

When I Am Afraid

Last Sunday we were in Rapid City, South Dakota, enjoying much cooler temperatures and paying our respects to the late Wild Bill Hickok. Our family, the four of us, survived a week together in the confines of Paula's car and still love each other so that's a good thing. Paula and I are going to take a couple of days this week to try to recover from the vacation last week. Anyway, it's good to be home and it's good to see you here this morning.

Today is family day and we welcome our children as they join us for our worship service. Our students are all back in school now and settling into the school year. I was thinking about my elementary school years. We lived in Muskogee and I attended Pershing Elementary School. They tore it down a few years ago so I can't go back. Sad isn't it? I remember at the end of the summer, every year, the dread and fear that came over me as I approached a new school year. I hated school! Isn't there an alternative? We hadn't heard about home schooling in those days and besides, mom and dad both worked at the pottery. I had to go to school but it was a scary place. Looking back on it now I don't really know why I was so afraid, why I hated school.

Maybe it was those drills we had to do. You know, fire drills and tornado drills and preparing for the nuclear attack that was coming during the cold war. We all marched out into the hallway and got down on the floor with our head tucked between our knees and our hands over our head. I'm not sure how that was going to protect us from a nuclear attack, or even a tornado, but it was the best plan they could come up with at the time. I don't know if you still have tornado drills but I understand now you have drills to prepare for intruders, practicing locking down the school or the classroom in case of shooters on campus. What a scary reality.

Maybe it wasn't just those drills. The teachers were a little scary back in the day. I look at the teachers in our church and they are all young and pleasant and I look back at the pictures in my year book and the teachers all looked really old. There wasn't a twenty or thirty year old teacher in my school. It looked like teachers weren't allowed into the classroom until they were past 60. How could that be?

Maybe it wasn't the safety drills or the teachers, maybe it was the bullies. I won't use last names in case anyone is from Muskogee, but there were bullies in my class and in the classes ahead of me. Mark and Harold and Grady picked on everyone, including me! I was a nice guy and I wasn't a fighter so I was a target at times for bullies. Maybe it was the bullies.

Thirteen years ago this week life changed for all of us as America came under attack, not from a single country but from an ideology. Thirteen years ago this week radical islam and a bunch of psychotic bullies forced their way into our lives as they brought down the World Trade Centers in New York City and attacked the Pentagon in our nation's capitol. Not a day goes by without terrorist bullies making the news somewhere in the world and that's what they are, bullies. Whether we are in the third grade dealing with a bully that knocks our books out of our hands or pushes us down, makes fun of us or takes our lunch money, or whether it is terrorists that frighten us with their threats and their cruel actions, the result is the same, the effect is the same, we are frightened, terrorized. We are afraid.

King David knew about bullies. Look what he wrote in Psalm 56. **“Be merciful to me, O God, for men hotly pursue me; all day long they press their attack. My slanderers pursue me all day long...” Psalm 56:1-2.**

David wasn't speaking figuratively. His enemies were literally chasing him, trying to kill him. “Yes, but David was a king with bodyguards and an army and lived in a walled city. How frightened could he be?” David had been anointed king, but he wasn't king when he wrote this psalm. The bible tells us he wrote this when the Philistines seized him in Gath.

1 Samuel 21 gives us the details behind this Psalm. King Saul was trying to kill David and David was running for his life. He doesn't know who to trust or where to turn. In desperation he fled to the Philistine king in Gath. This shows you how desperate he was that he would run to the Philistines, to Goliath's hometown no less. Perhaps he thought since he and the Philistines were both Saul's enemies, they would be his friends and help him. He was wrong. They seized him and David acted like he was crazy, hoping they would not kill a crazy man. 1 Samuel 21 says, **“David took these words to heart and was very much afraid of Achish king of Gath.” 1 Samuel 21:12**

David, the boy who killed a lion and a bear, who killed a giant with just a sling shot, this David was very much afraid. Here he was – alone, frightened, unsure of what to do. It sounds like me in the third grade. And starting the seventh grade at Clinton, not knowing anyone. And again in the eighth grade, starting in a new school again. Or starting college, or a new job, or facing bullies or terrorists, or facing the empty nest in your house, or facing life after a divorce or a death or a law suit or a million other changes that come. Life can be frightening, uncertain. We feel terrorized as we face our troubles alone.

The bible often says, “Do not be afraid.” “Fear not.” Preachers tell us why we shouldn’t be afraid. “If you are afraid you aren’t walking in faith. You have to chose, either fear or faith.” And then we walk away after that sermon feeling even worse because we are not only afraid, but apparently we aren’t faithful Christians either since we have given in to fear.

