

Overcoming Fear and Anxiety – Part I
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John 14:1-3
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Please turn with me in your Bibles to the 14th chapter of John. The title of the message today is actually ‘Overcoming Fear and Anxiety’. In God’s providence we’ve been having a series of Bible studies taught by a gentleman that directs our counseling ministry, one of our deacons, Jack Enter, has been teaching our Sunday morning Bible study, and he’s been talking about fear. Next week I think we are moving to a new subject of anger, or no, I’m not sure. Anyway, anger is coming up soon. ‘Fear, Anger, and Pride’ is the series that he is teaching here in the sanctuary at 9:45 on Sunday mornings.

The Lord has me in a passage that is dealing with that same issue of fear and anxiety. Such powerful forces in our lives. In fact, fear is the thing that is mentioned most as a sin that we are to overcome, 700 times in the Bible, Old and New Testament you have references to fear. And how often do we read, “Do not fear.” “Do not be afraid.” “Do not be anxious,” we just read earlier from Philippians 4. So ‘Overcoming Fear and Anxiety’, and we’re going to be looking at this today, and Lord-willing, next week as well, because I think there are three points, and I hope to cover two today, and then we’ll come with the last, Lord-willing, next Sunday morning.

One of the things that, as we prepare to read the text, we need to understand is that, as I said earlier, you can’t escape your circumstances. God doesn’t promise to make things easy for us. In fact, I want to also mention a very helpful book, Courage: Fighting Fear with Fear, by Dr. Wayne Mack. He’s got a great chapter on this particular passage that we are looking at, that I found helpful as I prepared my message. I wish he would do that with all of my sermon text, but it is Chapter 2 in this book. It’s very helpful, and so insightful the way he applies the word to our lives. But when you think about it, and Dr. Mack actually talks about that, a quote from him in that chapter is, if you wanted a carefree, you know, problem-free life, you got on the wrong roller coaster because the Christian life is nowhere promised to be carefree and you know, just everything coming up roses. The health, wealth, and prosperity preaching that is so common today is not from the word of God. It is from the word of God the same way Satan quotes Scripture. I’m not saying that everybody that is preaching it is Satanic necessarily, at best they are misinformed. They are not reading their Bibles carefully at all, because the Bible doesn’t promise us wealth, it doesn’t promise us health, it doesn’t say that faith is the way

to all of those things. If your wallet is empty, I've heard this, "Look at your wallet and declare that it's going to have money in it. That is faith," they say. That is the farthest thing from faith, that is something like witchcraft, just rank Paganism, it is not the Christian faith. Faith is not declaring something and making it happen, only God declares things and makes them happen. We are people who believe in what He says. Faith is dependence upon the word of God. It is depending, it is nothing that we bring, nothing that we do except, like Martin Luther said, "It is the empty, outstretched hand of a beggar." We trust in Him. Faith is believing what He said, not declaring what we want. And so, to overcome fear and anxiety, the good news is God has told us He wants us to overcome fear and anxiety, but He is not going to help us do that by removing all the anxious circumstances, and all the fearful circumstances. He is going to do something much more wonderful. He is going to allow us to ride through the storms of life with calm in our souls. Now it is not persistent, continual calm, we have to fight for it. We have to fight the fight of faith. In 1 Timothy 6:12, Paul reminds Timothy, "Fight the good fight of faith."

Faith isn't just something that you possess when you get saved. I mean, certainly God grants faith, and when your eyes are open to see that you are a sinner, that you are hopeless apart from God, that you have no hope of ever entering into His presence, that the stains on your soul cannot be cleansed by your own efforts. You look outside of yourself to a perfect Savior, Jesus Christ, who lived a perfect life, and offered to God that perfect, spotless life as a sacrifice for our sins. That His perfect life, that God imputed our sins to Him, and you realize that God punished your sins in Jesus, and He opens your eyes to place all of trust in Christ, that's saving faith. That is the beginning of faith. That is salvation, and when you truly believe, you are saved forever. But the Christian life is a life of faith, it is a good fight of faith. You are to continue believing, you are to continue responding to the promises of God, and believing Him. He is going to lead us through lives, not that are storm-free, and problem-free, no, His way from Genesis to Revelation, read your Bible carefully, His way is to lead His people through adversity, after adversity, after adversity, but to lead them to look to Him in the adversity, to be their almighty, all-sufficient one, in that they will walk through the troubles, though they walk through the waters, the waters don't overwhelm them. Though they pass through the fire, the fire doesn't burn them. It doesn't say they don't walk through the water, they walk through the water, they pass through the fire, but God is with them in it.

