

I. Introduction

A. As I mentioned last week, fifteen years ago I was in Kenya for a meeting, and because it was my first trip to Africa I decided to stay a few extra days to look around. A friend of a friend arranged for me to spend a night in a Maasai village with a member of the Maasai tribe who had left the village as a boy. (Last week I mentioned that back in the late 60s, the Kenyan government started bringing young men from each tribe into the cities to educate them so they could then be liaisons back to their tribes, much like the Babylonians were doing with Daniel and his friends. This man was one of them. He lived in Nairobi – a city of three million people, but would occasionally go back to visit his family. We set it up so he would take us to tribal village, which was about four hours by jeep off the road.)

B. It was an unforgettable 24 hours for a host of reasons, one of which related to my refusal to pledge to defend the cows from any lions that might attack at night.

C. The Maasai are cattle farmers. Their life revolves around cows. They keep them in the center of the village; their huts are made of dried cow manure; one of their favorite drinks is a mixture of cow's blood and milk. It's not much like life in the suburbs of Chicago.

D. There is a lot I remember about those twenty-four hours, but the topic is fear. So let me note that mine was on full display. When we got to the village my Maasai guide gave me a stick and explained that it was unthinkable that I would ever be "barehanded." I had to always have a weapon.

E. I kept setting my stick down, which led to several reprimands. Finally, at the end of the day, when we were in our little hut, I asked the guide if I could finally set my stick down or, I joked, am I am expected to sleep with it. He took it and leaned it beside the door, explaining that it would be right there, and that way if any lions came during the night to attack the cows I would be able to immediately grab the stick and run out to defend them.

F. I laughed, assuming this was a joke. It wasn't. He said he was serious. I said, "I was told that the lions were not around this time of year." He said it was unlikely that any lions were around to attack this time of year, but if it happened I needed to be ready.

G. I explained that there was less than a zero percent chance that if a lion came during the night that I was going to grab a stick and run out to fight against it in order to protect some cows. He got mad, saying that I must. It was the only honorable thing to do. I explained that I was trying to be honorable by making it clear that they should not count on me.

H. It got a bit tense, at which point I said, "Look, if any cows die on my watch, I will pay for them. How much does a cow cost?" He said I was being a typical American, trying to buy everything. We didn't ever resolve our standoff, but I'm glad to report no lions came that night. Which was a good thing all around.

- II. Today's topic is courage. The premise is, Daniel and friends had it and we need it.
- A. Perhaps I am not qualified to talk on this subject, because I am on record being a coward. Of course, it's easy for you to judge me and feel brave about lions since it's pretty unlikely that you will see one today. Or this week or this year.
- B. Some of you would be scared silly if I invited you up here to finish this sermon. Or if someone stood up and said, "there is a snake in here!" Public speaking and snakes – along with heights and trips to the dentist – are among the most common fears today.<sup>1</sup>
- C. As a pastor I would add a few things to the list. I see a lot of angst over: cancer, loneliness, a new president and, increasingly, what I'll call vulnerability – a general sense that we are powerless in the face of the face of a big complicated world.<sup>2</sup>
- D. Fear has not been a big part of my adult life, though I've had a few run-ins with it.
1. About twenty years ago I suddenly became scared of elevators. I was on one, the door was closing and all the sudden I felt a wave of panic and jumped off just before the doors closed. I was quite surprised by this. It came out of nowhere. For a few days I used the stairs and then I decided I had to face my fears. My brothers are both engineers who work designing and manufacturing elevators. I called them to hear how safe they were. They assured me that any elevator built in the last fifty years would not – could not – fall. Period. I told them that I had no fear of elevators until I fully embraced the fact that they let anyone make them. I'm thankful to say that those fears went away.
  2. I got another taste of panic-level fear two years ago following my stroke. For the first few weeks I could barely move. And it was during a time that hospital staff kept transferring me from bed to gurney to MRI table and then back. And I was very scared that I'd be dropped. My fears were not rational but that doesn't mean they weren't overwhelming.
- E. Sometimes fear is all consuming. Let's watch this video of Brocki, who is on staff at Christ Church, as she very honestly relays her struggles with fear and anxiety a few years back. VIDEO
- F. Sometimes fear overwhelms us. Most of the time it's less prominent but it shapes us all the same. I'm not sure what level of anxiety you are managing. My study of the future introduced a new set of concerns.
1. Unemployment caused by artificial intelligence;
  2. Out of control technology – as described in Bill Joy's classic article, *Machines Do Not Need Us*;
  3. Political instability and disruption caused by millions of people not able to manage the changes racing our way;
  4. I listed others in the "Monsters Under the Bed" section in the book – pandemics, climate change disasters, dirty bombs.

