

Text: Genesis 22:1-19 (Matthew 6:25-34)

Title: In a Time of Fear Remember *The Lord Who Provides*

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Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

“Let those who fear the LORD say: “His love endures forever.” ... The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?” Psalm 118:4, 6

If you’ve been following the news at all, you’ll know that financial markets are in trouble. On Thursday, the Dow Jones index fell by over 600 points in just the last hour of trading on the New York stock exchange and it seems continue to fall. Banks around the world are facing possible collapse. Although Canada’s banks have been deemed to be the most secure in the world, the Canadian government is providing financial assistance to the banks by dropping the prime rate. On Friday, Finance Minister Jim Flaherty announced that the government was “buying \$25-billion in insured mortgage pools in an effort to boost lending by the country's banks and reduce borrowing costs for Canadians....”

(<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20081010.wflaherty1010/BNStory/Front>)

According to Flaherty, no Canadian bank is in danger of failing. That is good news to hear but there is still a deep nervousness about where all this financial turmoil is going to take us. People are using terms like “deep recession” in an effort to avoid using the “D” word – “depression.” But there are two words that people are not reluctant to use and I have heard them again and again over the last few weeks. Those two words are “greed” and “fear.” Financial analysts have repeatedly stated that the financial market is driven by these two emotions. The essence of the problem, apparently, is that “greed” got us into the credit crisis and “fear” is going to prolong it. One market analyst I heard this week stated that of the two emotions – and I’m not sure that “greed” is really an emotion – but of the two driving factors that influence the market, “fear” is by far the strongest. That’s why financial analysts are telling us that it is going to take some considerable amount of time for the financial world to rebound upward from its current downward trend.

I am not a financial analyst – I’m a Bible preacher. Please don’t look to me for advice on how to deal with your stocks or mortgages or on how to safeguard your retirement income. I would simply encourage you to get some sound financial advice from a qualified person so that you are able to protect your assets as best you can in the current situation. But there is a spiritual dimension to the financial crisis and I want to give you some advice on how to deal with that.

My question this morning is this...

Does the Bible have anything to say about how I am to deal with “fear” created by living in uncertain times?

In a time of great insecurity, does God have a source of security for me that will carry me through these changing times?

What I want to suggest to you on this Thanksgiving Sunday is simply this:

The best way to deal with the fear of our circumstances is to replace it with the fear of our God.

As the Christian writer, Oswald Chambers said,

“The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God you fear everything else.”

“Fear” is an interesting word in the Bible. The same word, in different situations can mean very different things.

In the passage in Psalm 118 quoted on the screen, just one verse separates two, distinct uses of the same word. In verse 4 the writer says that those who “fear the Lord” are convinced of His love – that’s a good thing!

In fact, the abiding conviction of those who have a Biblical fear of the Lord is that **God is for them and not against them! REMEMBER THAT!**

In verse 6, the writer says that when the Lord is with us, we will not “be afraid” of what people can do to us. In other words, the fear of the Lord, a good thing, dispels the fear of man, a bad thing.

But sometimes I think we get confused. Sometimes, **rather than fearing the Lord I think we’re afraid of God.**

Do you catch what I said? This is an old problem. It happened for the first time to Adam and Eve, our parents, and we’ve been repeating the mistake ever since.

The Bible tells us that God created Adam & Eve to have a special relationship with Him. They talked with God and walked with him. But one day, they disobeyed Him. When God next came to speak with them, the Bible tells us that they hid. The Lord searched them out: “Where are you?” He called.

Adam answered: **“I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.” (Genesis 3:10)** Adam dreaded his meeting with God!

Many people go through life believing that God is against them! They are convinced that if they give God control of their lives, that He will take away from them the people or things they love and give them nothing but pain and difficulty.

They don’t fear the Lord – they dread Him!

I recently heard one man's testimony of coming to faith in Jesus Christ. For years he was held back by the fear that if he gave his life to Christ, God would take away the things that gave him pleasure. He dreaded God. He was sure that God was out to get him. But when he did finally put his faith in Christ he found that **God replaced the things that had brought him pleasure with things that brought him joy!**

His dread of God was replaced with the "fear the Lord."

Adam and Eve picture for us what the dread of God looks like. But what does "the fear of the Lord" look like? I can't think of any better Bible picture of the fear of the Lord in operation than the story of Abraham & Isaac on Mount Moriah. In fact, that's what God says this story demonstrates. Notice His words in verse 12 when we get there: "**Now I know that you fear God....**"

[**READ** Genesis 22:1-19]

If we want to live in a proper healthy fear of the Lord, we need to follow Abraham's example. God said to Abraham, "You've got it! You know what it means to fear me, not dread me!"

In a situation where we normally would expect the dread of God, Abraham demonstrated the fear of the Lord.

God said to Abraham:

"Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about." (Genesis 22:2)

God has just told Abraham that He wants to take away from him his most cherished possession – his son!