And that is much better because what happens is, in the beauty of God's plan, and the perfection of His wisdom is that there is nothing like problems, and suffering, to make me remember, and to make you remember, that this life isn't what it's

cracked up to be. That we have yearnings in our heart that go deeper than anything this world can satisfy, and it is when we hurt, and we suffer, when we are afraid, when we are anxious, that we are reminded, “I need Him.” And the Lord does that so that He can fill us up with Himself. So the Christian is the person who is able to rejoice always, even in trying circumstances, not because he’s got a *Pollyanna* kind of life, but because He knows God is with him in the moment, and that God is working all of these things to His purposes. So there is great joy in knowing that whatever tribulation we’re going through, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4, that these momentary, light afflictions are producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison. So that is what we are going to see here in John 14 because that is exactly what Jesus tells His disciples on the night before He is crucified.

We’ve noted that we are looking at this passage of Scripture, John 13 to John 17, these five chapters are *‘The Farewell Discourse’* of Jesus, His last extended opportunity to teach His disciples before the cross. In just a few hours, He will be arrested. So we’ve seen already how He washed their feet, He perplexed them with that amazing and stunning display, that for them to be clean, something scandalous has to happen. Jesus, the King of Kings, and the Lord of Lords, becomes like the lowest slave, and so they are fresh off of that, then He follows that up with the stunning announcement that He’s about to be betrayed by one of the 12. I mean, the emotional tumult in the lives of the disciples is great this evening, and they are perplexed by that.

We saw when we read that they are looking at one another, “Who is it?” They can’t imagine that one of them would betray their Master. They totally miss Jesus identifying the traitor, Judas, but they are still perplexed. They are still wondering, “Am I the one?” Then after Judas leaves, Jesus announces that now is the hour for the Son of Man to be glorified. Now is the time for the cross to happen. The plan is in action, the betrayal is happening, the arrest is imminent, the moment is at hand. And then He says, we’re going to read from Verse 33 through Chapter 14, Verse 6. We’ll start with John 13:33 to get the context. We are focusing on John 14:1-3, the first three verses of Chapter 14. But I want you to see how these flow right out of the context of real circumstances, and we can sometimes divorce that. We hear this passage read a lot, especially like at funerals and stuff. It is appropriate to read at funerals, but it is helpful to see it in its context, so look with me at John 13:33.

John 13:33-38 ~ Little children, I am with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, now I also say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ 34 A new commandment I give to you, that you

*love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” 36 Simon Peter *said to Him, “Lord, where are You going?” Jesus answered, “Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you will follow later.” 37 Peter *said to Him, “Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You.” 38 Jesus *answered, “Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly, truly, I say to you, a rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times.*

*John 14:1-6 ~ “Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. 3 If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. 4 And you know the way where I am going.” 5 Thomas *said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?” 6 Jesus *said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.*

Let’s pray together.

Our Father, we ask that the entrance of Your word might give light, and that in Your light we might see light. That we might see the glory of our Savior, the ugliness of our own sin, the sufficiency of His sacrifice, and the wonder of His forgiveness. We pray in His name, Amen.

Jesus is concerned that His disciples are troubled. He knows they are troubled. The circumstances they are going through are troubling. **“Do not let your heart be troubled;... is the first command. There are actually three commands in Verse 1 that are part of the first two points. In fact, I’m going to go ahead and tell you there are three points to the message. So let me lay this out for you. How do you overcome fear and anxiety? The first thing you do is you stop letting your troubles trouble you. Secondly, start putting your faith into action. This is exactly what He says in Verse 1, “Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. So the second point actually has two sub-points. Start putting your faith into action—your faith in God, and your faith in Jesus. And the third point is start anticipating Heaven, and we’ll get to that next time. I’m sure we won’t make it that far. We will start on ‘Stop Letting Your Troubles Trouble You’, and ‘Start Putting Your Faith into Action’.**

1) Stop Letting Your Troubles Trouble You:

He says, “Stop being troubled. Do not let your heart be troubled.” The first thing we need to note about that is that that is a command, it is an imperative. It is not a suggestion, He is commanding them to stop being troubled. Now the way I say it, I think it is a better translation actually, ‘*stop being troubled*’ would be a better translation than, “**Do not let your heart be troubled;**... It is close, but the idea is that the verb for ‘*be troubled*’, translated ‘*be troubled, do not be troubled*’ is a present tense Greek verb. And we’ve noted, oftentimes in the past, that the present tense in Greek is not quite like the English tense. When we say present, past, we’re just talking about time. The time of the action of the verb. Present tense, present time, right? In Greek it is different than that. It is not just present time, it is not just time, it is the kind of action. And the Greek present speaks of continual action, ongoing action. Other tenses speak of just momentary, punctiliar, at a point in time. This particular verb, ‘*do not be troubled*’, is the present tense Greek. It is ongoing. The idea is, “You are being troubled, you are being troubled right now, stop it.” That is what He is saying. “Stop being troubled.” Also notice the passive voice. He doesn’t say, “Stop troubling.” “Stop being troubled.” That things are acting upon you and you must resist them. That is the passive imperative, you see? “Don’t let it happen to you. Stop letting your troubles trouble you.”