G. If you want to worry, it's easy to find something to worry about. And that fear will shape us. In fact, fear is a more significant and defining force than we realize. It motivates a lot more behavior than hope does.<sup>3</sup>

H. And yet, we are called to courage. We are "encouraged" – note the root of that word – we are encouraged to be courageous. We are admonished to do the right thing even if the right thing scares us.

I. The biblical term that is often used to describe courage is "stand" – we are to stand up to our fears not duck and run. We see this term used in Ephesians 6. It's also the word Luther used in his famous trial over Scripture. "Here I stand, so help me God I can do no other." I am holding my ground, or I'll die trying.<sup>4</sup>

III. If you want to read along with me, turn to Daniel 6.

A. I started studying Daniel about two years ago. It felt like the place to turn to figure out how to navigate some of the challenges I saw heading our way.

B. As I mentioned last week, when Daniel and his friends were about 12 or 13 years old, Jerusalem – their home town – was overrun by Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian King. At that time, they became prisoners of war and joined the other survivors on a four-month, 500-mile march to Babylon. However, very quickly they were sent to the palace, where they became interns. This beat being a simple slave. But it wasn't ideal. They were stripped of their rights, castrated, forced to learn a new language and otherwise belittled. However, they not only survived these challenges, they grew stronger and were able to make good things happen.

IV. As an aside, let me note that there is a risk with a series like this. The suggestion is that if we are like Daniel we will survive and thrive just like him. We will overcome the lions we face.

A. That would be religion, classically defined – the idea that if we do certain things (or do not do certain things) we can manipulate God into treating us in certain ways.<sup>5</sup> Christianity is not a religion. And it's important to note that the principle reason the Book of Daniel is in the Bible is not to teach us that if we have the same kind of faith as Daniel that we can survive our night with the lions. Daniel is in the Bible to show us the lengths God was went to in order to complete the promise He made to send a Rescuer through Abraham's blood line.<sup>6</sup> Remember, the Bible is a story, and the story is principally about Jesus. Daniel is important because he leads to Jesus.

B. But that doesn't mean we can't learn from him. He is pretty remarkable. In fact, with the exception of Jesus, no one comes off as good as he does. Abraham lies. Moses gets mad and kills someone. David is a philanderer and a murderer. Peter denies Jesus. Paul is hard to get along with. Every other major player messes up somehow. But not Daniel.<sup>7, 8 9</sup>