David didn’t say, “If I start to become frightened, I just begin to think positive thoughts and confess the word and all my fears just blow away like dust in the wind.” David said, **“When I am afraid, I will trust in you.” Psalm 56:3.** “When I am afraid.” Not, “When I’m tempted to be frightened” but “when I am afraid.” David had reason to be afraid. There were real threats out there. Real enemies. Real bullies and terrorists and troubles that wanted to devour him. And he wasn’t just thinking about becoming afraid, it was too late for that. He was afraid!

The King James Version of Psalm 56:1-2 reads, **“Be merciful unto me, O God, for man would swallow me up...mine enemies would daily swallow me up, for they be many that fight against me...” Psalm 56:1-2.** (It sounded to me like pirates were after him – “argh, *they be many* that fight against me...”) David’s enemies and troubles seemed to want to swallow him up, to devour him, to eat him alive.

Maybe we can relate. There are real things, real bullies and troubles that want to eat us alive, to devour and consume us. Notice that David’s enemies were unrelenting. It was every day that he was under attack. There was no relief, no escape. And it wasn’t just a physical attack but it was mental and emotional as well. They were slandering him (v2). Words were constantly spoken against him. Anything he said, any defense he offered, his words were immediately twisted and used against him (v5). People were spying on him, stalking him, conspiring against him, just waiting to take his life from him (v6). That unrelenting emotional and mental attack may be worse than the physical attack. It never stops trying to devour us.

We face really frightening things in this world and really frightening things were happening to David, but as all of this was happening David said, **“When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?” Psalm 56:3-4**

David was afraid, but David chose to put his trust and confidence in God. Not in men (David was alone), not in his own ingenuity, not in wealth or position or ability, but his confidence was in God. David believed that God would provide even when the circumstances

suggested otherwise. David believed that God had his best interests at heart, that he would deliver him at the right time, in the right way.

When I am afraid, I will trust in you and as I trust in you, I will stop being afraid. As I learn to rest in you, I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me? In the end, my hope, my confidence is in the Lord.

I was praying one morning a couple of weeks ago and I said “Lord, I trust you.” And then I thought, “If I’m being honest, some times I don’t seem to trust you. If I trust the Lord so much, why am I so afraid, so fearful about some of the things I was praying about?” So then I prayed, “Lord, I trust you, but when I can’t seem to trust you, I surrender to you.”

“In God I trust and I will not be afraid” David says. But sometimes I have a hard time trusting him, the outcome isn’t what I prayed for, things don’t turn around the way I had hoped, his ways are so far beyond and above my ways and I find myself struggling to trust in the dark, in the mystery. Sometimes I’m still afraid, but if I can’t trust him, I can choose to surrender to him. I surrender to his sovereignty. I surrender to his will, his way and I throw myself and my fears upon him and his mercy. “Lord, I surrender to you and I will learn to trust you. O for grace to trust you more.”

In the Psalm just before this, Psalm 55:22, David declared, **“Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall.” Psalm 55:22.** When I am afraid, I will cast my cares on the Lord and he will sustain me. He won’t let me fall. My confidence rests in him and I won’t have to be afraid.

David had confidence in God and notice that he had confidence in God’s word as well. David said he was trusting in God, “whose word I praise.” Three times in this Psalm David speaks of the God “whose word I praise”. David is saying he commends God’s word to others, he boasts of God’s word, he praises and recommends God’s word. He has staked his life on God’s word. It is in God’s word that David trusts and in the God whom that word reveals.

It is God’s word that has revealed God’s character and nature to David. He knows he can trust in God because he knows God’s word says he is trustworthy and faithful and that he will never leave us nor forsake us. David knew God had promised to make him king someday and he had confidence that God would keep his word to him. When I am afraid, when trouble comes, when bullies attack and threaten, when people lie about me and twist my words, I will trust in the Lord and in his word and I will not be afraid.

Whether it's terrorists and islamic radicals, or bullies at school, or bullies on the job, or threats or financial and legal problems or family problems or sickness or death or the thought of being alone or a million other things that frighten you and worry you, God has promised to be with you, to sustain you if you will trust in him. If you can't trust him yet can you go ahead and surrender to him anyway? "Here Lord, I'm afraid but I'm running to you. There is no one else I can turn to. I will trust you. I will trust your word." Cast your cares upon him. Read God's word and like David, put confidence and trust in the God who reveals himself in his word.

"When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust. I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?"

You know the devil is a terrorist. He wants to frighten us, to hijack our thoughts and imagination and steal our peace. He wants us to live in fear and dread. But when I am afraid, I will trust in you, in God, whose word I praise and rely upon, in God I trust. I will not be afraid. The devil is a liar and God alone is truth.

If you are living in fear today, whether you are afraid of bullies at school or a million other things that terrorize us, let's cast our cares upon the Lord. Let's surrender to him and place our trust in Him. He will share his peace with us. When we are afraid, let's trust in Him.