

2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

A word about fear

Presented by Graeme Best

Good morning. Shohoiya Yokawai spent 28 years in prison. But it was not a prison of bars, locks and wardens. It was a prison of self-imposed fear. He was a Japanese soldier on the island of Guam during World War 2. When the American forces landed he fled into the jungle and hid in a cave. For 28 years he lived in that cave, driven by his fear of capture. Even after he learnt the war was over, fear kept him prisoner. He only ever came out of the cave at night to look for small animals and mangoes on which he survived.

And we think, “What a waste of a life. Twenty-eight years as a prisoner of his own fear!” And yet, there are many, many people who are prisoners of fear walking around our streets this very day. Perhaps you are one of them? Is there anything we can do to relieve us of our fears? This morning I’d like to share a word with you about fear.

Song

The word fear can refer to reverence and respect – like the fear of God – however we mostly use the word to describe a feeling of great concern. A feeling of distress or panic caused by some impending danger or pain. It is this kind of fear that I am talking about this morning. I like what Michael Pritchard said. He said, “Fear is that little darkroom where negatives are developed. Negative thoughts arising from the anticipation of trouble”.

Fear is of course, very much part of all of our lives. Everyone knows what it is to be afraid. Perhaps you have been afraid of losing your health. Of losing your job or your finances. You may fear injury or accident. Or maybe you are just afraid of growing old. Some people fear flying in aeroplanes. Others have a fear of heights. We call those fears phobias.

Fear is an emotion that every one of us experiences because in our society there is plenty to fear. Crime, violence, robbery – a general disregard for life – and these things are increasing. That is why we put locks on our windows and doors and why we put alarm systems in our houses and our cars. It is why we take out insurance policies. It is the most natural thing in the world to be afraid.

Now of course there are **two kinds of fear**. There is what I simply call **healthy fear**. Healthy fear helps us avoid dangerous situations. It makes us respect electricity. Be careful with gas. Avoid dangerous dogs. It keeps us out of dark alleys at night. It keeps us alive. Fear is a God-given emotion that prepares our body and minds to deal with challenges in life. There is nothing wrong with having fear in most instances.

But then there is **harmful fear**. Harmful fear paralyses us. It can imprison us, sicken us and make us feel useless and hopeless. Harmful fear is unchecked fear. Unreasonable, out of control fear and such uncontrolled fear is destructive.

For example: it is good to have a fear of very close spaces where oxygen is in limited supply. We need to be able to breathe. But that fear uncontrolled can stop a person from even entering any small room. A small room can make them panic.

And so when fears start to grow out of control, both mental and physical changes can cause a paralysis within and this can have such a destructive affect on our lives. Fear can stop us from getting anything done because we are consumed with our fear. It can keep us from interacting with others because we just want to be alone and deal with the fear ourselves. We can find it difficult to focus our thoughts because all we can think about is our fear. And perhaps most of all, fear can rob us of joy in life.

Song

Fear can rob us of real joy. There was a lady by the name of Hetty Green. When she died way back in 1916 she left an estate valued at 100 million dollars. She was incredibly wealthy. But she was so worried about losing her wealth she failed to enjoy her life. For breakfast she would have cold porridge to save the expense of heating. When her son had a severe leg injury, she took so long trying to find a free clinic that would treat him, his leg had to be amputated due to advanced infection. Her fear of losing her wealth led to an absolutely miserable life.

Harmful, paralysing fear can rob us of our joy. It can destroy our enthusiasm for life. Can stop us going places, achieving goals, experiencing what life has to offer. And this is especially true as Christians because **Satan uses fear** to attack us in so many ways.

For example. Satan can use fear to stop us sharing our faith. Stop us from serving God because he can cause us to fear rejection. Fear failure. Have the fear of inadequacy. The fear of going without in some way. The fear of criticism.

Satan is a master at using our own fears to limit our Christian witness and to keep us from serving God and in doing so, he can rob us of the joy that flows out of witnessing and service. In the same way he can rob us of the joy of a close, trusting relationship with Jesus. And so, while there is healthy fear there is also harmful fear, uncontrolled fear that can rob us of peace and joy.

But God doesn't want us to live lives filled with unhealthy fear. He wants us, through his Son Jesus, to have life to the full. Consider what God said to some of his people in Scripture. He said to Abram (Genesis 15:1) "**Do not be afraid.** I am your shield, your very great reward."

(Genesis 26:24) To Isaac and said, "**Do not be afraid,** for I am with you."

(Genesis 46:3) To Jacob "**Do not be afraid** to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there."

(Joshua 1:9) To Joshua "Be strong and courageous. **Do not be terrified;** do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."

(Isaiah 41:13) In Isaiah he says "For I am the LORD, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, **Do not fear;** I will help you."

He said “O Israel: **Fear not** .. you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.”

Time and time again throughout Scripture, God says to his people, “**Do not be afraid. Do not fear. Fear not. For I am with you.**” And he says the same to you and me today.

Song

God does not want us to live with fear. He wants us to enjoy an abundant, joyful life as we trust in him. And so then, **how can we overcome our fears? As Christians, how can we conquer harmful fear?**

Well, let me firstly say, conquering fear is not a matter of self-determination. It’s not just a matter of saying, “Well, I’m not going to be afraid of that any more.” It just doesn’t work like that.

In Psalm 27, David was facing a battle .. a great enemy. David’s enemies wanted him dead. They encamped and made war against him. David was in a difficult situation and he had every reason to be afraid, but as someone once said, every opportunity for fear is a chance for growth. Every fear should become a bridge to faith and not a stumbling stone. This was the case for David.

While David was facing a tough situation, he did not fear. He had a confidence, not a confidence born out of self-belief, but one born out of a relationship with God. Verse 1. “The LORD is my light and my salvation-- whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life -- of whom shall I be afraid?”

In that time of great stress David had a deep-seated confidence. But again, his confidence wasn’t in himself. Or in his soldiers. It was in the Lord.

Verses 3 and 5 “Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident. For in the day of trouble God will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock.”

God was David’s light. God was David’s salvation. His Saviour. His strength. His liberator, including from his fears. The bottom line was, God was on David’s side and David knew that. And David knew that nothing or no-one could ever overcome God. He didn’t have to fear because his trust, his faith, his confidence was in God. His God. He knew peace in his heart and mind, in the midst of trouble.

And so, we, like David, need to put our trust, our faith, our confidence in God, because our God can handle anything. Anyone. Anytime. Our God cares for us. He says, that if he is for us, then who can be against us. Our God is sovereign ruler over the universe. Nothing is outside of his control. We may be weak. We may be unable to do a thing in our own strength. Our knees may be knocking. But our God can meet any challenge. And we can have total confidence in him.

Song

What I have shared this morning concerning fear has barely scratched the surface of the topic however I would like to encourage you that if you are struggling with fear in some way to do as David did and put your trust, your faith, your confidence in God.

We live in a world that can cause us to be afraid but we can know God's peace and joy if we draw near to him. If we follow the advice of Corrie Ten Boon who said "In times of fear, I don't wrestle, I nestle." Nestle in the presence, protection and love of God, especially through prayer.

Let me close with Philippians 4:6-7 that says "Do not be anxious (and I would say, do not be fearful) about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus".

May God bless you all as you seek him.