Now the first thing we need to see is the disciples had reasons to be troubled, and Jesus acknowledges that. They have very good reasons to be troubled. I mean, if we just take a moment and think about that, He just told them of His imminent departure. He’s been telling them for a while and they haven’t been getting it, but tonight they are getting it more clearly. There is something about this night, the washing of the feet, the announcement regarding the traitor. It is now becoming painfully clear they are about to be separated from Jesus. That in itself is troubling. Many of the disciples are thinking, “We left everything to follow You. We left our homes, we left our families to follow You, and You’re leaving us? How can that be? Not only are you leaving us, You are making it clear there is no way we can follow You.” As He said in Verse 33, “Where I am going you cannot come. You are not able to come.” Again in Verse 36, “Where I am going, you are not able to follow Me now.”

What was His command to them originally? How did He call His disciples? “Follow Me.” That was basically His message every day, “Follow Me. Keep following Me.” How do you know a true disciple? He’s the one who is following Jesus. And here He is saying, after He was saying, “Follow Me,” for three and a half years, now He is saying, “You cannot follow.” Anybody would be troubled,

perplexed, confused. In fact, the word ‘trouble’, **“Do not let your heart be troubled;... is a very strong word. It means ‘to stir up, to agitate, to be in confusion and chaos’.** The word is used in several different settings, literal settings. This is a figurative use here, **“Do not let your heart be troubled;... Just think about the literal, physical settings. Water can be stirred up. Water can be troubled. Waves, like when they were on the Sea of Galilee, in the boat, and the waves were pounding against the boat. Remember the water was troubled. Wind can be troubled. Often they would use this verb to speak of a wind, a strong wind that is wreaking chaos, that is blowing trees down and that kind of thing.**

We’ve seen winds like that not too long ago here, and quite regularly in the summer, don’t we? A wind can be like that. Also, Luke uses this verb a couple of times in Acts 17 to speak of crowds, a mob being troubled. Acts 17:8, when Paul is preaching the Gospel in Greece, the crowds follow him from Thessalonica and the crowds are troubled, stirred up. They want to kill him. It is a violent uprising, and that is a way this verb is used. So waters that are stirred up, a wind that is stirred up, the chaos of a mob. Think about how that is, how frightening that is. Now He is basically saying, “Look, you are in troubling circumstances. The wind is blowing, the waters are rising, and you are going to experience...” Man, they are going to experience in the next few hours, mob mentality gone to the nth degree when the crowds are yelling, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” They are going to see evil venting itself incredibly, and Jesus knows that, and He is preparing them. **“Do not let your heart be troubled;... Stop letting your troubles control you.”** Not only that, even after His resurrection and ascension, when they know He’s on the throne, they are going to live the rest of their lives without the visible, physical presence of Jesus. What a radical difference from walking with Him every day, touching Him, hearing His voice with their ears, seeing Him day after day for three and a half years. What a dramatic difference. They had reasons to be troubled. Their circumstances were troubling. He doesn’t say, “I’m going to make your circumstances better. If you have faith you can have better circumstances.” No, He doesn’t say that at all. His determination is to make their circumstances worse, from their viewpoint, and in that to give them victory.

Now it is also interesting that this word ‘troubled’ is not the first time we’ve seen that in the book. In fact, we saw it just in the last chapter. John 13:21, when Jesus had said this, right after He announces that someone is going to betray Him. **‘HE WHO EATS MY BREAD HAS LIFTED UP HIS HEEL AGAINST ME.’** Verse 18.

John 13:21 ~ When Jesus had said this, He became troubled in spirit, and testified and said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray Me.”

Jesus was troubled. In fact, if you turn back over to John 12:27, do you remember when the Greeks come to seek Jesus when we looked at this passage a few months back? The Greeks come to seek Jesus, “We want to see Jesus.” Philip comes up to Jesus, tells Him, “There are some Greeks seeking You,” and Jesus doesn’t say anything about, “Well bring them here.” He doesn’t talk about it, He says, “Now is the hour for the Son of Man to be glorified.” This was a signal from the Father. “Now is the time for Me to go to the cross,” and it says, after He announces that in Verses 23-26, He says, Verse 27:

John 12:27 ~ “Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour.

