

Elect Exiles - Part 6

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What is the most frequent command found in the Bible? Is it, do not lie? Do not steal? Do not kill? You would think maybe one of those, but you Bible students probably know that the most frequently found command in the Bible is, "Do not fear." You can find, "Do not fear," or a derivative of that phrase -- fear not; have no fear -- you can find that over 60 times in the scriptures. Additionally, if you looked for, "Do not be afraid," you will find that 40-plus times. So a hundred times or more we see the command, "Do not fear." So obviously, God is trying to tell us something.

On the other side of that, we know that the most frequently found promise in the scriptures is, "I will be with you." So what a comforting thought to know that the Lord looks at us and says, don't fear; I will be with you.

Now, would it surprise you that in the text we're going to look at today, we are actually commanded to live in fear? I'm commanded, as a Christian, to live in fear. We're even told that this is to

characterize the life of a disciple of Jesus. So we're going to look at 1 Peter, Chapter 1, and we're going to read 17 and following. 1 Peter 1. "And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and your hope are in God."

We are commanded in the scriptures to conduct ourselves with fear throughout the time of our exile. The title of this series has been, "Elect Exiles." Elect: I'm chosen. Exile: I've been dispersed. So those who have been chosen and those who are choosing to live as citizens of the king, even in a place that they're not citizens of this world. I have been exiled to live in enemy-occupied territory among those who do not choose to follow the king that we serve.

Fear is to characterize the life of an elect

exile. I don't know about you, but I don't like that thought. I don't like that phrase. Because I like to even say I live by faith and not by fear. But the problem is we use lots of words different ways, don't we? We can use fear one way here, and we use fear one way here. It's a lot like the way I use "love."

I love pizza. I do. It's my favorite food in the world. It's always been my favorite food. It will be on my dinner table once a week as long as I possibly can have it. I love pizza. But let me tell you something. I love my wife. I do. I love pizza, and I love my wife. I love my dog. So if you think about those three different statements, do I mean the same thing when I say "I love"? That's a lot like the way we use fear. We use it in different ways, in different contexts.

So here's a statement that I want us to hang our thoughts on for this lesson. There is a kind of fear that is God-given, and there's also a kind of fear that is circumstance-driven. There's a kind of fear that is God-given, and there's a kind of fear that is circumstance-driven.

We are living in some strange circumstances today, aren't we? It's strange for me, for sure. The reason is that there's this virus that has come, and it

has infected millions. It has killed thousands. It's a real deal. It has disrupted our routine. We can't gather in ways that we're used to gathering. We can't go to school in the ways we have gone to school. We can't go to sports the way we used to go to sports. We can't shop the way we have shopped. There are all sorts of ways that this has disrupted our routine, and our economy has suffered. People have lost jobs. People have lost money. People have lost retirement accounts. This brings fear. There's no doubt about it.

And it's normal to experience that kind of fear, but I want you to know this morning, as we look at this passage, that's not God-given. That kind of fear is not God-given. We are human beings, and we have the tendency to rest in fear sometimes. But remember, the scriptures say, in 2 Timothy 1:7, "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and a sound mind." So I have fear at times, but I need to say, is this from God or is this from my circumstances?

So here's the difference.

Circumstance-driven fear runs from. "Runs from."

God-given fear runs to. Here's another one.

Circumstance-driven fear is when my emotions do the

thinking. God-given fear is when the truth guides my thinking. Circumstance-driven fear is based on facts. And there are facts, and I don't want to dismiss those facts. I'm not ignoring the facts of the virus. We believe in science. We do. We believe that's real. But God-given fear is based on truth. And there's a difference, isn't there? There are facts, but then there is truth that is laid over top of those facts that help me interpret the world as a disciple of Jesus.

Circumstance-driven fear works to be in control, so I can feel safe. And so I experience that fear, so I can try to work myself out of this. I've got to get back to normal. Isn't that what a lot of us are saying? But God-given fear worships the God who really is in control. Circumstance-driven fear is to react with timidity in my circumstances, which is really -- the root word there, the Greek word there in 2 Timothy 1:7, it can be translated "timidity." So God is not giving us a spirit of timidity. That's circumstance-driven fear, where I run from. But God-given fear is to respond with the holy spirit's power, love, and sound mind.

So disciples of Jesus do live in fear, but it is the kind of fear that's God-given. We see it right

here in this passage. We see it all through the scriptures. So here is my definition from all of that, from grabbing what scripture says about God-given fear, here is how I would define it: God-given fear is a life of worship devoted to the truth of God's word that causes us to respond to our a challenges, not run from them, with the holy spirit's power, love, and sound mind.

