

# Dealing With Your Fears

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**Bible Text:** Isaiah 8:11-13; 1 Peter 3:13-16

**Preached on:** November 9, 2008

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Please turn in your Bibles to the prophet Isaiah, chapter seven. We will read a few verses from Isaiah seven and then a few verses from Isaiah chapter eight. And then we are going to turn to 1 Peter.

First of all Isaiah chapter seven the first seven verses.

Now it came about in the days of Ahaz, the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin the king of Aram and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but could not conquer it. When it was reported to the house of David, saying, "The Arameans have camped in Ephraim," his heart and the hearts of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake with the wind. Then the LORD said to Isaiah, "Go out now to meet Ahaz, you and your son Shear-jashub, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, on the highway to the fuller's field, and say to him, 'Take care and be calm, have no fear and do not be fainthearted because of these two stubs of smoldering firebrands, on account of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and the son of Remaliah. 'Because Aram, with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has planned evil against you, saying, "Let us go up against Judah and terrorize it, and make for ourselves a breach in its walls and set up the son of Tabeel as king in the midst of it."<sup>1</sup>

And then in Isaiah chapter eight a few verses beginning with verse 11. God is giving Isaiah a response to the fear that was rising in the hearts of Judah and King Ahaz and also in his own heart.

Isaiah chapter eight beginning with verse 11:

For thus the LORD spoke to me with mighty power and instructed me not to walk in the way of this people, saying, "You are not to say, 'It is a conspiracy!' In regard to all that this people call a conspiracy, And you are not to fear what they fear or be in dread of it. It is the LORD of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear, And He shall

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 7:1-7

be your dread. Then He shall become a sanctuary; But to both the houses of Israel, a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over, And a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Many will stumble over them, Then they will fall and be broken; They will even be snared and caught."<sup>2</sup>

And then if you would please turn, in the New Testament, to 1 Peter chapter three. This is a little bit more familiar passage, 1 Peter chapter three and we will read verses 13 through 16.

Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.<sup>3</sup>

Please pray with me.

*Lord, again, thanks for your Word. Thank you for the grace that you give us in Christ. As we talk a little bit about the whole matter of fear and intimidation, we pray that you would give us insight into your Word. We ask, Lord, that we might be a people who trust in you and do not live lives of fear. Be pleased to bless us now as we take counsel from your Word in this matter. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.*

Fear is something that is with us all. It is with us more than we would like to admit. The political upheaval and economic turmoil that has permeated our society in the past weeks has given a lot of people a lot of fear. The subprime mortgage meltdown and the subsequent fall of the stock market, the ravaging of IRAs, 401ks, and retirement plans has given most of us a great deal of pause. And if you are like many others, you have had more than a little fear with regard to the future and the unknown.

This past week, in the couple of days after the election, the stock market fell more than it has ever done before. There is a lot of fear and anxiety and uncertainty in the world and in our own lives.

Our text in 1 Peter this morning addresses fear. It is real. And in verses 14 and 15 we find the answer to fear given to us. Or at least we have *an* answer to fear given to us by God through Peter. "But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled."<sup>4</sup> Then the answer comes in verse 15. "But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 8:11-15

<sup>3</sup> 1 Peter 3:13-16

<sup>4</sup> 1 Peter 3:14

<sup>5</sup> 1 Peter 3:15

In other words, face your fear; but remember Christ is Lord.

I think this is what Peter is teaching us and this is the lesson for you and for me this morning. I need it as well as you do. Face your fear; remember Christ is Lord.

In our text, in 1 Peter 3:14, Peter is referring to Isaiah and, in fact, Peter uses the lesson God teaches Isaiah with regard to facing fear. Therefore, I want to go back once again to Isaiah chapter seven and then Isaiah chapter eight. Then, finally, I want to come back to this text in 1 Peter chapter three to see how Peter follows Isaiah. Thus we will get the lesson of facing our fears and remembering that Christ is Lord.

So turn back with me, if you would, to Isaiah chapter seven and let's see the situation into which Isaiah is plunged, Israel is plunged, Judah is plunged and the fears that arise in this situation. Isaiah chapter seven, beginning with verse one, "Now it came about in the days of Ahaz, the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin the king of Aram and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but could not conquer it."<sup>6</sup>

Here we have King Ahaz who is the grandson of Uzziah. You may be able to glance across the page and see these words in Isaiah chapter six and verse one, "In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted."<sup>7</sup> That was 740 years before the birth of Christ. King Uzziah died and Isaiah was called.