- C. The Lion's Den event we are focused on comes near the end of Daniel's life. In fact, it comes after a regime change. In 586 BC the Jews are marched to Babylon. In 539BC – forty-seven years later – the Babylonians are defeated by the Persians. Daniel survives the transition and ends up as an advisor in the court of the Persian King.<sup>10</sup> We pick up reading shortly after that.
- V. **Daniel 6:1: It seemed good to Darius to appoint 120 satraps over the kingdom, that they would be in charge of the whole kingdom,**
- A. Darius is the new king. Satraps are governing officials. Provincial leaders.
  - B. The fact that there were 120 of them shows how large the Persian Empire was.
- VI. **V2: and over them three commissioners (of whom Daniel was one), that these satraps might be accountable to them, and that the king might not suffer loss.**
- A. Obviously, there was corruption in the system.
- VII. **V3 Then this Daniel began distinguishing himself among the commissioners and satraps because he possessed an extraordinary spirit, and the king planned to appoint him over the entire kingdom.**
- A. Everything we read about Daniel suggests that he was a very exceptional person.
- VIII. **V4: Then the commissioners and satraps began trying to find a ground of accusation against Daniel in regard to government affairs; but they could find no ground of accusation or evidence of corruption, inasmuch as he was faithful, and no negligence or corruption was to be found in him. Then these men said, "We will not find any ground of accusation against this Daniel unless we find it against him with regard to the law of his God."**
- A. They go looking for dirt but can't find any. So they attack him because of his faith.<sup>11</sup> The bottom line is, they're jealous of him and set a trap to bring him down.
- IX. **V6 Then these commissioners and satraps came by agreement to the king and spoke to him as follows: "King Darius, live forever! All the commissioners of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the high officials and the governors have consulted together that the king should establish a statute and enforce an injunction that anyone who makes a petition to any god or man besides you, O king, for thirty days, shall be cast into the lions' den.**
- A. Of course all of the commissioners have not agreed to this. Daniel would not have agreed to this. They are lying. Oh well.

X. **V8: Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document so that it may not be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which may not be revoked.” Therefore King Darius signed the document, that is, the injunction.**

A. Part of what you get as you read through Daniel is the contrast between the foolish kings and Daniel, and even more than Daniel, God. The officials make a big deal about a “law that cannot be broken.” They come off as a bunch of kids who do not really understand how things work. The law of God is based on how things work. It’s not an arbitrary list of rules God makes up. He explains things for our benefit.

B. Furthermore, there is this sense that they think they are boxing Daniel in with these new rules. They are not. Daniel simply acts with courage. This is where he is brave.

XI. **V10 Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously.**

A. It was illegal to pray to anyone but the King. Daniel knows this but maintains his devotional practices. He has developed spiritual habits to nurture his relationship with God. He didn’t go out of his way to get their attention, but he didn’t hide from them either.

XII. **V11 Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and supplication before his God. Then they approached and spoke before the king about the king’s injunction.**

A. They catch Daniel in their trap and turn him in.

B. If you have read Daniel recently – and if not, please do, chapters 1-6 – you know that these leaders demand that the king do what this irrevocable law he signed says he must do. Darius comes off as a pawn in their hands. And he is all nervous about it. As opposed to Daniel, who is not.

C. Daniel is lowered into the Lion’s Den (kings kept lions for hunting. Sort of like British royalty used to keep foxes.)<sup>12</sup> But he survives the night. In the morning the king is excited that Daniel has survived. He is also mad at those who set the trap and has them thrown into the den. And this time the lions are hungry.

D. This is a rich passage. It has inspired a lot of sermons on bravery. And the early church drew parallels between Daniel going into the lions’ den with Jesus going into the grave.<sup>13</sup>

E. I want to reflect on the fact that Daniel navigates his high stress moments with courage, reflect on how he did that and see what we might learn.

XIII. Let me start by sharing a few 101 level insights about fear. We can pick these up anywhere.

A. It's important to note that there is a difference between being fearless and being courageous. The first suggests that we are not frightened or anxious; the second means we do the right thing even if we'd rather hide under the bed.<sup>14</sup> Many who act courageously report that they were so scared they couldn't spit.

B. It's worth noting that there are appropriate fears and inappropriate ones: it's a good thing to be uneasy around the edge of a cliff or around a fire. It is not helpful to panic when you are in a crowd, nor does it make sense to worry about being attacked by a shark – especially when you live in the Midwest. For the record we are far more likely to be killed by a TV falling off a wall than by a shark. And the most dangerous thing most of us will face today are French fries and a second piece of pie.

C. We know from studies that physical bravery is easier to pull off than moral bravery.<sup>15</sup>

D. We also know that there are a variety of ways to try to handle or manage fear. We can: avoid fear-producing situations (like elevators); we can take meds to lower our anxiety; we can practice breathing and meditative techniques;<sup>16</sup> there are now Virtual Reality approaches – if you hate flying, you can acclimate to flying while on the ground.

