

Paul and Fear

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 August 2017

Preacher: Rev. Dr. Russell Herbert

[0:00] Now, I've got some things in a bag here, and they have something in common, and I wondered if you can guess what it is they have in common. But wait until we get to all the end of the items before you take the guesses.

But the first thing I've got here is a cycling helmet. I'll stick that one on. A pair of wellies. I'm not going to put those on.

They're not actually my wellies, and they don't fit me. So we've got wellies and a cycling helmet. Don't shout it out. Does anyone guess yet what the thing might be? Okay, you think you might know? Don't say it yet, though.

So we've got wellies, cycling helmet. I realise I've done this totally the wrong way round, because I can't now get this on over here. But I've got some protective goggles. I can assure you, just in case you're wondering, I don't normally wear these when I'm riding my bike.

But that would be silly. So I've got some goggles, helmet, wellies, some rubber gloves. Tamara will tell you, I can never get these off, because I've always got them on.

[1:01] We've got wellies, rubber gloves, goggles, cycling helmet. And one last thing, and now I'm not going to be able to get hold of these. I'm not actually going to put these in.

But I have some earplugs. Earplugs might not be a certain amount of time. Earplugs, I'm not going to stick them in, because otherwise I won't be able to hear you.

But I've got some earplugs, some goggles, helmet, wellies, gloves. What is it that these things have in common?

Yes, your hand went up really, really early. Sorry. To do with being a builder. That's a really good guess, but that's not actually what I'm looking for. Anybody else? All right.

Protection. Protection. That's exactly it. They are all to protect you from something. And the thing is, is that we live in a world where we need protection.

[1:58] Because things happen. Things, the reality is, is we need protection from things that can go wrong. And what we're thinking about in our service this morning is actually the feelings that we can have over things that could go wrong or over things that are going wrong.

And the word that comes to mind, I'm going to take these rubber gloves off. It just doesn't feel natural. The thing is, is that the feelings that we have over things that either have gone wrong, could go wrong, or are going wrong, could be summed up with the word fear.

Do you know, there's a word in the Bible that wasn't written in English, but in the New Testament it was written in Greek. A word that is translated to fear, which actually we do use in our language, in our English language.

The Greek would be phobos. We get the word phobia, which means fear. And it's a word that we use. When we refer to a phobia, it means something that makes us afraid. And there are all sorts of different types of phobias, that is, fears.

So we're going to put some up on the screen. And I wonder if you can guess what these different fears, these different phobias are. Some of them are more obvious than others. It's kind of in the word.

[3:25] But a zoo phobia. Put it out if you think you know what zoo phobia refers to. What's it a fear of? What do you think it might be? There's a bit of a hint there. It's not a fear of zoo, but it's a fear of animals.

Fear of animals. Next one. Ornophobia. Birds. Fear of birds. Next one. Hemophobia. Blood. It's the fear of blood. Next one.

Claustrophobia. Small spaces. Confined spaces. The next one. Scotophobia. No, it's nothing to do with people on the other side of the border.

Anybody know? It's the fear of the dark, apparently. Of the what? Fear of the dark. Nyctophobia. It's the fear of night time.

Next one. I don't know if I'm going to pronounce this correctly. Helminthophobia. Fear of worms.

Wow. I'm impressed. What is it?

[4 : 29] Agrophobia. Gardening. Open spaces. Or going out. Next one. Arachnophobia. Spiders. Guilty. Lulophobia.

It's the fear of public speaking. Yeah. Hydrophobia. Water. Water.

Thermophobia. Heat. Heat. Heat. Acrophobia. It's the fear of heights. Fear of heights. Hodophobia.

Hobbits. It's the fear of travel. Musophobia. Not music. Fear of mice. Last one.

Pognophobia. I love this one. It is the fear of beards. John. Says a man with a beard. Yeah. Now.

All sorts of different things.

[5 : 30] That can generate a sense of fear in us. And if we're honest with ourselves. All of us have fears of one kind or another. Now I'm not going to go around with a microphone.

And share it with everybody. But what I would invite you to do. Is just pause for a moment now. And ask yourself this question. What is it that makes you afraid? What sort of things.

Do you become fearful of? Each of us will answer that differently. And it's a very personal question.

Which is why I'm not going to ask you to share it with anybody else.