Uzziah's grandson, Ahaz, is now faced with a great deal of trouble in his kingdom as the text tells us. Rezin is the king of Aram or Syria. If you have got the English Standard Version, it tells you that. The king of Syria and Pekah, the son of Remaliah, the king of Israel, were forming a coalition to move south and attack Jerusalem. And so Jerusalem was going to be put under siege by this conspiracy, by these two nations that were coming together.

Verse two, "When it was reported to the house of David, saying, 'The Arameans [or the Syrians] have camped in Ephraim, his heart [that is, the heart of Ahaz] and the hearts of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake with the wind.'<sup>8</sup> If you have been in a forest in a strong wind, you hear that wind in the forest and you hear the rattling of the branches and you see the shaking of the trees. In like manner, Ahaz and Judah were shaking with fear and trembling. They were about to be attacked. This was not a light fear as Isaiah describes it.

Verse three, "Then the LORD said to Isaiah, 'Go out now to meet Ahaz...'<sup>9</sup> I want you to give Ahaz a word, Isaiah.

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<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 7:1

<sup>7</sup> Isaiah 6:1

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 7:2

<sup>9</sup> Isaiah 7:3

.... you and your son Shear-jashub, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, on the highway to the fuller's field, and say to him, "Take care and be calm, have no fear and do not be fainthearted because of these two stubs of smoldering firebrands, on account of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and the son of Remaliah."<sup>10</sup>

You can picture this. I think this is so because some of you experience fear. There is a little fear and trepidation in your heart because of a family situation or a work situation or something else that is going on in the community, perhaps something that you are about to face. A good friend comes to you and puts his arm around you and says to you, "It's all right. Don't be afraid."

And what is your response?

"Yeah, right. What do you mean, 'Don't be afraid?'"

It's real easy to say, "Don't be afraid." And I suspect Ahaz may have reacted just as I've said. But Isaiah is reminding Ahaz that these two kings and their armies are like sparks that rise from a fire. You have seen this, haven't you? These sparks that rise from a fire soon dissipate in the air. They are extinguished quickly. There is nothing left of them. They are like a vapor. And so Isaiah is telling Ahaz, "Look, Israel and Syria may attack. But nothing is going to come of it."

Let's read on a bit more.

Because Aram, with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has planned evil against you, saying, "Let us go up against Judah and terrorize it, and make for ourselves a breach in its walls and set up the son of Tabeel as king in the midst of it."<sup>11</sup>

Verse seven, "Thus says the Lord GOD: 'It shall not stand nor shall it come to pass.'"

You see, these two kings were like terrorists. We are familiar with this idea in our day and age. They want to put fear and trembling into Ahaz. We also get a little concerned when we think about the terrorism that has occurred in the world. Especially when the elections came close, thankfully we are now past that time, there were some who were sensing maybe there would be a terrorist attack and many people, perhaps some of our friends, would be put in jeopardy. Real fears arose in the hearts of men and women. This is the situation which Isaiah and Ahaz are facing, real fear with regard to military combat.

I remember a few years ago traveling around in a jeep as a chaplain in Viet Nam with my assistant. We traveled around in quite a large area. When I came back to the brigade headquarters after making one of these rounds I was looking at the map and surveying

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<sup>10</sup> Isaiah 7:3-4

<sup>11</sup> Isaiah 7:5-6

some of the territory we had just been in. The brigade the tactical officer asked me, “Chaplain, where have you been?” I pointed on the map to the areas we had been. He said to me. “I wouldn’t go down there without a full battalion.” I shrugged. You see, God was with us. Fear is real, but God was with us. And this is one of the lessons we have to learn.

Look now at Isaiah chapter eight and look at the pattern of truth that God gives Isaiah. Isaiah was, no doubt, caught up with some fear. Isaiah chapter eight and verse 11,

For thus the LORD spoke to me with mighty power and instructed me not to walk in the way of this people, saying, "You are not to say, 'It is a conspiracy!' In regard to all that this people call a conspiracy,"<sup>12</sup>

Hopefully the bulk of us are not among those who believe in conspiracy theories. There are a lot of such people out there. But Ahaz was faced with a real conspiracy against his kingdom. Therefore, there was fear in his heart. And God is saying to Isaiah, “Be careful. Be careful. Don’t fear what Ahaz fears and don’t fear what the people fear.”