Jesus is troubled. His soul is troubled, Chapter 12, Verse 27. His spirit is troubled, Chapter 13, Verse 21. His circumstances troubled Him. If ever anyone had a right to be troubled by their circumstances, it was the Son of God. He is not just going to experience death, the death of the cross, which is agony, unspeakable agony, physical agony, He is going to experience something far worse than that. He is going to experience becoming the bearer of every sin that was ever committed by everyone who would ever believe. He is going to bear the weight of all of that guilt and condemnation, in His own heart, on the cross. He is going to experience separation, in some mysterious way, from the Father. The sky is going to become dark at 12:00 noon until 3:00 in the afternoon, as He hangs there bearing the weight of our sins. That is why He cries out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” quoting Psalm 22:1. At that moment, He is the sin-bearer, and the Father cannot look upon Him. That is why the sky is dark because God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. So God has turned His back on His Son. Jesus, fully understands what awaits Him. This is why He sweat drops of blood a few hours after this moment we’re looking at right now in John 13. Luke records in the Garden of Gethsemane, He becomes anguished. Remember He prays three times, “Father, save Me from this hour.” He is wrestling, He is struggling to go to the cross. In His divinity, He understands fully what is happening. In His humanity, He can’t bear facing it, and yet what does He do? Though He is troubled, He is not controlled by His troubles, He overcomes. And we need to learn some things there, a real important implication, it is not sinful to be troubled. It is not sinful to be troubled.

In fact, there is another time in the book of John that John tells us that Jesus was troubled, Chapter 11, Verse 33, at Lazarus' tomb, when Jesus saw Mary and the Jews weeping. He was deeply moved in His spirit, and the text says He troubled Himself. He was troubled in His heart, as He looked at death, as He mourned and grieved. There are circumstances in life that trouble us, and the Christian, this is the beauty of true Gospel, biblical Christianity. The Christian is the person who looks life directly in the face, understands exactly what is happening, and yet still has joy. He is not a *Pollyanna* who acts like, "Hey, I'm just happy because I'm a Christian, and I'm pretending that everything is okay like Pollyanna."

Remember that movie? It kind of irritated me. I mean, you know, I watched it when I was an adult. I should have watched it when I was a kid. Forgive me, there is nothing wrong with Pollyanna, you know, every movie. The preacher was really bad in that movie too probably, now that I'm on it, let's go ahead and point that out. That made me mad. No, but seriously, Pollyanna, she is just like, "It's going to be better tomorrow. Everything is going to be great, and I'm just going to believe it, and therefore I am happy." Well the problem is, you don't know what's going to happen tomorrow, and if you are basing in circumstances, that is just foolishness. That is just light sentimentality. That doesn't really help when you encounter the realities of living in a fallen world. When life really hits you, you need something more than trite little sayings. You need to know the God who holds your life in His hand, and you need to know that the God who holds your life in His hand, who reigns over it, that the hand that holds you has a nail scar in it. That's what you need to know. And this is what the glory of the Gospel is that it tells us that. The Lord wants us to have, to be in troubles and yet not be controlled by troubles. It is not sinful to be troubled, to feel grief, to have worries and concerns, to be afraid at times is not sinful in itself. It is sinful when those things control you. Jesus was troubled, and He had to pray three times in the garden, "Father, please let this cup pass from me, nevertheless..." What did He say? "Not My will, but Your will be done." That is how He ended His prayer, surrendering to the will of God. That's what we're supposed to do. We are not to allow our troubles control us. I'll read to you what Dr. Mack says about this in his book. I'm going to read that quote to you.

If you were looking for an easy ride when you became a Christian, you got on the wrong roller coaster. Don't be shocked when life gets tough. Situations will come into your life in which your faith is going to be tested. You will go through storms and trials. If you were living the Christian life thinking you will never have anything more to worry about, you are living in a fantasy world. You are going to experience trouble, and you need to be aware that you will be tempted to respond as the disciples did, they fell to pieces.

That's what was happening. Jesus sensed it, and of course we see it play itself out that night.

You're going to experience trouble, and if you're going to overcome your fear, when you're afraid you must be aware of that temptation and remember Jesus' prohibition. You will face frightening circumstances. You will experience normal human emotion such as fear and distress, but listen, believer. Your situation is not hopeless. Don't act as if you have to be controlled by fear. You don't. A courageous response will not be easy. It may not even be natural, but it is possible. Jesus was aware of the difficult situation the disciples were in. He knew the temptations they faced, yet He didn't say, "Well, life is difficult. Too bad. I guess there's no hope for you. I understand that you have to be controlled by fear and sorrow." No, instead He said, "Let not your hearts be troubled." That was a command. Stop giving your hearts permission to be controlled by fear.