XIV. There are also insights about fear and courage that we can draw from the Bible, where it is a frequent topic.

A. The most common way Jesus greeted his friends was to say, “fear not,” which suggests both that fear was a big part of their life and that it was something Jesus was calling on them to leave behind.

A. The big refrain of the Book of Proverbs is that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”<sup>17</sup> We hear the same idea from Jesus in Matthew 10. There He said, “Do not fear him who is able to destroy your body but unable to destroy your soul, instead, fear Him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell.” In other words, fear God.

1. This is a hard concept to grasp. We do not like the idea of fearing God so most dilute it to say, “this means respect.” Respect is not strong enough, but it does not mean dread.<sup>18</sup> I think C.S. Lewis does a great job of capturing how we are to relate to a Holy and loving God when he represents Jesus as a Lion in *The Chronicles of Narnia*.<sup>19</sup>

XV. What do we learn about fear from Daniel? I think there two key take-aways. We need perspective and we need to be prepared.

A. For starters please note that Daniel kept things in perspective.

1. He had a big view of God and a small, humble view of himself. A failure to grasp this starting point is the source of a lot of problems. We have to embrace the idea that God doesn't exist for our benefit, we exist for His pleasure. This is a big, jarring, unsettling idea. It changes just about everything. But once you get it, a lot of pressure goes away.
2. We need to right-size God and His agenda and understand our role in the grand scheme of things. We need to understand that He is God and we are not. His Kingdom matters. Our aspirations may not.
3. I need to do a bit of a dance here because what matters to you matters to God. He loves you too much for it to be otherwise. But, He is God and we are not. In fact, our great value comes because we are made in his image.
4. God in the creator and sustainer of all things. Our biggest, grandest view of him is hopelessly small. But as we move in that direction and see him more fully things begin to fall into place.
5. A while back I printed out a picture from the Hubble Space craft that shows the galaxy, and from time to time I remind myself that God spoke it into existence. He is awesome. I cannot begin to grasp how big, wonderful or powerful He is. My problems and fears do not daunt him. He's got this. I'm going to send out a link this week with a six-minute video that is mind-blowing. As you watch a description of the universe, remember, "the heavens declare the glory of God." He made this.
6. When enveloped by challenging circumstances, most people mis-define reality in one of few different ways.
  - a) Some magnify their peril. They catastrophize their circumstances. These are the Chicken Littles on whom the sky is forever falling.
  - b) Others deny the gravity of their circumstances. These are the Pollyannas who, by refusing to face reality, which ultimately make things worse for themselves and others.<sup>20</sup>
  - c) A third group inflates their ability to deal with the problems.
  - d) A fourth group believes – mistakenly – that nothing bad will happen to them as long as they trust in God, i.e., have enough faith.<sup>21</sup>
7. Daniel does not do chose any of these options. He keeps things in perspective. As do his friends. When they are thrown into the fiery furnace for refusing to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar, they say something very wise. Their situation is very much like what Daniel is facing at the end of the book. Everyone around them is acting like idiots. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refuse to play along. Because they refuse to bow to the king, the king orders them thrown into a furnace. They respond – I'm reading now in ch. 3:16:

a) Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

8. When God comes into clearer view – and his power and glory and faithfulness – you are reminded of his promises, among them, eternal life.

9. Daniel, his three friends keep that in mind. And because eternity changes everything, they do not panic when someone threatens to kill them.<sup>22</sup>

10. My Dad had this perspective later in life. And it profoundly changed the way he faced death. After his cancer diagnosis he told us, “There is no bad ending for me. If I die I go to heaven with Christ; if I live I am around people I love. It’s all good.” You can have that kind of peace. How?

B. Daniel was able to navigate trials because he was prepared, and He was prepared because he prioritized his relationship with God.

1. Our passage today notes that Daniel had some deeply ingrained spiritual habits of prayer and Bible study. These shaped his soul in ways that allowed him keep his wits about it when even when there was all kinds of crazy-making going on everywhere he looked.