Look, again, at verse 12. “You are not to say, ‘It is a conspiracy!’ In regard to all that this people call a conspiracy, And you are not to fear what they fear or be in dread of it.”<sup>13</sup> They are fearful of this invading army. And if you were in that circumstance I would think you too might be in fear of that invading army. But God is saying to Isaiah, “Don’t have fear in your heart like the people have fear in their hearts because of this invading army.”

Now notice verse 13. “It is the LORD of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear, and He shall be your dread.”<sup>14</sup>

If there is someone to fear, if there is someone to dread, if there is someone who is greater than all, it is the Lord God omnipotent who reigns supreme over all the earth. He is the one with whom you have to reckon. In the end it is God who is supreme. And you may have in your heart a fear of that employer because you don’t know what the future is with regard to your particular employment. I can understand that. I can identify with that for sure. But in the end, ultimately, who is in control of your life. It is the Lord God, as the Scriptures say. It is the Lord of hosts whom you should regard as holy, as the one who is above all. He is supreme and he is the one, in the end, you ought to fear and to dread.

Now let me remind you of something with regard to the fear of the Lord. We want to water down this concept. In the Old Testament the one who fears the Lord is the believer. This is the individual who knows God. He or she knows who God is as the Creator of all. This person knows He is the One who directs everything in the world. Nothing falls out that is not in accordance with the plans and the purposes of God.

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<sup>12</sup> Isaiah 8:11-12

<sup>13</sup> Isaiah 8:12

<sup>14</sup> Isaiah 8:13

I mentioned this in a sermon years ago in the church of my in-laws. I put it this way. When you go in the bathroom and you look at the hairs that are sprinkled in the sink, those hairs are there because God counts the number of the hairs on your head. Not one hair falls off of your head and falls into that sink without the purposes of God in view. He is the one who controls all these things. My mother-in-law didn't like that illustration very much. You might understand why. But it is true, is it not, that God is in absolute control of all things. He is the holy one, the holy one above all. Isaiah knew that was the case. He had seen the Lord high and lifted up in the temple. And God was now coming to Isaiah to settle in Isaiah's heart the truth that he ought not to fear. And this wasn't just a pat on the back, "Everything will be all right, Isaiah."

No. It was the encouragement, "I am the holy One and I am the One that has you, Isaiah, in the palm of my hand. And you need to remember that this is the case." And so the dynamic is simply this. "Isaiah, face your fear. Remember, I am Lord of all," This is God's lesson for Isaiah. And this is what you need to remember and this is what I need to remember. Face your fear; remember Jesus Christ is Lord of all.

Now let's go to 1 Peter and see how Peter uses this same argument. In fact, Peter quotes Isaiah. Let's begin with verse 13 in 1 Peter chapter three. "Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?"<sup>15</sup>

If you desire what is good and you live in your home and in the community and in the classroom and in the office, you live as one who desires to be good before God, the question is: Who is there to harm you? It is a rhetorical question. It is a rhetorical question that begs the answer, "No one." This is Peter's starting point.

And then Peter has this little "but." These little "buts" come along for emphasis. "But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness..."<sup>16</sup> Even if, in your attempt to be good in the office, in the classroom, in the community, you should suffer abuse and individuals should revile you. "Oh, you are a goody two shoes, are you?" And they might call you a prude or worse a bigot. And so they should revile you. Even if this should take place, Peter says, "You are blessed."<sup>17</sup>

"Oh, really," you want to say. Yes, really.

This is the truth of God. You are blessed. And why are you blessed? The word blessed is the same word that Jesus uses in the beatitudes. "Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."<sup>18</sup> Blessed are you. Why? You are a member of the kingdom. You are a member of the kingdom of God. Heaven is your

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<sup>15</sup> 1 Peter 3:13.

<sup>16</sup> 1 Peter 3:14.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> See Matthew 5:11-12.

home. And Jesus Christ is your Lord. This *is* a blessing. This is a blessing you need to remember and I need to remember.