That is the command He gives us. Stop letting your heart be controlled by fear. Now, you experience troubles, but do not let the troubles come into your heart and the outside pressure—in fact, if I was to take this glass of water and somebody bumped my arm, right? Right now the water is fairly calm, but if somebody bumped my arm, what would happen? An outside trouble would make trouble inside the glass, and that's what our lives do. Circumstances come and shake us, and He's saying, "Listen, as a Christian, you have the power, though you are shaken, that your heart is steadfast. For we've received a kingdom which cannot be shaken. Don't let your heart be troubled. Stop letting your troubles trouble you." That's the first point, the first thing we do.

2) Start Putting Your Faith into Action:

The second thing is we start putting our faith into action. Our second point, back to John 14:1. Start putting your faith into action. ...**believe in God, believe also in Me**. Now I need to share with you that the Greek of Verse 1: ...**believe in God, believe also in Me...** it happens to be that the form of the verb *believe* in both places can be imperative or indicative. It's present tense imperative or indicative. I think the context necessitates we interpret it imperative. When He says, "Don't let your hearts be troubled. Don't go on letting your troubles control you (basically). Don't let your hearts be continually controlled by fear. Start believing," that's what He's saying. He's not saying, "You believe in God." That would be indicative. "You believe in God. You believe in Me." See that's the indicative statement. A statement is a fact. These are commands, I think, though. The form could be either one, but the context tells us it's a command.

He's saying, "Believe in God, and believe also in Me." I mentioned that they're present tense imperatives. The force really is you have to now continually, just as you stopped letting your heart be continually troubled, now you are to start continually believing. This is the fight of faith I was talking about earlier. Start believing in God. Start putting your faith into action.

One of the really sad things that ought to sadden our hearts and I think grieves the heart of God is when true Christians, people who truly know the Lord, live controlled by anxiety and fear, when true Christians live lives that are filled with misery, when they're not characterized by joy. What a terrible advertisement for the Gospel. It ought not be this way. And what He's saying is if we let our hearts be troubled, the opposite of letting your heart be troubled is to put your faith into action. If we are letting ourselves be controlled by anxiety and fear, what we're doing is we have a problem where we are not putting our faith into action.

I mean, you may feel in a moment, as fear presses in upon you and it begins to control you, or anxiety presses in upon you and it begins to control you, you say, "I believe in God. I believe in Jesus, but it's not helping." That's because you're not really activating your faith the way you need to. It's not a generalized faith. The faith that overcomes, the faith that He's calling us to, is a specific and personal action at this moment to trust God in the moment as it relates to the circumstance we're dealing with. Your faith must be active. Believe in God.

Let's look at that first, the first sub-point here. Start putting your faith into action is the second main point. The first sub-point is: Believe in God. The second sub-point is: Believe also in Me. So let's look at the first sub-point:

A) Believe in God:

What does it mean to believe in God? What is He saying? Believe in God. "I realize that your circumstances are troubling you, that you're feeling overwhelmed, that you're starting to fall to pieces." And Jesus says, "What you need to do is believe in God." Biblically, believing is to put your trust in Him. It's to take God at His word and to place and to rest upon Him. Biblically, when we put our faith in God, it means we put our faith in two things, His character and His promises. This is how you activate your faith. It's not just *I believe in God. I believe there is a God. I believe in Jesus. I've given my heart to Him, but I'm still controlled by anxiety. I'm still controlled by fear.* Well, you're not yet placing your faith actively where you need to. You need to place it in His character.

You need to look at God. Faith looks out of yourself unto God, and depends upon God, and rests upon God. This is what you see the Psalmists doing again, and again, and again. Whatever circumstance they're in—you'll see them overwhelmed by fear and anxiety themselves, struggling in various kinds of trials. What are they doing? The Psalmist is trying to find God. He's looking for God and he's looking to the word of God to show him the Lord. So believe in God means first of all trust in Him. Trust in His character. Think about who God is. When you're being overwhelmed by your life, when something terrible happens, a traumatic circumstance happens and you feel shaken like this, what do you do? Look at God. Our problem is we lack faith. We forget who He is, and we forget what He's promised to do.

