

The Hope Of The Gospel In The Midst Of Fear

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[0 : 00] Unintentionally, I know folks have been asking about Gemma after our lengthy stay in the emergency room on Thursday.

So she had twisted her leg the other day. It must have been Tuesday, we think. We don't really know when it happened. We do know where it happened. It happened in our kitchen.

And I guess she, it's taken a few days for the whole story to come out. As you can imagine with a five-year-old trying to figure out what exactly went down.

And she waited until we were actually meeting with the orthopedic to give some, you know, meaningful content to this whole thing after several hours in the emergency room. Apparently she was wearing socks and she ran into the kitchen and didn't stop quite as gracefully as she hoped. And as she puts it, as she put it, she did a split when she didn't want to. At least that's what it felt like to her. So she had twisted her leg. But praise God, the x-ray showed no like, no damage to the bone or anything like that.

[1 : 10] The thing that is concerning for certainly her parents is that her knee is still significantly swollen, more so than the other one. At least it looks significant to me. So she has a follow-up scheduled for Friday with the orthopedic if nothing improves.

But she is walking better now, which is, you know, a huge praise. So as I saw her going out with her Snoopy, that reminded me, oh yeah, she got Snoopy at the ER. And I didn't mention anything, and you all must think I'm a horrible father, which, well, you keep your thoughts to yourself.

Take your Bibles and open up to 1 Corinthians 15. All right, so 1 Corinthians 15 is where we're going to start today.

And we're going to do some, we're going to be around scripture a little bit. I'll be honest with you, coming into this this morning, it is God has to use this in your life.

Obviously, with the events of what took place in Lewiston, a lot has changed. A lot of things out of the norm, and that included how I wanted to approach this Sunday.

[2 : 29] There was part of me that was like, well, let's just continue in Acts 11. But I'd feel like that would be doing a disservice and ignoring the obvious issues that we've dealt with over the last several days.

And so I have Thursday, Friday, Saturday, been pleading with God to give clarity in direction of what to share. And by the grace of God, I was able to muddle together my various thoughts and put it hopefully in a comprehensive way, as I share with you today.

And pray that you will be blessed by it as we are in scripture. And as I've titled this sermon, The Hope of the Gospel in the Midst of Fear.

So, what's gone on in the state of Maine over the last several days? It's safe to say that there's been a very real presence of fear among people. Fear among people even in this church that I have spoken to personally.

There's fear from what took place at a bowling alley and a restaurant in Lewiston. Two simple places, two public places that any one of us could find ourselves in.

[3 : 50] There's fear from the fact that the person responsible was not immediately apprehended. And so for two days, not knowing his whereabouts caused a lot of our state to go on lockdown and shut down and change routines.

And, you know, see through social media, different events that were postponed or canceled due to this reality, this fear that existed.

I was supposed to substitute for a teacher at OVCS on Thursday and Friday because of his illness. And OVCS had closed school along with many other schools in our area and further north.

There was fear, or is, in not knowing what is to come from all this. So the reality that there is fear that exists, and many, if not all of us here, have had some experience of it over the last several days because of what's happened.

I did not want to go untouched. Fear is an emotional response to perceived threats or danger characterized by a sense of unease, apprehension, or anxiety.

[5 : 04] I did not come up with that definition myself. I looked it up. That's what it is. It's the emotional response to perceived threats or danger or what has actually already taken place.

The Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology and Counseling says fear ranges from uneasiness to abject insecurity with threats to one's physical and or psychological self.

So fear in and of itself is a danger to an individual. Just fear alone. Since April of 1999, when the tragic events took place at Columbine High School, there have been many more media-covered mass shootings in America.

So many, in fact, that it seems to have become almost a normal part of American society. This is something I was talking about with an individual last night, even, at the Lion's Supper. However, obviously, the topic of discussion for many conversations revolved around what took place in Lewiston and our reactions to it.

And the lady I was speaking with said, it almost seems like this is just a normal thing. And that's true. With how often and frequently it takes place in our nation and how much coverage each event receives, it almost seems like it's just part of normal life.

[6 : 33] And we can become desensitized to the evil and the unfortunate reality that are these mass murder events. Depending on who you read and how they define it, there's somewhere in the neighborhood of, you know, five or six hundred, I think, this year alone.

