

“The Freedom of Fear”, Rev. Shelley Kral

Proverbs 19:23

May 10, 2020

Happy Mother’s Day! I’m Pastor Shelley and the sermon for today is on fear. More specifically the freedom of fear. If you think it’s strange to talk about fear on Mother’s Day it’s probably because you’ve never been a Mama or you’ve never had a Mama.

If you’ve been either one of those and paid even the slightest bit of attention, you know fear is a common part of a mama’s life because it’s a common part of human life, to live is to fear.

That’s why the Bible talks about it so much.

You can’t go through life without fear.

You can’t enter fully into parenting or any other aspect of human life without fear

That’s why the Bible talks about it so much – because God knows us, he knows about what goes on inside us. He never tries to pretend things aren’t there that are there.

And inside each of us is fear; fear powerful enough that it makes us live a certain way; powerful enough that it guides our actions and our attitudes.

And according to Scripture that fear inside us can be of two kinds...

There is a kind of fear the Bible talks about that will crush us and a kind of fear that will cultivate us.

One will crush us, destroy life in us and one will cultivate us it will grow life in us.

One will kill us; the other will make us.

The biblical story is the story of how to move out of one and into the other. How to re-orient our lives from around one to around the other.

It never tells us to not experience any fear. It tells us to experience the right kind of fear.

The first kind doesn’t take any effort. We’re born with it. It’s just there.

Fear of being hurt.

Are you familiar with this one?

Are you scared of being hurt? Physically, relationally, emotionally, professionally hurt; you organize your life around not being hurt?

So scared you don’t touch the hot iron you’re mama told you not to – at least not more than once. So scared you don’t tell your wife the dress makes her look fat or tell your husband about the latest credit card bill. You don’t tell your parents about the note from the principle in your backpack. You don’t tell your friends about your child’s addiction.

This first kind of fear – the kind that is scared of being hurt - is what makes us do stuff like passing others work off as your own, never admitting you’d rather learn hip hop than to hit baseballs, letting people think we are one political party when we actually agree more with the other one.

We’re scared of the pain of rejection, of having the wrong reputation, of not being as smart, talented, friendly or capable as others expect us to be;

Now let me say, acting to protect yourself from pain isn’t always a bad thing.

It's a good idea to stay out of harm's way... but when protecting yourself from pain becomes THE organizing principle of your life – the thing you center yourself around; the deepest unspoken commitment of your heart... When your actions and attitudes are determined by your commitment to not being hurt – you've taken a good thing and made it an ultimate thing and that's when it ends up going destroying you

Why? Because it makes you the center of the universe. It makes your not experiencing pain the biggest, most important thing. With this kind of fear it's all about you. All about what you can do. All about what you HAVE to do!

You have to get life to work. You have to make sure people like you. You have to make sure you're the smartest one in the office. You have to make sure your kids love Jesus. You have to make sure your life counted for something before it's over.

You can't afford not to... you don't want to experience the pain of having lived a meaningless life...

This kind of life crushes you because it puts you in the place only God belongs.

And you weren't made to be in the place. You don't have what it takes to be God. None of us do. So eventually, its going to crush you.

This what the Bible warns of in all its "do not fear" places.

Matt 1:20 *Don't fear taking Mary as your wife, Joseph:* Don't center your life around what other people think of you)

Matt 10:28 -*Don't fear those who can kill the body;* Rev 2:10 *Don't fear what you're about to suffer;* Don't center your life on avoid suffering or death no matter what.

And my personal favorite:

1 Pe 3:6 *Don't fear anything that is frightening.*

Why not? Why should we not organize our lives this way – Because there is a better way.

Because of the second kind of fear. The one that won't kill you – but will cultivate you.

The second kind of fear in the Bible is known as the Fear of the Lord.

This one isn't about being scared; it's about being staggered.

Staggered, amazed, awed... by the character of God.

This fear brings you to your knees in wonder at the love and mercy, the power and the holiness of God that brings life into dead places, that fixes injustices, and heals diseases; that frees people to live without anxiety and cynicism.

This kind of fear - the fear of the Lord –leads to life". Proverbs 19:23 says:

*19:23 Fearing the LORD leads to life,
and one who does so will live satisfied; he will not be afflicted by calamity.*

Other proverbs describe the Fear of the Lord – living from this place where you are staggered by the character of God as a fountain of life (Prov 14:27); as the way you turn from evil (Prov 16:6); the way to have strong confidence (Prov 14:26).

When the center of your life is awe over the character of God you are instructed in wisdom (Prov 15:33) for it is the beginning of knowledge (Prov 1:7).

Knowledge that is a foundation for living – not simply facts to assent to – but a way of living that cultivates the goodness that is in God in you!

When you are experiencing this kind of fear – it dissolves the other kind.

When you're experiencing this kind of fear you are increasingly set free because life no longer centered around what you HAVE TO do, but around what GOD WILL do.

Tim Keller describes what this is like from his experience.