A great example of this is in Luke 8, where the disciples are with Jesus in the boat on the Sea of Galilee, and the waters become troubled. A storm comes up. Remember Jesus is asleep in the boat? The storm is so bad that they really are afraid they're going to die. It's pretty amazing He stayed asleep in the boat, isn't it? And do you remember what they said? "Lord, wake up! We're about to perish. We're about to die. You've got to do something. We're dying!" What does He say? Luke 8 says that He says, "Where is your faith?" "Wait a minute. We think we have justifiable reason to be concerned." "Yeah, you have justifiable reason to be concerned, but where is your faith? Do you think you're going to perish?" "We're going to perish," is what they say. "We're all going to die." "Where is your faith?"

Now, it's not the kind of faith that the 'name it and claim it' folks tell you. "Just make up what you want to be true. Make God like you want Him to be. Declare what you want to have happen and believe it enough." That's not biblical faith. That's living in some kind of Christianized fantasy land. Biblical faith is to know what you know about who God is, and to know what you know about what He said, and to place your trust in that. Jesus says, "Where's your faith? Because listen, if we're all going to perish, the whole plan of salvation is going to fall. Are you that stupid to think that God's going to let Me die in this boat? Do you believe I'm the Messiah? Do you believe I'm the Son of God? Do you believe what I've been telling you, that I've got to go to the cross and die at the hands of sinful men? Do you believe that I'm the Savior of the world? How am I going to perish and you going to perish, My disciples, in this boat?" That should put it in context. But this is the same thing. We look at the disciples and we say, "I can't believe they didn't realize that. I mean, you guys had Jesus in the boat. What are you guys sweating it for?"

But what happens to us when we go through just this? We're going along good, everything's great, and sometimes isn't it amazing how you will have had a really wonderful time with the Lord, or something's happened, and you've had this victorious experience? Maybe you shared Christ with someone and you're just encouraged about that, or you're making progress with your family and your relationship with your family, or some friend or whatever, and then something happens out of the blue, and suddenly you were riding high and feeling the blessing of God, the wind was in your sails, and suddenly, "Oh my goodness. Everything's falling apart." We all can do that. Isn't it amazing how quickly we jump to the worst case scenario? "I knew it couldn't last," and we just expect bad things, because of our sin nature. Unbelief is our problem. If we really believed in who God is, we would know that we have great reason for confidence, not being troubled.

Let's think about God's character. Let me just share with you three things about God's character, and then we'll talk about two of His promises, and then we'll wrap up for today. We'll talk about believing in Jesus next time, and also the third point. You can apply these character attributes to any circumstance in your life. There are three things that I want you to think about in relation to fear and anxiety, that if we really believed it, we would never be troubled. I mean, we would have troubles, but we would not be troubled if we believed that God was truly sovereign.

Jack said something in one of his lessons a couple weeks ago, that we have a gap between our confessional faith and our experiential faith. That is, we say we believe this, but we live as if we didn't believe it. There's a gap. And where do you see a gap in your confessional faith? "I believe God is sovereign." When something happens, "Oh no!" I'm living like He's not in control. Do I really believe He's in control? Well, what I need to do is stop letting my heart be troubled, by focusing on the fact. Like Martyn Lloyd-Jones says in his book on spiritual depression, "Stop listening to yourself and start talking to yourself." Stop letting your flesh and your foolish way of thinking dominate your life, and start telling yourself the truth about the Gospel. God is sovereign. The more I read the Bible, the more convinced I become of it every day. I mean, if you just read it carefully, and you look at what it says, and you submit to what it says, you cannot escape this. Every molecule in the universe, every subatomic particle in the universe, is reigned over and ruled over by our sovereign God. Nothing happens apart from His will.

Lamentations 3:37 says, “Who can speak and it come to pass unless the Lord has commanded it?” This means that even the atheist who says, “I’m going to go get a hamburger and think about how much I don’t believe in God,” even the atheist who wants to go get the hamburger at Burger King isn’t going to put the hamburger in his mouth unless God decrees for him to have it. That’s the way it is. Who can speak and it come to pass unless the Lord has commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both good and ill go forth? Good and bad things come from the hand of God. Now, He doesn’t do evil, but He’s sovereign over it.

That’s what you see in Job too. Look at Job 1 and 2. I talked about this on Wednesday night. We were looking at Joel, actually, and I was sharing how Joel shows you that God is sovereign. The question we looked at on Wednesday night was: *Where is God when bad things happen?* And what Joel says is He is aware of what’s going on, and He’s in control of what’s going on. It says it all the way through the Bible. And in fact, the very first book of the Bible, like all the great doctrines, it’s there in Genesis 37 to 50. The last 14 chapters of Genesis basically is an extended teaching time from the life of Joseph on this doctrine, the doctrine of Divine Providence, our name, the name of our church, the Providence of God. That means that God is providing.