God's request seemed to go against everything that the human heart holds dear. God wanted Abraham to sacrifice:

- 1) God asked for his "son" -- the Lord's request seemed to go against **his mind**. What would be the value to God of the death of Isaac? It didn't make sense! Why would God ask this of him?
- 2) God asked for his "only son" – the Lord's request seemed to go against **his ambition**. The Bible tells us that Abraham wanted an heir, someone to whom he could pass on his legacy. This would totally destroy that hope!
- 3) And God asked for the son "whom you love" – God's request struck at **his heart!**

Isn't that exactly why we dread God?

We're afraid that If we give God our lives, He's going to take away _____ – you fill in the blank!

- Our family
- Our career
- Our friendships
- Whatever we like, He'll take it away!

OR If we give God our lives, He's going to make us do something we don't want to do – you fill in the blank.

- Become a missionary to some place we don't want to go.
- Witness to our friends at school or work
- Give up my career plans to become a worker in a soup kitchen
- OR EVEN WORSE – become a pastor!
- Whatever we want to do, He'll say NO!

Abraham is faced with exactly what should have generated a dread of God, but instead of dread, Abraham responded with trust and confidence that God was for him and not against him – he feared the Lord!

How could he be so sure? Because He knew His God! If we want to live in the proper fear of the Lord and not in dread of God, there are **three lessons** we need to take from Abraham's example.

First, Abraham believed that God was sovereign

**“Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey.”
Genesis 22:3**

Do you see any hesitation here? God spoke. Abraham obeyed. Why? Because Abraham believed that God was God.

When God spoke, he wasn't offering opinions for Abraham's consideration!

When God spoke, he was not initiating a dialogue with Abraham!

When God spoke, he was not making a tentative evaluation of the situation!

When God spoke, Abraham obeyed! That's what “sovereign” means – God is the King and we obey His commands.

I think sometimes our dread of God is born in our loss of the fear of God. We no longer see God as God –

- Instead of being all knowing, we think He's just well informed!

- Instead of being all powerful, we think He's just very strong!
- Instead of being all-present, we think He's just travels a lot!
- Instead of being in sovereign control of the universe, we think He's just well intentioned.

Joseph Stowell, the president of the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago wrote this evaluation of this view of God:

"Our evangelical culture tends to take the awesome reality of a transcendent God who is worthy to be feared and downsize Him so He could fit into our 'buddy system.' The way we talk about Him, the way we pray, and, more strikingly, the way we live shows that we have somehow lost our sense of being appropriately awestruck in the presence of a holy and all-powerful God. ... If God were to show up visibly, many of us think we'd run up to Him and high-five Him for the good things He has done." (In Moody Nov/Dec 1997)

The fear of the Lord is expressed by obedience to the One who is King of the universe. Not out of cringing fear, but because He is God and He really does know what's best!

There's a story about a man who gave his business to God. He had struggled with it for years. One Sunday he finally said, "That's it; that's enough!" As he drove away from church he decided he had worried enough about it and by the time he got home had unreservedly committed his business to the Lord.

That very night his place of business caught fire! He got an emergency call. He calmly drove down to the site and stood on the sidewalk watching the fire. One of his colleagues, seeing his relaxed demeanour said, "Don't you know what's happening to you?!...It's...it's burning up!"

The man replied, "I know it. I know it. No problem, Fred. This morning I gave this company to God, and if He wants to burn it up, that's His business."

(Charles Swindoll, Living on the Ragged Edge)

Is God God in your life?

Second, Abraham believed that God was good and powerful

"He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."" Genesis 22:5

"...then WE will come back to you."

Didn't Abraham understand? God was asking him to kill Isaac. OR WAS HE?

Had God ever done Abraham wrong? No. He had promised Abraham many things:

- A great name among mankind – King Melchizedek of Jerusalem had already honored him and foreign kings were learning to fear him in battle.
- Descendants too numerous to count – his family was already growing.
- Protection from his enemies – God had delivered twice already on that promise; first in Pharaoh’s court and then again with King Abimelech.
- A land for his descendants to inhabit – Abraham had already walked the length and breadth of it!
- A son from his own body – even though he was over 100 years old, God gave Abraham and Sarah their son Isaac.

God had never done him wrong, why would He do so now, Abraham reasoned.

In fact, Abraham reasoned way outside the box when thinking about the goodness and power of His God.

Hebrews 11:17-19 gives us this insight into Abraham’s mind.

“By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.” Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.”

He knew God’s promises; he knew God’s goodness; he knew God’s power. When he put all the pieces together, he came up with an astounding conclusion – I’m going to kill Isaac BUT God is going to raise him from the dead!

“...then WE will come back to you.”