The primary difference between these two kinds of fear is based in action. Circumstance-driven fear makes me run away or makes me freeze and not do what I need to do. That's what the enemy wants. The enemy wants me to run away, or he wants me to freeze and not step into what God has called me to do to obey him. God-given fear, on the other hand, causes me to do something. It causes me to do something the Lord wants me to do. I respond to his word.

So I find three action steps here in the scriptures that we're looking at in 1 Peter, Chapter 1, primarily just in a couple verses there in that passage, the three action steps, and the first one is, God-given fear reflects. God-given fear reflects. You see in verse 18 that we know we were ransomed. We conduct ourselves with fear throughout the time of our exile, because we know something. We have reflected on

something. We've thought about something. That's the implication.

It's Peter saying, think about this for minute. You were ransomed. You were bought at a price. You have unbelievable value compared to anything else in the world. God sent his son to ransom you. That's a big deal, isn't it, to know that God loves me that much, and I am reflecting on that price that's been paid for me, and that is what God-given fear does. That's the first action that it does.

Many times we get so busy that we don't have time to pause or reflect. And as I think back at pre-Coronavirus time, how busy I would get, and this is my routine, and all of a sudden, you know, we stop for a minute; and life hits me, and I have to stop and reflect. That has been so good for me. Wow, it's been good for me. It's made me stop and reflect and go, what is life all about? Why am I here? Who am I? What am I supposed to be doing? So it's good for me to reflect, but the first thing I need to reflect on is what Jesus Christ has done for me.

This is a time of evaluation. It's a time of appraisal. I've heard several people tell me here recently, because of the housing market and how good it is, as far as a seller's market, their house has gone

up in value. And that's a good place to be, isn't it, if that's you right now? How do you really know if your house has gone up in value though? You have to have an appraiser. You have to have someone come in and appraise that property and say, this is how much it is valued at now. This is what we would expect a buyer to pay. What if you got that appraisal done, and it's \$100,000 more than you paid for it? That's a time to party. That's exciting, right?

Well, what does that do though? Does it make you want to do something? Does it push you into action? Maybe that action will be, I'm going to sell; I'm going make that money, maybe. Maybe, more often, for me, when I find that I have something of value, I want to take care of it. I want to be a good steward of it. I want to take it more seriously.

I remember when I paid off my old truck back in the day, the first car I ever paid off, I was like, yes, I paid this truck off. I was out there washing that thing and waxing it and taking care of it, because I want this thing to last, because I've got something of value now, something that's mine that I appreciate. I reflect. God-given fear makes me reflect on the value that I have in his story. I have been ransomed. 1 Corinthians 6 says that you have been bought at a

price; therefore, glorify God in your body. Since you have been bought, take care of what God owns. So God-given fear reflects on God's goodness and what he's done.

Secondly, God-given fear -- this is the second action step I see here, is that God-given fear recalibrates. Believe it or not, I can play the guitar. Now, I wouldn't say that I play it well. I strum it. And my audience is of three individuals, primarily, two. One is nine years old, and one is seven years old. So I'm doing okay, I think, with that audience. My wife, she seems to enjoy it. Sometimes she will walk out of the room. I don't know if that's because of my playing. But I strum. But every time I sit down and play the guitar and I go to play, what do I have to do? You all that know guitars, you have got to tune that thing. It will get out of tune every time.

And so you tune it, and the way you tune is, you take a standard. Now, I'm not musically-inclined enough to find that standard in my ear, so I've got this little tuner. I take that tuner, and I strike that string, and I compare it to the standard of the tuner. So I am tuning it. I am tuning my guitar.

And I will tell you that this has been a time

for me where I've stopped, and I feel like I maybe have gotten a little out of tune, and so I need to come back to a standard and tune my life right now. I want to make sure that I'm following the steps of discipleship that I'm supposed to be, that I'm working at the pace that I'm supposed to work at, that I'm prioritizing people that I should be prioritizing. But here is the question. What if your tuner is not working right? You have got to go back and recalibrate that tuner. You have got to go back to the standard and see if my standard is correct.

So if I look at my actions in my life and if they're out of step with the Lord, they're out of tune, I go back to the standard. But what if my standard isn't right? I need to go back and make sure I recalibrate to the standard. And look at this in this passage in 1 Peter, Chapter 1. We see here, in verse 17, he says, "If you call on him as father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear." So I conduct myself with fear. I have God-given fear, because I look at God who judges impartially according to each one's deeds. God is the judge. He holds the standard.