You know. All of us have fears of one kind or another. It's part of being a human being. And I said jokingly just now. That you know. When it came to arachnophobia. Fear of spiders.

I put my hand up and said. Guilty. But actually. Why would we describe a fear. As something that we're guilty of. Because it's not something that. Although we might feel embarrassed about.

[6 : 28] Some of the things that may make us afraid. Actually it's part of being human. All of us have something or other. That makes us feel afraid. And sometimes. In our lives. Particular things will happen to us.

That make us feel fearful. And afraid. And we'll come to that in a moment. When we have our Bible reading. But just to introduce that reading. Because it comes from.

The book of Acts. Which. Tells us the story. Of the earliest Christians. After the time of Jesus. And when we rewind. To when Jesus was on earth. Jesus was.

Was with his disciples. Before he died. He said to them. What would happen to him. That he would be taken. That he would be crucified. That he would be died. He would die.

And that he would. Come alive again. But he said. Everything's going to be okay. And he said to him. He said to his disciples. Before he went back. To his father in heaven.

[7 : 23] He said. I'm not going to be with you. In a while. But I want you to hold in there. And to be hopeful. Because something amazing. Is going to happen. Because my Holy Spirit.

Is going to come upon you. The Holy Spirit. Of God. Will come upon you. Like fire. And that fire. Will be with you. Always.

Because God's Holy Spirit. Is always with us. And Jesus said. That. Even though he did great things. If we trust in him. And we follow him.

Then. We too. Will see amazing things happen. And as we go through. The stories in the book of Acts. And we read of Paul. And the earliest Christians. We see. That actually Jesus.

Was true to his words. That even though there were things. That made them feel afraid. That his presence by his spirit. Was with them. That they saw amazing things happen.

[8 : 21] They saw miracles. They saw healings. They saw people set free. They saw lives changed. Because God's promise. Is that he is always. Always.

With us. He's with us by his spirit. And he will not. Turn away. From that promise. There's something else. That Jesus said.

Before he died. In a conversation. With a woman at a well. One day. Who went to that place.

Searching and asking questions. Was as this woman. Was drawing water. From the well.

Jesus spoke of himself. As the one who gives. Life giving water. Water. That will always give us.

Everything that we need. God is with us. By his spirit. That we cannot see. And we find in the Bible. The image of fire. We find in the image.

[9 : 15] In the Bible. The image. Of living water. But God's presence. Is something. That we cannot see. We cannot reach out. And touch. But we can be reassured.

That he is always there. With us. And that leads us. To the word on the street. Where we're going to hear. In just a few moments. Of how Paul. Even though he had fear going on.

Knew that God. Was with him. The word on the street. What was the name of the town. Where that story took place. This is a test to see. If you were really listening. Corinth.

It was in Corinth. And Corinth. Corinth did not have. A particularly good reputation. In Jesus' day. It was known. To be a difficult place. In fact.

The word. To Corinthianize. Somebody. Was used as an insult. It meant to really draw. Somebody's moral standards down. If you'd been Corinthianized. It meant that you really were down there.

[10:11] In terms of your. Your lifestyle. It was. It had such a reputation. For. For being a place. Where. There was. Basically. No sense of morality at all.

There was all sorts of different. Competing. Philosophies. And beliefs. About life. And. That was where. Paul. Found himself.

For that period of time. Now. At face value. Listening to that reading. Would suggest. That things were going quite well. Because it tells. How the church. Was growing. There were new Christians. Being made.

And you would think. That actually. Paul didn't have that much. To be afraid of. But clearly. He did. And whilst that reading. Doesn't spell out. Anything specific. That happened.

Much. In much detail. In terms of. What would make Paul afraid. Clearly he was. Because later on. Where he wrote the letters. To the Corinthians. He actually wrote.

[11:05] When I first came to you. I came with much fear. And trembling. And we know. That must have been true. Because. What we are told. In that story. That we just read.

Was that Paul had a dream. In which. Jesus. A vision of Jesus. Came to him. And said. Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid. But Paul. Even though he had.

His fears going on. Knew. That if he kept his focus. On Jesus. He would be okay. Now I just want to share. With you something. That I have. Used here before.

So you may have seen this. Before. But sometimes. It can be helpful. To see. The same image. Presented again. To help us think. About the reality. Of our fears. Now I want us. Just to go back. To that question. That I asked us all. To think about. Earlier on. About what things. Make us feel. Afraid. You see sometimes. Things can come along. In our lives. That really make us.