The idea is that everything that happens, God has ordained for His glory and the good of His people. That’s the Doctrine of Providence. Every single thing that happens, God governs it all without doing evil or tempting any man to evil. He lets Satan do what he wants to do at times, only what He wills for him to do. Read Job 1-2 if you doubt that. Go home and read Job 1 and 2. He tells us later the Lord in speaking to Job shows him that He leads leviathan around like he has a ring in his nose. Basically He’s talking about Satan—sea monster, Satan, the dragon, this kind of thing. He says Satan is a free entity. He makes his own decisions, in that sense. God doesn’t tempt him to evil, yet God leads him around like he’s a pet alligator. I wouldn’t want a pet alligator, but God could have a pet alligator, and God leads Satan around like he’s a pet alligator. And whenever He wants to, He tugs on that chain, and Satan does exactly what He wants him to do. That’s the picture the Bible gives.

Now, there are some troubling things about that. That means that God’s sovereign over what happens to me when tragedy strikes? Yes, but that’s much better than what you believe if you believe the nonsense that people throw out that God’s not in control. What kind of world do you live in then? Satan’s just running around doing what he wants to do?

No, the good news is the Bible teaches you that that is absolutely not the case. Like I said, look at Job 1 and 2. He is sovereign. Jesus knew this. This is how Jesus handled His being troubled. In John 19:10-11, remember He's before Pilate. He's been sent back and forth from Pilate to Herod. He's been beaten by the Jewish priests and leaders, these old men beating Him. Can you believe that? This is how evil sin is, and how the unleashing of God's wrath is happening. These old men, dignified, that should have enough sense not to do it, are beating Him and spitting on Him.

He's experienced that, and now He's before Pilate, and Pilate says to Him in John 19:10, he's asking Him questions, and Jesus is not answering him. Pilate says, "Do You not realize that I have authority over You as to whether You live or die? I hold Your life in my hand." And Jesus says this: "You have no authority over Me, but such as it has been given to you by My Father who is in heaven." He spoke up about that. He says, "Listen, you need to know something. God is sovereign." What is He saying? "I'm trusting in the sovereignty of My Father. All that is happening to Me is happening according to His sovereign plan. Not one thing is out of control."

Not only is He sovereign, but He's good. This is the other thing you see throughout the Bible is the goodness of God. In the New Testament, we see God is love. He desires the best for others. He gives of Himself. He sees our need and He moves toward us. The New Testament *God is love* is echoed by the Old Testament concept of God as lovingkindness. The word חֶסֶד (*chesed*) is a very important word in the Old Testament. *Chesed* is where mercy and lovingkindness meet. You'll see steadfast love sometimes translated—lovingkindness. When you see that word, it's the Hebrew word *chesed*.

The idea is if someone in power, someone who has ability, sees someone in agony and suffering, there's something in the heart of this person. *Chesed* in the heart of this person moves them toward the weak and the needy to bless and to alleviate the suffering. And it's not just the movement, it's also love. There's affection. There's concern and affection. It is the very heart of God to be concerned and kind, kindly disposed and affectionate toward His creatures, in that sense toward all men, but even more supremely to those who belong to Him.

One of my favorite passages is Exodus 34:6-7. I come to it often, and I think it ought to be one of everybody's favorite passages, because it's one of those marks in the Old Testament where God in His grace lets us see clearest into the heart behind the veil of who He really is.

When you look at that passage, you see it's right in the wake, it's right after God has poured out His wrath upon the nation of Israel. Remember the golden calf incident? He just gave them the second commandment, "Don't make an idol," and what did they do? They made an idol. Moses is gone for 40 days. They think, "Well, he's dead. Something happened to him. Let's make an idol." They make an idol and they begin trying to worship God with this idol, and when you try to worship God with an idol, you are not worshiping God. They find this kind of a moral, spiritual darkness that descends over them, and there are all kinds of perversion going on.

Moses comes down the mountain and sees it, throws the Commandments down, they break, and God sends a plague, and 3,000 people die on that day. God's anger burns. Just a few days later after, the storm has quieted down, Moses is talking to God, and Moses said, "Show me Your glory. I want one thing. I want You to show me Your glory." It's amazing he said that. I mean, he had already seen so much glory. He said, "I want more." This is the heart that God blesses. "I want to know You more. Show me Your glory." God says, "I will show you my glory. You won't be able to see My face, but I will let you see the back parts of My robe passing by. I'm going to put you in the cleft of the rock."

