox. Fear the Lord, and you will taste and see that the Lord is good, and you will find that you have nothing to fear.

In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, C.S. Lewis wrote about Aslan the lion, who is clearly a representation of Jesus. And in the book, we read this conversation:

### [C.S. Lewis quote]



"Aslan is a lion- the Lion, the great Lion."

"Ooh" said Susan. "I'd thought he was a man. Is he-quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion"

"Safe?" said Mr Beaver. "Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."

And in the same way, God is good, but He isn't safe. Through faith in Jesus, He wants to burn all of the sin out of your life. And sometimes that includes judgment, and affliction, but it's not because He doesn't love you. It's precisely because He does love you. So fear Him, and you will find that you have nothing to fear.

Now, this morning, we've participated in the baptism of two sisters in Christ. Baptism itself doesn't save or transform a person, but it's a way of declaring that you have been saved and are being transformed by God. It's a way, and even often the very first way in Scripture, that a person shows that they believe in Jesus and want to follow Him all of their lives. The symbolism is simply this: that just as Jesus died, and was buried, and rose again, as we trust in Him, we've also died to our old self, and we're raised to live a new life in Jesus.

I've baptized several people over the years who for years were afraid of doing it. Like public speaking, people often have a fear of just being in front of people, and being seen in such a vulnerable way. But I hope you're encouraged this morning to fear not, and you're encouraged to fear only God, and having a reverent fear of the Lord, you rest in Jesus's love, and perfect love casts out fear.

So I invite you this morning to respond with a step of faith. Don't fear circumstances or watching eyes. Trust in Jesus with a childlike faith, and follow Him in baptism.

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<sup>18</sup> 1 John 4:8