2. The Bible tells us that this is the path to take. Read Joshua 1:8 about our need to meditate on God’s Word day and night. If you live on a diet of Fox News or CNN you will think a certain way. And it will cultivate anger and disdain and fear. Read the Book. Flood your mind with insights from God. Allow his promises to control your inner narrative.

3. One of the ways first responders do not panic is that they prepare. They think through scenarios and decide how they will respond.

4. This past week I went to see Sully – the Tom Hanks & Clint Eastwood movie about the pilot who successfully landed a plane in the Hudson River. Good movie. I wanted to go because I read some article and interviews with Captain Sullenberger. He had been a fighter pilot with the US Air Force before serving as a commercial pilot for twenty-nine years. All of which prepared him to take decisive action after birds knocked out both engines of his jet. His calm efforts saved the lives of all 155 people on board US Airways Flight 1549.

5. In his book, *Highest Duty: My Search for What Really Matters*, Sully notes: "We all have heard about ordinary people who find themselves in extraordinary situations. They act courageously or responsibly, and their efforts are described as if they opted to act that way on the spur of the moment. . . I believe many people in those situations actually have made decisions years before. Somewhere along the line, they came to define the sort of person they wanted to be, and then they conducted their lives accordingly. They had told themselves they would not be passive observers. If called upon to respond in some courageous or selfless way, they would do so."

6. I would submit to you, Daniel was ready.<sup>23</sup> He kept his eyes on God. His life and character were shaped by this focus. Consequently, his inner world wasn't thrown hither and yon by the craziness that went on around him. He ended up bringing order to it instead.

7. Let me emphasize this point. As we roll forward into a world that has some more good and some more bad but is almost certainly faster and more invasive, you will either have an inner world that shapes your life or your life will be molded by everything going on around you.

8. The brilliance of Daniel is not that he survived a night in the Lions' Den. It's not like he wrestled the lions. He likely went to a corner and sat down. The brilliance of Daniel is the way he lived his life.

C. Men and women, do not allow yourself to be surprised by the setbacks you will face. They are coming.

1. Bad medical reports. Job losses. Law suits. None of this will surprise God or change the outcome of what matters. We can live above a lot of this because in Christ we have God's promise of eternal life. Courage is the right perspective. It comes from knowing God and allowing His promises to shape your outlook.

D. Let me say this differently – worry is a bad plan. You can learn to relax in the face of challenges. You can learn to be strong and courageous and part of the solution. In order to move in that direction, you need to move closer to God. And that requires a spiritual growth plan.

XVI. In a moment we are going to pray. Before I do let me ask you to take out the FutureView cards you were handed. If you didn't fill this out last week, please do so now.

A. If you do, starting tomorrow you will receive brief devotionals that tie in with the sermon.

B. These cards also allow you to sign up for a small group.

C. And you can use the back to share any prayer requests that you'd like us to be praying for.

D. The way to be prepared for tomorrow – whatever it brings – is not to build a bomb shelter or buy gold or have dried food buried in your backyard. It's to be right with God.

XVII. Prayer

XVIII. Transition to worship – done by campus pastor: We can grow in courage. Peter did. One day he denies Christ, cowering in front of a young peasant girl who says, “hey, you were with him.” Later he stands toe to toe against Roman leaders and all manner of people who could cause him great harm. We can grow in courage. A key factor is right-sizing our view of God.

A. The picture on the screen behind me was taken by the Hubble Space probe. It shows a corner of the universe that God made – and that small corner is more massive than we can begin to grasp. God spoke it all into existence. He is amazing at levels we can hardly grasp. There are many things that are mighty. But they are “only” mighty. God is Almighty.

B. Look at him. Prepare. Courage follows a relationship with Him.

XIX. Quotes: to be interspersed in with announcements before and after the service

A. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Proverbs 9:10.

B. Courage is not the absence of fear but the judgement that something else is more important.

C. Courage is a quality so necessary for maintaining virtue, that it is always respected, even when it is associated with vice. Samuel Johnson.