And I love this passage. I meditated on this passage and thought about this for days before I

prepared this sermon. It says, "According to each one's deeds." I hope you hear that. The standard is not someone else's deeds. The standard for Chip is not what someone else does. The standard is not according to someone else's opinion. The standard is not according to my old self or where I'm at tomorrow. It's according to what I am capable of right now. The Lord only knows that, and he judges me according to my deeds. He knows what I'm capable of. He's impartial.

The Parable of the Soils says that some of us are able to produce 30 fold, some are able to produce 60 fold, some are able to produce 100 fold. That means there is a differences among us. There's different talents, gifts, and abilities. But that doesn't make me lower my standard. It makes me raise my standard to say, I want to be everything God made me to be, and so I'm going to live in fear, not running from, but running to what God has for me. I'm going to let God-given fear recalibrate my standards to his standards. I'm going to reset my priorities. I'm going to reevaluate my goals. I'm going to renew my standards.

But the third action step that, honestly, I think is my favorite in this passage: God-given fear responds. God-given fear responds. If you call on him

as father, conduct yourself with fear. The word "conduct" means to live or walk. So this is a practical statement. Conduct yourself with fear.

What does every good father want to teach their children, including this father that's trying to be a good father? What do I want? I want to teach my children to have responsibility. I want to teach them to be good stewards of what God has given them: To take care of their money, to take care of their time, to take care of the circumstances they are in and respond in those circumstances. That's what responsibility is, isn't it, is the ability to respond.

Circumstance-driven fear is reacting to our circumstances. That's really what it is. God-given fear is responding in our circumstances. And this is what hit me in the face as I was thinking about this. That's really the difference, isn't it? A God-fearing man or woman does not run from circumstances, but they also don't ignore their circumstances.

It has bothered me personally, I will confess, that some people are ridiculing other believers for following the government's recommendations to stay at home and to worship from home. That's bothered me. Some may have been made to feel like they are running from what God has called

them to do. Forsaking the assembly is what some would call it. But the problem with that thinking, I have found, is that is missing a major ingredient to what God-given fear does. It causes me to respond in a situation, and part of that response certainly is worshiping God, but the other part of that is honoring my neighbor and loving my neighbor.

There is a verse one chapter later from where we're at, in Chapter 2, verse 17, that says to honor everyone, love the brotherhood. So there's two different categories of people. There's everybody. My neighbors. Those who may or may not be believers in Jesus Christ. I am to honor them. Number two, love the brotherhood. Number three, fear God. That's what we're talking about. In Number 4 it says to honor the emperor. So a responsible Christian, a disciple of Jesus Christ, balances that. And I am not to sit in judgment of anyone else and say how to do that, but here's what I know, and I'm thankful for this church, this church family I belong with, is that we are honoring our neighbor, everyone, while we're fearing God, and honoring those who are in authority.

And so I think about, in these circumstances, how can I respond? And I believe it takes bravery, courage, to step into even a time where I step back and

say, how can I honor the Lord and honor my neighbor?  
So God-given fear responds in our circumstances.

We're living in a time where thousands have died, jobs have been lost, and our economy has been hit hard, and so I don't want to minimize any of that. It's been tough for a lot. And I don't know exactly what you're going through right now and how this is maybe hitting you as you're thinking through reevaluating when you have stepped back and thought through these things, but for me one thing I was very encouraged by, when I heard: Historians discussing what has happened at times that are similar to this. Not exactly like this, but similar, where people have had to pull back, whether it be because of large-scale depression, large-scale suffering, maybe after war, but certainly also what is similar is those who have been quarantined because of the plagues. Well, here's what's happened. When people have come out of times where they have been, quote/unquote, quarantined, some of the greatest discoveries and accomplishments have occurred.

In science, Isaac Newton, some of his experiments were actually conducted when he was quarantined because of the plague: Gravity. In literature, Shakespeare wrote many of his best works

during times like this where he was having to be by himself. Geoffrey Chaucer wrote *Canterbury Tales* while he was quarantined from the plague. In theology, Martin Luther, Charles Spurgeon, great theologians, they did ministry in times like this and then reevaluated how they did ministry coming out of that, and huge accomplishments were made in the history of God's work.

Here is what I know. The scriptures teach that resurrection follows death. When a seed is planted, it dies, doesn't it, and then that seed, when it germinates, and it grows a plant, and we see something later that's happened, could it be that right now we're in a planting time, and what could it be that God is planting now that we're going to witness growing later to his glory? And I believe that is within you, that's within me, if we choose to live in God-given fear. Respect and honor, a life of worship devoted to his truth, not running from, but running to our challenges with the Holy Spirit's power, love, and sound mind. Reflect on his goodness, recalibrate to God's standard, and respond in our circumstances right now. We love you. I hope you have a great week in the Lord.