But this one being the largest. Five sixty five. Thank you. And this one being the largest one of 2023. My prayer is that the Lord would help us not to become desensitized to such evil.

And indeed, it is evil. But where does this evil come from? Is there hope to combat this great sin and wickedness?

Jesus tells us clearly in Matthew 15, verse 19, where these things come from. He says, For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander, and many other things that could be mentioned.

At the root of every murder is a sinful heart. And that's drastically different from just from mere mental illness. There's no pill or medicine that one can digest to change a sinful heart.

[7 : 55] Laws are enacted to try to prevent things like this from happening. And they're good. Laws are good.

Laws are necessary. But laws might even restrain some sinful behavior. But laws cannot change a sinful heart. Some would argue that more counsel or education would prevent the next mass shooting.

Yet we see in Genesis 4 that Cain had the best counselor in the world in God. And instead of heeding what his counselor had to say, Cain went out and killed his brother Abel anyway.

Some would argue that if we legislate the elimination of guns, then such violence and murder would cease or at least be greatly diminished. Yet Genesis 6 reveals to us that a world void of guns was still quite violent and full of murder.

Genesis 6 verse 5 and 11. The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth. That every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and the earth was filled with violence.

[8 : 59] If the root of the problem is a sinful heart, then no amount of medicine or education or laws or even the eliminations of guns could change that.

So what hope do we have in this world? What hope do we have in our society in the state of Maine? How do we deal with our fear in the midst of such hopelessness?

These are two questions that I've struggled with over the last few days. And the answer, what hope do we have? I always come back to the gospel. And that's where we're going to be looking at today. Now that's clear to me. The answer is the gospel. It's the Sunday school answer for all our problems and our trials. And every question we have is the gospel. But how do we deal with our fear in the midst of this hopelessness?

How do we as Christians deal with fear? Well, let's start with the gospel. Our hope must be in the gospel.

[10:02] So first, I've got three points apparently. I didn't pay attention as I was writing honestly. The gospel is what reconciles us to God. That would be the first point to take away to give us hope.

The gospel is what reconciles us to God. 1 Corinthians 15, verses 1 through 11. Paul writes, Obviously, you could do a whole sermon on these 11 verses, but I just want it to be one aspect of exposure to the word of God as we go about this morning.

I think one thing that stuck out to me in verse 3, probably the thing that stuck out to me the most in my preparation for this morning is the term of first importance.

Of first importance. There's no message of truth more important than the gospel of Jesus. This is first importance to Paul.

[12:13] And it was first importance that he gave it to the Corinthian church. And it is of first importance to us today. In Romans 1, 16, Paul writes, I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

It was of first importance to Paul because it is the power of God for salvation. Everything about the gospel was prophesied for hundreds of years before it happened.

Jesus died for our sins. He was buried and he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures. Everything in the life of Jesus happened as God ordained it to happen.

As he had prophesied and said it would happen for hundreds of years. Both the good and the evil.

Romans 5, 8, God shows his love for us and that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

God's love for us is shown in the sacrifice of Jesus at the very time that we had no love for him.

Before we ever come to the point in our life, in our mind, in our thinking that we're going to love God or we love God for what he's done for us.

[13:38] Before there's ever any thought like that, Jesus died for us. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us, Paul writes.

In Hebrews 12, verses 2 and 3 says, Jesus endured the cross.

Our God, our God, who took on human flesh, lived among sinners, gave a life of perfection and compassion and love. And it was, we acted, sinners, we acted.

I'm going to just lump us in there because if we were there, we would have been among them.

Acted in such hostility towards him. Ultimately, where he was crucified because of hatred towards him, towards Jesus, towards the Son of God.

2 Corinthians 5, verse 2 and 3 says, All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

[15:12] That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

So what took place in Jesus, meek, humble, loving, compassionate Jesus, who endured hostility from sinners to nail him to the cross.

All this was an act of God's love to reconcile us to himself. There are four times in 2 Corinthians 5, 18 and 19 that the word reconciliation comes up.

God's reconciling us to himself through Jesus. And he has given to us a ministry of reconciliation.