D. Courage is contagious. When a brave man takes a stand, the spines of others are often stiffened. Bill Graham

E. Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point, which means, at the point of highest reality. A chastity or honesty or mercy which yields to danger will be chaste or honest or merciful only on conditions. Pilate was merciful until it became risky. (C.S. Lewis)

F. When I worry I go to the mirror and say to myself, “This tremendous thing which is worrying me is beyond a solution. It is especially too hard for Jesus Christ to handle.” And then I smile and am ashamed. Corrie ten Boom

G. It requires an ever-growing share of our daily allotment of courage simply to read the newspaper.

H. Everything you want is on the other side of fear. Jack Canfield

I. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. Ecclesiastes 12:13.

XX. Questions

A. On a scale of 1 (no fear) and 7 (panic attacks), what is your fear level normally?

- B. What do you fear? What do you think you should fear?
- C. When have you felt most safe?
- D. What would it take for you to be courageous?
- E. Does the idea of fearing God make sense to you?

---

<sup>1</sup> And there are some clinical phobias about other things like wide open spaces, injuries, crowds and the dark.

<sup>2</sup> In a recent issue of *First Things*, R.R. Reno opens an essay stating, I don't think we've fully realized how acute feelings of vulnerability have become in twenty-first-century America. At prestigious universities, young people with every reason to believe they'll land on the top end of society nevertheless feel threatened, so much so that some call for "trigger warnings" and "safe spaces." It's easy to mock this, as I have done in the past. But such a response is wrong, or at least short-sighted. Trump, Sanders, European populism, and the rest of the turmoil in today's public life tell us something. A pervasive disquietude is transforming our society and politics. (R.R. Reno, "Politics of Vulnerability," *First Things*, Oct. 2016, p. 3).

<sup>3</sup> We see that in this election cycle. It is far easier to stir hate than love. Far easier to scare people than inspire them.

<sup>4</sup> In his first convocation address years ago, a young Albert Mohler attempted to call the faculty of Southern Seminary back to their statement of faith with the line, "Don't just do something, stand there." (Collin Hanson, *Blind Spots*, Crossway 2016, p. 63).

<sup>5</sup> Skye Jethani writes: The appeal of human religion is the illusion of control. We believe that engaging in certain rituals, prayers, or moral codes will protect us from the uncertain and dangerous forces that surround us. We believe God will be favorable to us for our devotion and obedience, and unfavorable toward those who stray. In other words, religion gives us a sense of control in a fearful world.// This is also the appeal of idolatry. Scripture presents us with an uncontainable, uncontrollable, all-powerful God who has created us in his image. The second commandment forbids us from making an image of him because invariably any image we create will be a projection of ourselves that inverts the proper divine-human relationship. Rather than submitting to the will of God in whose image we are created, we create idols in our image and expect these containable gods to submit to our will.

<sup>6</sup> They divide roughly into three types: history, prophecy and wisdom literature. Daniel is not a prophet – nor did the Jews ever view him as one – but his book is found in that section. And Jesus calls him one and he makes prophetic announcements. But the Jews do not include the Book of Daniel in with the prophetic literature. I am basing this on the fact that they do not list him with the prophets. (While we divide the Old Testament into four categories, the Jews divide it into three: 1) the Law; 2) the Prophets (Nebiim) – which includes some of our historical books – e.g., Joshua, Judges, Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings; 3) the writings. Daniel was in the third category.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel is rightly held up as a great model. He does something no one other significant biblical figure other than Jesus pulls off: he not only avoids any scandals or significantly stupid decisions; he appears to be a wise, thoughtful

godly person throughout his life. He has a long run in a high profile, powerful position under the spot light of his enemies and yet he avoids any major sins.

With the exception of Jesus, everyone who is prominently featured in the Bible messes up. Noah has “family issues;” Abraham throws Sarah under the bus; Moses can’t control his temper; Peter denies Christ; James and John make a selfish grab for power; Paul is on the wrong side of a tiff with Barnabas. There are others who appear to be strong, thoughtful, and God-honoring – such as Joshua and Caleb. But we do not hear much about them and so it is more of an argument from silence. Meanwhile, everyone who gets more than a few lines of ink in the Bible seems to do something to remind us of just how deeply sin courses through our veins.<sup>7</sup> Daniel is the exception. He’s a rock star. He lives scandal free. He does not fall to pride; he doesn’t get angry; he doesn’t kill anyone; he doesn’t use a private server for his emails and his name doesn’t show up as having an Ashley Madison account.