[11:58] Feel afraid. And we refer. To that. That feeling. When we get overwhelmed. By our fears. As that. Sometimes we call it. That sinking feeling. Don't we. Where we just feel. That we. We just can't. Stay afloat.

Because life is just. Getting so difficult. We're feeling afraid. I've got here. A jug of water. Water. And. And a little metal washer. Now you might not be able to see that. That clearly at the back. But it's a little metal washer. If I drop the metal washer. In the water. What's going to happen to it? It's going to sink. Isn't it? And in case you're going. There we go. Straight to the bottom.

And that can be us sometimes. When we're feeling afraid. When something happens. That makes us feel frightened. Then we can have that. That feeling. That we say. That sinking feeling.

We wish we could stay afloat. But we get pulled down. By the things. That make us feel afraid. Now. I've got something else here. Which is also quite small. I'm going to hold it up. It's a little bit easier to see.

[12:54] Than the washer. It's a little tiny piece. Of polystyrene. Now. If I drop this. In the water. What's going to happen? Who thinks it's going to sink?

Who thinks it's going to float? Okay. Most of you. And you're quite right. There it goes. It floats on the water. Now. Sometimes we might think. That being a Christian.

Is about leaning on God. And that perhaps. If we just. Talk a little bit about God. Maybe say a quick prayer. We lean on him. And that might be enough.

But. You know. If I try and balance that washer. On that piece of polystyrene. I might just about be able. No. I can't do it. If I could do it. It wouldn't last very long. Very quickly.

Very quickly. Indeed. It falls right off. And straight to the bottom. That's you and me. When we think. That following Jesus.

[13:51] Is just a matter of leaning on him. You see. When we look at the witnesses in the Bible. Time and time again. Yeah. They had fears. They had.

They were afraid. But we notice a pattern. And it's this. That the thing that kept them afloat. Is when they focus. On Jesus. Remember the story of.

When the disciples were out on the boat. On the water. And Jesus was walking on the water. And he says to Peter. Get out of the boat. And come to me. And he gets. Peter gets out.

And he walks on the water. Towards Jesus. All the while. He's looking at Jesus. He stays afloat. But then we're told. That Peter then looks around. And he sees. The storms.

And the size of the waves. And it's at that point. He starts to sink. You see. It's when he takes his focus off Jesus. And focuses instead on the fear. That he starts to sink.

[14 : 46] And so it is in this story we have this morning. It's when Paul focuses on Jesus. That those fears are put in perspective. You see. There is one way that this washer can stay afloat.

And it's not by leaning on the polystyrene. You've probably worked out how it is. How can I make this float? Thread it through the middle. You see. It's when we put God at the very centre of our lives.

Yes. The fear may still be there. But we find that in his strength. With him at the centre. We don't sink. But we stay afloat.

Now. Again. What is it? That you're fearful of. What is it that makes you afraid? Each of us. Every single one of us in this room. Will have something or other. That makes us feel afraid. What we're going to do now. Is we're just going to lead us in a short prayer. We're going to ask us to think about those things.

[15 : 48] That may make us feel afraid. And in our prayers. We're just going to bring those things before God. And ask him to be at the very centre of our lives. And give us strength. Just as Paul had strength.

In the face of his fears. So let's pray. Sometimes it's helpful to close our eyes for this. But if you feel more comfortable keeping them open. Then. Whichever you prefer to do. Firstly.

As we come to pray. I invite you to think about. Whatever it may be. That may make you feel afraid. It might be one particular thing. It might be a situation. It might be something that's going on in your life right now.

Or something that lies in the future. But just think about that thing. And hold it before God. In prayer. Now.

And as you hold. That thought. In prayer. Remember again.

[16 : 48] The words that Jesus said. To Paul in the vision. For they are the same words. That he would say to each one of us. Do not be afraid.

Lord God. We all have fears. We all have things. That make us feel like we could be sinking.

Lord. Whatever those things may be. We bring them to you now. Help us to trust in you. Help us not only to lean on you.

But to put you at the centre of our lives. That even though the fears. And the things that make us feel afraid. May still be there. We may know that we are kept afloat.

By you. And by your strength. Amen. Thank you.

[17 : 55] Amen.