

## FEAR

Psalms 56:3-11, Matthew 26:39

By Raymond White

The Bible says in many places particularly in Psalms fear not, don't fear, don't be afraid. How literally are we to take that?

***Psalms 56:3** What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee. **:4** In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me. **:11** In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me.*

If we take it literally, then it's a contradiction: "I am afraid" versus "I will not fear." Clearly it is optimistic exaggeration. Truth is, we all fear what "flesh can do" to us. I fear loss of income, sickness, criminals, government, lawsuits, and a host of lesser threats. I don't live in constant terror of those things because they haven't happened. But if one of them did happen, for instance if I were kidnapped by terrorists and threatened with torture, of course I'd be afraid. Even Jesus was afraid, that's why he prayed in despair: "let this cup pass."

Let's take this verse as it was intended: The more we trust God, the more able we are to manage our fear. But even if we trust absolutely as did the prophets, we still fear.

God's servants are not fearless, they are just driven. That's important to know lest we leave the scarier tasks to those we think braver than ourselves. Great people have great fears. Their greatness lies not in fearlessness, but in bravely doing what they are afraid of. That is the virtue we call courage.

Let's start with Moses. Moses tried everything he could think of to get out of the job that God was calling him to. Each time Moses threw up an obstacle, god responded by giving Moses something to overcome that obstacle.

***Exodus 3:11** Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh? In other words, I'm a nobody.*

***Exodus 3:12** I will be with you. I don't care that you are a nobody, I'm on your side.*

***Exodus 4:1** But, behold, they will not believe me...*

***Exodus 4:3** God replied by turning Moses' rod into a serpent. That, they will believe.*

***Exodus 4:10** I am not eloquent...I am slow of speech... I'm no speaker, get someone else.*

***Exodus 4:14** Aaron...cometh forth to meet thee.*

So, whatever problem Moses had that he was afraid of that made him cower away from the task at hand, God resolved that problem. And finally Moses accepted the assignment.

Now, some more prophets.

***1 Kings 19:3** And when [Elijah] saw that [Jezebel was after him] he arose, and went for his life.:**4** ...and requested for himself that he might die...*

***Job 42:6** Wherefore I [Job] abhor myself...*

*Isaiah 6:5* Woe is me for I am undone because I am a man of unclean lips and my eyes have seen the lord.

*Isaiah 64:6* All our righteousness is as filthy rags.

*Jeremiah 20:9* I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name.  
[Jeremiah resigns] *But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was wary with forbearing, and I could not stay.* [But God wouldn't accept the resignation.]

*Daniel 10:8* My comeliness was turned into corruption.

*Jonah 4:2* I knew that thou art a gracious God and merciful, *:3* Therefore, O Lord, take my life from me.

*Habakkuk 3:2* I have heard thy speech and was afraid.

*Luke 5:8* Peter...fell down at Jesus knees saying, Depart from me for I am a sinful man.

*Matthew 26:39* O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.

So there's the list of great people who were afraid. Isaiah, Habakkuk, Job, and Daniel were afraid of God. Elijah was afraid of Jezebel. Moses was afraid of Pharaoh. Jeremiah was afraid of the Jews. Peter was afraid of Jesus, and Jesus was afraid of the cross (he was not a masochist). And Jonah, if you can imagine it, was afraid of succeeding. He would rather die (he said so) than to convert those undeserving Ninevites.

They were each afraid of something, but they each got the job done.

Everyone is afraid of something. You are afraid of something. Just remember that great people are not great because they have no fear but because they do what they have to do in spite of their fear. That is what we call courage.

Sometimes fear is justified, but sometimes fear is not at all justified, as when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and said, "Fear not." He meant it. That was no exaggeration. Seeing an angel is frightening, but this angel was Mary's friend and ally and nothing for Mary to be afraid of. And so he calmed her down and assured her and said wonderful things to her.

"Fear not" can mean either of two things. It can mean that there really is nothing to fear, or it can mean don't worry *so* much about your current peril, manage your fear because God is in control and, even if the worst happens, when this is all over you'll be okay. That second is a common situation when we sit in a dentist's chair.