Our text goes on, “But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled”<sup>19</sup>

“Do not fear what they fear.” First, these were words to Isaiah. “Do not fear what they fear, Isaiah.” Peter says the same thing to those in the Church who are scattered and subject to persecution. “Don’t fear what other people fear and don’t be intimidated and do not be troubled.”

Now, again, these are words that can trip off the tongue quite easily. But I don’t think Peter is just patting us on the back and saying everything will be all right. In fact, he knows everything will not be all right. Perhaps some of those to whom he writes are going to be killed for heir faith. But there is an answer to fear. Let’s read verses 14 and 15 together.

But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts.<sup>20</sup>

What is the answer to fear? Set aside Christ as Lord in your heart. Remember, Jesus Christ is Lord. And you are to remember this in your heart, as Peter says. Sanctifying Christ, remembering Christ, is a matter of heart. The heart involves the mind and the emotions and the will. We are not just talking about turning the truth around in your head. To be sure, this is where worry and fear starts, is it not? It churns around in your head. I have been there and done that. You wake up in the middle of the night and you can’t go back to sleep. Why? Fear is churning around in your head. Your mind is going a mile a minute. You need to realize Christ is Lord. And you need to work this truth around in your mind. But this is not enough. You need to embrace Christ. There is an emotional context here. You need to love him with your whole heart and mind and strength. There is something emotional about that. And then there is an act of the will where you say, “Yes, Lord. Yes, Lord, I will follow you.”

Then too, you need to remember that Christ is Lord, that Christ is the God-man who lived in this world. He was born of a virgin and he lived a perfect life in this world. He lived that life for you. And because he lived that life for you, his good life is given to you as a gift. He also went to that cross to bear in his body the punishment due to you for your sins so that God could say to you, “Not guilty.” And then he rose again from the grave. He was seen by many. Paul says up to 500 at one time. And the way Paul puts it is this. You can go talk to some of them if you want. Some of them are dead now, but most of them are alive and you can go talk to them. Paul was quite confident of this. And then the disciples saw him ascend bodily into heaven to sit on the throne of the majesty on

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<sup>19</sup> 1 Peter 3:14

<sup>20</sup> 1 Peter 3:14-15

high as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And Peter says, boldly, that God has made him both Lord and Christ.<sup>21</sup>

Yes, you are to remember these things. You are to remember that Jesus Christ is Lord and that he loves you with a perfect love. Nothing transpires in your life except that which he ordains, that which he wills. And so you can have supreme confidence in your God and in Jesus Christ. This is the answer to fear. Do not fear, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your heart.<sup>22</sup> Face your fear; remember Christ is Lord. Time and time again this is the salve that comes to the heart and applied to the heart quells your fear.

But Peter is not done. Peter is not finished in this text. Peter gives us a couple of ways in which you may and I may sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts.

Verse 15, “But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.”<sup>23</sup>

How are you going to quell fear by sanctifying Christ as Lord in your heart? You are going to have to remember the hope that you have, the hope that you have in Jesus. And you must be ready to speak about this hope to others. Do you know what your great hope is? It is the resurrection. It is the resurrection from the dead. This is your great hope. One day Christ is going to come again a second time in glory. And my guess is that when he comes you will have passed from this life.

Your body, as the catechism says, will be resting in the grave, waiting, waiting for that resurrection and your soul, if you trust Christ, will have passed into glory, into the presence of Christ. But God is not done with you yet.

The fact that your soul has passed into glory is not the great hope. It is part of the hope you have. But the great hope is that the dead will be raised incorruptible and so we shall all be saved through the resurrection of the dead.<sup>24</sup>

I remember, again, as a chaplain going to a funeral service for a fellow who was killed in combat. My wife and I went. We have never experienced such wailing and moaning and gnashing of teeth. And when I preached at the graveside at this military funeral, I preached on the resurrection of the dead. You usually don't preach at the graveside. Usually the sermon is in the chapel. But there was such wailing and gnashing of teeth and so many words of sadness without any hope that I was constrained to preach at the graveside. I preached about the resurrection from the dead. After the twenty-one gun salute, one of the fellows in the firing squad came to me and he said, “Thank you, chaplain. Thank you for the word of hope, hope in the resurrection.”