Resurrection?! We have the advantage of living on the other side of the cross of Christ – we KNOW about the resurrection of Jesus and God’s promise to raise us. Abraham didn’t know anything about resurrection – **but he knew His God!**

Even though the situation looked dire, Abraham knew that God’s plan was not empty tragedy – not the useless death of an only son – but the fulfillment of His promises. God will bring life out of this, not death!

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” Jeremiah 29:11

We are so quick to forget God’s goodness in our lives. When trouble or difficulties come, our vision narrows and all we can see is trouble. We cry, “God you don’t love me; God you’re not good; God, I can’t trust you.” Abraham had to

stare the reality of killing his own son in the face and keep his eyes focused beyond the pain of this moment in order to see the good hand of God – **and he did it!**

There's a central lesson we need to learn here and it's a lesson that believers in God have had to learn again and against over the years.

William Cowper, the English poet laureate who co-wrote many wonderful hymns with John Newton, struggled all his life with the dread of God. He suffered from a depressive condition that might have been helped by modern medication.

[Sometimes fear and dread aren't just a matter of what we believe – sometimes they are related to physical issues that a good doctor can address medically] He couldn't get out from under the fear that God was against him, even though he knew the truth that God was for him. His sick mind believed that although God had declared that He was for everyone in the world, He was against him and him alone.

Despite his false dread of God, in a lucid and clear period he wrote these truthful words about Him:

**“God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.**

**Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill,
He treasures up His bright designs,
And works his sovereign will.**

**Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.”**

Abraham was convinced that regardless of how dark the clouds in his life might appear, they were “big with mercy” because God was good and powerful.

How do the clouds in your life look to you? Big with goodness & mercy? Or dark with dread?

Third, Abraham believed that God would see to it

“Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." ... So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide.”
Genesis 22:8, 14

Even before the ram was seen, he knew the name of his God.

Even before he called him “Jehovah-Jireh” – “the LORD who provides” – he already knew him as the God who provides.

The Hebrew word that is translated “provide” in both verse 8 and 14 is the verb that is usually translated “to see.” The meaning “provide” is a secondary meaning of the word.

With this in mind, some scholars suggest that it could the Lord’s name could be translated, **“The Lord who sees to it.”**

God is the One who takes care of things – He doesn’t leave any loose edges; He doesn’t leave things undone – he sees to it.

Abraham knew by instinct what God’s Word makes clear in many places:

Moses wrote in the Old Testament: **“God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?” Numbers 23:19**

Paul wrote in the New Testament: **“The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.” 1 Thessalonians 5:24**

God will take care of the situation. You can trust him, because He will see to it.

Steve Brown is an American pastor with a fear of flying. One of the members of his congregation, Maynard Watkins, is chief pilot for a major American airline. One day Maynard said to Brown, “Steve, I’m going to help you with your fear of flying. Set aside two evenings, and I’ll take you to our training facilities and let you see what it’s all about.”

During those two evenings Brown went through the pilots’ flight safety training, learned about emergency procedures, and even got to fly in a DC-10 flight simulator.

When it was over, Watkins asked Brown, “Now, Pastor, don’t you feel a whole lot better about flying?”

Brown surprised Watkins with his answer: “I never knew so much could go wrong with a plane, but I do feel better about flying ... because of you. I’ve watched your competence and skill. If men like you are in charge of the planes in which I fly, then I feel a whole lot better.”

It's the same with almost all the fears we face. God is in charge, and when you know Him, it makes all the difference in the world. You can face a situation for which you have no answer, not knowing the answer, but knowing that God will take care of it.

“And to this day it is said, `On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.” (v.14)

God will see to it.

And to this day it is said: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life... But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Matthew 6:24,33

God will see to it.

And to this day it is said: “And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:19

God will see to it.

The fear of the Lord is the confidence...

1) That God is sovereign

- ... It's his world and He's in charge of it.
- ... Your life is really His to direct – You're his creation

Have you acknowledged God's rule over your life?

2) That God is good & powerful

- ... His plans for your life are for good and not evil
- ... What He wants for you is best

Do you trust Him to do what's right for you?

3) That God will see to it

- ... He promises to provide for our needs

Do you trust Him to provide what you need when you need it?

In his book, Reaching for the Invisible God, Philip Yancey points to John Donne, the English writer of the 16th century, as a man who had come to grips with the fear of the Lord. John Donne had taken a close look at his fears and decided for the fear of the Lord.

- “Great enemies? They pose no threat because God can vanquish any enemy.
- Famine? No, God can supply.
- Death? Even that, the worst human fear, raises no permanent barrier to those who fear God.
- I would add: Financial collapse? Depression? Even that, too. God will provide.

Donne concludes that his best course is to cultivate a proper fear of the Lord, for that fear can supplant all others. He prays,

**“As thou hast given me a repentance, not to be repented of,
so give me, O Lord, a fear, of which I may not be afraid.”**

- **Invitation to prayer ministry**
- **Final Song:** Psalm of Thanks
- **Benediction:** Joshua 1:9