And this, in itself, I want to just, I just want to expand on for quite a significant amount of time.

But it's not the scope of this time together this morning. But the fact is, we are reconciled to God and we have been given a ministry of reconciliation to take to others. The hope of the gospel is our reconciliation to God because of the love that sent Jesus to the cross.

[16:35] Second point that I was contemplating is that the gospel is what delivers us from this evil age. Galatians 1, verses 3 and 4 say, Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.

This took some thinking. Because I imagine we don't feel delivered from this present evil age at the moment.

But it is the will of God to deliver us from the present evil age. And as I was thinking on this and praying through these verses, what does that mean?

Well, it's not to say that we are delivered from the consequences of evil actions, or that we will not be influenced or touched by evil in some form or fashion. Clearly that's not the case because here we are.

And here is what we are enduring and what we are facing day in and day out in one form or another. So rather, it's not that we are delivered from evil taking place, or that we are not touched or

impacted by evil decisions or senseless acts of violence or whatever.

[18 : 14] We are, because we live on this earth. Rather, to be delivered from the present evil age is that our lives are not to be defined by evil and given to it.

Our works are to be good for the glory of God. You could look at Matthew 5.16 and Ephesians 2.10 to see that. Let your light shine before men, that they may bring glory to your Father in heaven.

Our words are to be encouraging for the building up of the church. Ephesians 4.29 and following.

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such as for edifying one another.

Our hope is to be found in him and not man. Our hope is to be found in God, in Christ, and not mankind, in each other necessarily.

The conversations that take place after such tragic events as what happened this past week tend to focus on what man can do to make it right. There are calls to congressmen and congresswomen for stricter gun control laws.

[19 : 22] There's a plea for better access to mental health care. There are resources distributed and offered to help people through their trying times. And this is not bad by any stretch.

These are good things. This shows compassion toward humanity. Compassion and concern for one another. We ought to bring these things to the table of discussion.

We should be talking about these things and not be so dismissive of them. I know with some people and in some areas, you know, you talk about stricter gun control laws and you think you lopped off their right and left arm.

You're completely offending people in that. But is it so absurd to bring such a topic of conversation to the table to be discussed in a civil manner?

I think not. As I was talking with Josh Randall this morning, we were talking about the, you know, at the bowling alley, which is where his co-worker was. And I was just thinking, like, the thing that keeps coming up in the media is that it was a time of a bunch of kids were there.

[20 : 32] Bowling and having a good time. And you think about a lot of these mass shootings, think about Columbine and Sandy Hook and others. They take place in schools where kids are.

And if there's anybody who should be the most protected in our society, it's children. So, yeah, maybe we do need to have hard discussions that you don't want to talk about. But let's be civil about it.

Let's bring it to the table. But all these things, you know, mental health care, they were talking a lot about how this fellow was, you know, he sought care or was in care. Honestly, I'll be honest with you, I didn't read all about it.

I didn't read all about this guy and his background and all that. But I know this came across. Maybe that's something that does need to have better access to. But how do you have that when it's a practice that is lacking staffing and all that stuff?

And there should be resources offered to people who are in pain and who are suffering. You know, we ought to provide ways in which people can talk and receive counsel.

[21 : 41] And we as Christians have the best counsel book in all the world in Scripture and the Word of God. We should be on the front lines ready to counsel people. Which, by the way, I believe 100% every Christian is called to be a counselor.

And I'll make that argument another day. But every Christian is called to be a counselor. And we have the Word of God as the greatest resource with which we can counsel people. It is the greatest source of hope that people can have.

Why not bring that to the table for discussion as well? We cannot disregard the fact that only God is capable of bringing a true lasting change in society.

Only God is capable of bringing comfort and peace. Only God is capable of changing a sinner's heart. Only the gospel is capable of delivering us from this present evil age.

And finally, the gospel is what conforms us to Christ. I say finally. I know this is my longest point. So, hunker down.

[22 : 56] We're told in the Bible that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh. He is the image of God, which we are to emulate. John 1.14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

And we have seen His glory. Glory is of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Colossians 1.15 and 19 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. This is Jesus. God in the flesh. Full deity in humanity. And then when you read in Ephesians 5 verses 1 and 2.