<sup>8</sup> For a while Daniel was contested by historians because it didn’t seem to line up with the records from archeology. But now it does – a point I will develop a bit more in the sermon on faith and in the videos from the Oriental Institute. It is worth noting that as time goes on, the trustworthiness of the Bible is strengthened. About a year ago I met with a man who was in his early 80s. His health was failing and he was starting to think about God. He explained that he had gone to Sunday School as a child, but then he went to college to study science and he had taken a religion class and realized that the Bible was just a book and it was bad history at that. I pushed on that and heard his theories and said, “Wow. I am familiar with your theories, but no one holds to them anymore. It’s like you are looking at a periodic table with 75 elements on them. For a long time the book was assumed to be written by someone other than Daniel who was writing much later. This view was supported by several “mistakes” made in Daniel. We know see that the mistakes were not made by Daniel. He got it right. It’s now considered good history. We get supplemental reporting from several Jewish sources such as Josephus. We also get some details from the Babylonian Chronicles – which were written on cuneiform tablets. And it increasingly supports the Bible. This is good history.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel says that the sack of Jerusalem happened in third year of Jehoiakim’s reign when it was the fourth. This was considered a mistake, though we now know that the Babylonians dated their kings differently – they considered the first year a “year of ascension” and the second year as the first year of the king’s reign. Because Daniel was writing from Babylon, he used the Babylonian system. In Daniel 5 Daniel refers to Belshazzar as the last king of Babylon. But other ancient sources – i.e., Herodotus, Josephus, etc. – do not list him. They stop with Nabonidus. But not too long ago we found an inscription by Nabonidus saying that he took off to establish a capital in Teman and left his son, Belshazzar, behind to rule. This shows that Daniel was more accurate than Herodotus – who wrote only 50 years later.

<sup>10</sup> It appears as though Daniel outlasted three emperors and navigated six big promotions.

<sup>11</sup> Some have suggested that they Persians looking to undo Daniel may have been hostile to him because of racial prejudice.

<sup>12</sup> The kings had them for hunting but you had to feed them so you threw a people in the bit just to remind everyone who was king.

<sup>13</sup> One of the things that is highlighted is that both Daniel and Jesus are placed in “graves” that are sealed by the signet ring of a pagan ruler.

<sup>14</sup> If we take the generally accepted definition of bravery as a quality which knows not fear, I have never seen a brave man. All men are frightened. The more intelligent they are, the more they are frightened. The courageous man is the man who forces himself, in spite of his fear, to carry on. Discipline, pride, self-respect, self-confidence, and the love of glory are attributes which will make a man courageous even when he is afraid." General George Patton

<sup>15</sup> Alice von Hildebrand wrote, "Physical courage – something you find on athletic fields, for example – is very common, but moral courage is not. It is not easy to stand up for what is right when that might mean losing one's job, one's family or even one's life. It is far easier to keep quiet and let things slide."

<sup>16</sup> If you know how to worry, you know how to meditate! Just change what you think about and you will be practicing Christian meditation.

<sup>17</sup> This is the pay dirt insight that Solomon shares at the end of his life. He was given virtually unlimited access to everything. He had money, power, wisdom, fame, hundreds – perhaps thousands – of women. He denied himself nothing. And then at the end of his life he describes his pursuits as folly, vanity, chasing after the wind and says, here is what I have learned about life: Fear God and keep his commandments.