The next day Moses comes up to the mountain and no one comes with him, and God places him in the cleft of the rock in a place of safety, and the Lord passes by and he sees the back parts of God's robe. He wanted to see God's glory, but it's not so much what he sees as what he hears, because what he hears as the Lord passes by him is, "The Lord, the Lord," that is, "Yahweh, Yahweh." He's saying, "My Name, My Name. You want to see my glory? Do you want to know who I am? Yahweh, Yahweh, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness and truth, who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin, who will by no means leave the guilty unpunished." There are six positive affirmations before the seventh, "He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished."

What is God like? He is a God of goodness, and kindness, and mercy, who is disposed not to treat us as our sins deserve, but to forgive iniquity, transgression, and sin. The God who reigns over all things is the God who has incredible tenderness, and mercy, and love. He is good in all that He does. So if you believe that God is sovereign, He's good, He's in control, He wants your best, He wants to bless you, and that this is who He is, then how can you be afraid? How can you be anxious?

The third attribute is He's wise. He's not only sovereign, He's not only good, but He's also wise. He's perfect in wisdom. Wisdom is the ability to use knowledge to accomplish your purpose. God accomplishes His purposes perfectly in every instant. There's never been a time where God said, "You know, I did that a little too hard, just a little too much." There's no collateral damage, in other words, in what God does, He *never* misses the mark by a millimeter. He's wise. He knows how to do the very best things. I mean, we're talking about how He uses suffering in a fallen world where people are blind and dark.

I mean, we were lost, we hated God, we did not want Him, but He found a way to save us. Think about the wisdom of God in the plan of salvation. This is why Paul (Ted read the verses) said, "Oh the depth, and the riches, and the wisdom, and the knowledge of God." Paul is looking at the Gospel and saying, "How amazingly wise is our God? He's a holy God who cannot dwell with sin, and yet He's so wise that He found a way to punish sin and remain just, and at the same time justify the ungodly like you and me. How can that be? You have a God who is perfect in sovereignty, is perfect in goodness, and is perfect in wisdom. You by definition have no reason to be anxious or afraid. If you believe what you say you believe, and if you will activate your faith, and you will place your trust in Him, fear will run away from you.

Now, it's a fight. You've got to keep on doing it. That's why He says (present tense), "Believe in God. Keep on believing." Start believing and keep believing. So when our circumstances, when calamity happens, what we've got to do is look at God. We've got to take our eyes off ourselves and look at Him. Take our eyes off our circumstances and look at Him. Yes, we see the circumstance. We can really honestly face it. It's terrible. This is painful. This hurts. This is overwhelming me in some sense. Yes, I don't have the strength. Oh yes, I don't have the strength, but I know one who said, "I am." I know one who calls Himself God Almighty. I know in the midst of this turmoil, I know the God of peace. I know the God of perfect righteousness. I know the God who is everything that I need, and when you look to Him you find peace, you find joy, and this is why we rejoice. We walk through life not afraid of what happens tomorrow.

I mean, there are certain things we certainly don't want to experience, and we say that to the Lord. "I'd rather not experience that." But we don't have to be afraid. I can tell you this. I don't want to suffer. I hate pain. I don't think that it's ungodly or unbiblical to hate pain. I think sometimes my wife disputes that, that I'm too quick to take an aspirin, or whatever, and I've tried to temper that a little bit. "I think I might hurt in five minutes. Let me take one preventatively."

I think it's reasonable to dislike pain. It's a symptom of the fall. But if God wills that I go through extended pain in my life, some illness, or if God wills that I'm tortured somehow, if God wills that, I can tell you right now I don't think I can bear up under it myself in myself, but I know someone who can, and I know that His way is that He doesn't give you the grace for that moment until you need it.

This is what you see in the word. He doesn't give you grace today that you will need tomorrow, and say, "Hold onto that. You're going to need it tomorrow." No, He gives you what you need at the moment that you need it, so that what you do in the moment is, "Here I am, Lord. I'm overwhelmed. I'm fearful. I'm anxious. How am I going to make it? I'm going to look at You. Wait a minute. You're sovereign. This is happening according to Your plan. It could not be happening to me if my Father in heaven had not allowed it. You're good and You're wise. You're with me, You're for me, and You know how to handle this. I'm going to rest in who You are." That's how people fight the fight of faith, and that's how everyone who has ever gone through suffering and dying for their faith, or dying through agony, who really loved the Lord, it was all of His grace. And when we get to heaven, we're going to be testifying about the wonder of His grace. God is good. He is worthy to be praised, and we need to stop letting our troubles trouble us, and start trusting Him.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer...

Father, we thank You for Your word. We thank You for the promises of it. We thank You that Jesus Christ is everything that we need. We pray for those that are here who have not turned from their sins, that today might be the day of their salvation, that You might open their hearts to repent, and to believe, and to place all of their hope in such a wonderful Savior. We pray this in His Name, Amen.

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