He says when you're fearing God's love and grace your sins that look so big become little things, and you forget them. When you're standing in fear of his wisdom and power, your troubles become little things, and they go away. When you're standing in fear of his adoption and his care for you, then the criticisms and insults of other people become little. That's the joy of the fear of God.

The fear of God means to have God look so huge, so glorious, so wonderful, to in a sense bow under the weight of the magnitude of his greatness, that it gets your mind blessedly off of yourself and finally you're free. "

This is what John is getting at in 1 John 4:18-19 *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. We love because he first loved us.*

What John's getting at here is that when you are staggered by the pure love that is God – when you are in awe of how God loves you without you earning it; without you doing anything to deserve it – how tightly he holds on to you and isn't letting go of you despite your ignorance, stubbornness and rebellion. When you really get in touch with God's love; the fear of being hurt diminishes, the need to control the results of how things go at home, at work, at church – they get tossed overboard. It may happen incrementally but it really happens.

When you find yourself staggered by the love of Jesus, by all he has done for you, it changes you.

There is a story in John 8 about a woman caught committing adultery. The leaders of the community decide she should be killed for it. Jesus is brought into it to see what he'll do with it. And he interacts with the woman, with the leaders completely differently than how they were taught to interact. And in doing so he saves her life. The story ends with Jesus saying to her, "Go and sin no more"

When I put myself in her place, oriented to the first kind of fear, my response to Jesus' words is: "I've got to do that!"

When I put myself in her place living out of the Fear of the Lord, my response to Jesus' words is: "That's really possible, I can do that"

One of the places God has used the most in my life to help me move from fear of being hurt to bear of the Lord is in parenting.

So many issues in my soul got revealed through parenting.

One of those, especially in my early years of parenting, was the weight of responsibility I felt to do everything I could to ensure my kids turned out a certain way. Everything I could to ensure my kids grew up to love Jesus and love me, so they'd want both of us to live with them – Jesus forever and me after Jon died young from the 12 pack of diet coke he drinks a day.

So I was liable to feel proud in the moments when things seemed to be on track and depressed and anxious when it seemed like things were not on track.

And this was exhausting... so many ways as a parent I was exhausted

I remember the years when I was actively parenting every day – I never regretted being Jonah and Jenelle's parent, but there were lots of times I remember wishing they didn't need parenting.

I remember leaping at an chewed up and worn out Jon walking through the door after a 12 hour shift because now HE COULD Parent. Tag your it! I didn't not want to be their parent, but I didn't want to have to actively parent because I was tired, and I don't know about you, but especially when I'm tired I'm much better at reacting than parenting.

Especially when I'm tired, physically or mentally. I'm much better at **throwing my weight around than teaching my children how to throw themselves** on God's mercy. Much better at **laying down the law** than laying down my life. Much better **at leading them to regret their bad choice**, than leading them to repentance that leads to life.

But I'm God's girl, and he was growing me up at the same time I was trying to help my kids grow up.

And as through the years I lived more deeply with Jesus he began shifting my orientation from being scared about what might go wrong because I wasn't a good enough parent; to being staggered by the love and mercy of God, And that freed something in me...

A shift happened where I parented less out of the motivation that said "I better, I've got to make sure, it's up to me... how my kids turn out is in my hands" to

The motivation of "wow, I get to be used by God in my child's life in amazing ways but how they turn out is in God's hands; it's gonna be by God's grace, not my effort.

And that shift is freedom!

I recently started reading Paul David Tripp's book says *Parenting* and he says it really well:

"parenting is not first about what we want *for* our children or *from* our children, but about what God in grace has planned to do through us *in* our children. To lose sight of this is to end up with a relationship with our children that at the foundational level is neither Christian nor true parenting because it has become more about our will and our way than about the will and way of our Sovereign Savior King."

He explains what he means.

"Children are God's possession (see Ps. 127:3) for his purpose. That means that his plan for parents is that we would be his agents in the lives of these ones that have been formed into his image and entrusted to our care. The word that the Bible uses for this intermediary position is ambassador. It really is the perfect word for what God has called parents to be and to do. The only thing an ambassador does, if he's interested in keeping his job, is to faithfully represent the message, methods, and character of the leader who has sent him.

This move from parenting out of being scared of getting it wrong and hurting a ton of people to parenting out of being staggered by the character of God freed me to stand against a culture that says my value comes from how well it deems my child is doing and allows my value to come from the fact that Jesus believes me worth dying for.

It frees me from the need to protect reputations – Mine and Jon's as good parents, Jonah & Jenelle's as kids – to let us be who we are, a family who gets some things right and some things wrong but who are figuring out how to be adults grateful to be alive in God's universe.

A universe where God's wisdom and power are so big that our family troubles are small in his hands, a universe where being a cherished part of his family makes the criticism of our family little things rather than big things..

A family that is learning to not be afraid of that which is frightening because God is with us.

I hope you'll join us on that journey- out of the fear of pain into the freedom of the fear of the Lord

Lord Jesus, thanks for being so committed to us. So relentless in loving us back to your side. Thank you for being who you are. Open our eyes to see more of you every day so we can live out of the freedom you intend. We know you will for you promised you would. Amen. Make it so.