<sup>18</sup> In his sermon on Fear based on Phil. 2, Dr. Robert Rayburn writes, "John Bunyan, in the second part of *Pilgrim's Progress* has a character, Mr. Fearing, who has a weak faith and was never sure whether God was going to save him or damn him. Of Mr. Fearing Bunyan says, "he was always afraid that he should come short of whither he had a desire to go." [*Works*, iii, 213] But Mr. Fearing is not the Bible's idea or Bunyan's idea of what a Christian *ought* to be, but rather of a Christian who had not laid claim to the peace and the confidence that was rightfully his. In any case, the fear and trembling that Paul is urging upon us is not such a fear or dread. It is not insecurity or alarm at the prospect of failure. Nor is it a fear that drives out as dark and as unhappy and as sinful fears so often do. It is not a fear that drives out all the other emotions displaces all the other spiritual conditions within us. Worldly fears of the kind I have mentioned often do this. The fear is overwhelming. When one is afraid, really afraid, terrified, some of you know this – for good reasons or for bad it doesn't make any difference – he can think of nothing else, sometimes he cannot move. He is actually, physically paralyzed by his fear. This has often happened to soldiers. Safety dictates that they move, that they run, or retreat, but they cannot move, they cannot make their bodies obey because fear has literally paralyzed them. But the fear and trembling of which Paul speaks is not like that at all. It is not a paralyzing fear it is an animating fear. It is not a fear that imprisons, it is a fear that liberates and frees. This fear, amazingly, is congenial to other affections and emotions and convictions at the same time. You can, for example, fear God and be happy at the same time. "*Happy is the man who fears the Lord,*" we read in *Prov. 28:14.*"

In the first chapter of his first letter, Peter speaks of his Christian friends' "inexpressible and glorious joy" in their knowledge of Christ, and then goes on to say to them, "Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear." Reverent fear and inexpressible joy can exist in the same heart at the same time! The world does not know this, but it is true.

And not just fear and joy. We know how love and fear can go together. I loved my father, but I feared him too. And that is even more so of the believer's fear of God. "Let those who fear the Lord say, 'His love endures forever.'" [Ps. 118:4]

Strangely, even confidence and security can co-exist in the same heart with the fear of the Lord. The world cannot put these two things together. Fear is precisely the absence of calm and security and confidence. Remember David's lovely remark? "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him and he delivers them." There is a calm, a peace, an assurance that is the fruit of this fear of the Lord.

Well if it not a bad fear, a craven fear, a dark and paralyzing dread, and if it co-exists with joy, peace, and love, what

is this fear and trembling that Paul is speaking of?

Well, it is not easy to answer that question. I'm not sure that anyone has really ever perfectly answered it. It is something I think finally the Christian knows only when he feels and experiences it, or at least knows completely. Typically the commentaries will say that it amounts to reverence, homage, and devotion, and it surely is all of that. But the Bible uses the word "fear" in this positive sense in so many ways that it is impossible adequately to define it with a single word or term."

<sup>19</sup> The fear of God can – and does – coexist with joy and peace.

<sup>20</sup> Skye Jethani writes: In Psalm 3 we are given a glimpse into how King David viewed his circumstances. On the one hand, he is sober and honest about the perils surrounding him. "Many are rising against me," he says. On the other hand, he also recognizes the reality and the power of God. "But you, O Lord, are a shield about me." Defining reality requires both. We need the courage to see and admit the true threats against us, but we also need the wisdom to see and trust the presence of the Lord who is with us. The mature Christian, not to mention the godly leader, will do both.

<sup>21</sup> In C.S. Lewis's book, *The Screwtape Letters*, Lewis has Screwtape – a senior demon – say, "Tortured fear and stupid confidence are both desirable states of mind." Note: They were desirable to demons trying to mess up people. The point Lewis is making is that they are both bad approaches.

<sup>22</sup> As Puritan preacher Richard Sibbes wrote back in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, "You can kill me but you can't hurt me."

<sup>23</sup> Oswald Chambers agreed: "We presume that we would be ready for battle if confronted with a great crisis, but it is not the crisis that builds something within us—it simply reveals what we are made of already. . . . Crises reveal a person's true character." Whether your challenges are public or private, now is the time to choose courageous obedience to Jesus. Such trust positions you to experience his omnipotence. Whether others agree with your convictions or not, they will know that your faith is genuine and your Lord is real.