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<sup>21</sup> see Acts 2:36

<sup>22</sup> see 1 Peter 3:14-15

<sup>23</sup> 1 Peter 3:15

<sup>24</sup> See 1 Corinthians 15:52



Part of the way that you sanctify Christ as Lord in your heart is to understand the great hope that you have in Christ, hope in the resurrection. And you are ready to speak to others about that hope. You prepare to do it. That is part of the way you sanctify Christ as Lord in your heart.

And then Peter has another thing to add.

Look at verse 16. You are not only to be ready to make a defense to anyone who asks about the hope that is in you, but you must also have a good conscience. The English Standard Version reads, “having a good conscience.”<sup>25</sup>

Yes, part of the way that you sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts is by having a good conscience. Now this word “conscience,” you notice it is the word “science” with a prefix. Con – science. Science is the word for knowledge. And the little prefix, c-o-n, means “with.” You have eaten chili-con-carne, chili with meat. Conscience is knowledge that stands alongside of the actions that you take. Conscience is that little instrument in you that says, “Yes,” when you perform certain acts and, “No,” when you perform other acts. When you do something wrong, you feel bad. When you do something right, you feel good. Conscience is special knowledge you have with reference to the things you do.

Peter says you are to have a good conscience. That is, you are to have a God-like conscience. Your conscience as it stands along side of your conduct ought to be saying, “Yes,” when God says, “Yes,” and “No,” when God says, “No.” In other words, you ought to be following the Word of God and doing things in your life in accordance with the dictates of God. You ought to be doing the things God wants you to do.

It is just like children need to be doing the things their parents want them to do. And you children know full well that when you do something that is contrary to what your parents want, you will feel bad. That is conscience. And you are to have a good conscience. That is, you are to strive to do the things God desires you to do. And as you do, as you conduct your life in this way, you will be sanctifying Christ as Lord in your heart. You will be recognizing that Jesus Christ ultimately gives you the directions for your life and that you are to follow his directions. And so you have a good conscience.

Verse 16 continues. “And have a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.”<sup>26</sup> Ultimately, those who do slander your behavior because it is good, in the end, in the judgment, will be put to shame. You will not be put to shame. They will be put to shame, those who slander you.

And so here is the answer to fear. Face your fear. Understand your life. Understand what is going on in your life and remember Jesus Christ is Lord. Sanctify Christ as Lord in your heart.

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<sup>25</sup> 1 Peter 3:16.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

I remember going to seminary. I was terrified. Believe me, I was terrified. The reason I was terrified was that in college I did miserably in English. And if you put me in front of a class it was a literal disaster. And so I was terrified. And I was terrified for an additional reason. One of the professors at the seminary I attended was by the name of Geoffrey Bromiley. In those days, Dr. Bromiley sat at his typewriter with pieces of scrap paper collected by the student body on one side of the typewriter and books in German on the other side of the typewriter. And he would sit and translate those books typing away. He translated Karl Barth's *Dogmatic Theology*. He translated the multivolume *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. I thought to myself, "I am a dead man. There is no way I am going to get through his classes."

But in seminary I began to learn some things. I began to wrestle more thoroughly with the fact that Christ actually is Lord of my life and that He has a plan and a purpose for me. And not only so, I began to understand that my hope was the hope of the resurrection. In addition, I was putting effort into having a good conscience.

I did not understand what was taking place in my life until I was able to look back. But in looking back, I can see I was engaged in the process of sanctifying Christ as Lord in my heart. This is, in part, what was going on. I tell you this because I am not any different than you are. I am not better than you are or more capable than you are. I was just learning the lesson of Scripture, a lesson we must all learn.

What is the answer to fear? Remember Christ is Lord. This is the answer. Part of the way you get there is to understand your hope in Christ. And when people ask about it you are ready to talk to them about that hope. And in life you also keep a good conscience. You work on following the will of Christ. And when this is the case, fear diminishes. Fear becomes a less potent force in your life.

So face your fear and remember, remember Jesus Christ is Lord.

Let's pray together.

*Father, thank you. We are weak and feeble creatures. We need you. We need to understand you and your ways. And for many of us as we look into the future we don't know what awaits us. And there may be some fear. But we pray, Father, that we might have perspective and remember that Christ is Lord. And I pray that we might be about the business of sanctifying Christ as Lord in our hearts, being ready to talk about the hope of the resurrection that we have and keeping a good conscience. And so we need not fear.*

*Bless us, we pray, that this might indeed be the case in Jesus' name. Amen.*