Therefore be imitators of God as beloved children. And walk in love as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us. A fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

So we know who Jesus is. We have in the gospel accounts His life lived out. We have His commands given to us through the epistles. And through, you see in the book of Acts, go and make disciples of all nations.

[24 : 03] And we've got the apostles who wrote the epistles. And more commands and expectations given for us. All things, by the way, in which Jesus perfectly fulfilled in Himself.

We are called to imitate as well. Be imitators of God as beloved children. Jesus has shown us what that looks like. We are to be like Him in every way.

And the primary means by which God brings that about. How does God change us and mold us into the image of His Son? Through trials.

Through hardships. James 1, 2, and 3. Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds. For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

Well, how we got to kick start on this? Turn to Romans 8. I was afraid he was going to start, you know, taking all the verses that I had planned for you this morning.

[25 : 06] But he chose a different section of Romans 8. We only read up to verse 25. And then Tony decided to pipe in, verse 26 and 27. So he didn't get too far into it.

We're going to read verses 26 through 39. Romans 8, verses 26 through 39. Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness.

For we do not know what to pray as we ought. You been there? Lord, I don't know what to pray. I didn't know what to pray for this week.

I mean, I know some things. Romans 8, what? 26. Thank you. Yeah. We do not know what to pray for as we ought.

But the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. Even when you are at a loss for words, God's not. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit.

[26 : 11] Because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good.

For those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.

In order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined, he also called. And those whom he called, he also justified. And those whom he justified, he also glorified.

I'm going to pause there for a second. All things work together for good. For those who love God. And those who are called according to his purpose.

The trial, the fiery trial that you are enduring. The hardship you're going through. Whatever it is, is working together for good in your life.

[27 : 10] Because you are being conformed to the image of his Son. In order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. Pick up in verse 31.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all.

How will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn?

Christ Jesus is the one who died. More than that, who was raised. Who is at the right hand of God. Who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ.

Shall tribulation. Or distress. Or persecution. Or famine. Or nakedness. Or danger. Or sword. As it is written.

[28 : 09] For your sake. We are being killed all the day long. We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. No. In all these things.

We are more than conquerors. Through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death. Nor life. Nor angels. Nor rulers. Nor things present.

Nor things to come. Nor powers. Nor height. Nor depth. Nor anything else in all creation. Will be able to separate us. From the love of God. In Christ Jesus.

Our Lord. It is in the midst of these trials. Where we can lose hope. We lose sight of the goodness of God. Made clear to us in the gospel.

Of Jesus Christ. We forget that he has warned us. About these hard times to come. These trials that we will endure. Yet nothing.

[29 : 05] Nothing. Can separate us from the love of God. In Christ Jesus. Our Lord. There is no trial. Or hardship. Or uncertainty. That we can endure.

And go through. And face. That is going to separate us. From the love of God. There is nothing we endure in life. That means God. No longer loves you. In Matthew 8.

When Jesus was asleep in the boat. And the great storm came on the sea in Galilee. And the disciples panicked. Remember that? And out of desperation. They woke Jesus up.

Jesus is sleeping in the midst of a storm. And they are waking him up. Lord you got to save us. We are going to be consumed. This is our end. And what happened when Jesus woke up?

What happened when Jesus woke up? Think on this. He did not immediately stop the storm. That was raging and bringing fear to the disciples.

[30 : 06] He didn't. He didn't wake up like. Woo. Man. It's windy out here. Stop. He didn't do that. What did he do? He dealt with a peril that was more concerning.

Than the storm raging. And that was the unbelief of the disciples. He said. Why are you afraid? Oh you of little faith.

According to the practical encyclopedia of Christian counseling. On fear. One of the strongest. It's one of the strongest emotions that God has placed within man. It is the quality that preserves us in a dangerous world.

Fear keeps us from going too close to the edge of the cliff. Or from driving recklessly and so on. So it has valuable uses. Fear is a good thing. But fear like all of our emotions may be abused.

It may be allowed to control us. Rather than be controlled. By us. Spurgeon said. The greatest evil to be dreaded is that of doubting your Lord.

[31 : 18] In a sermon that he gave. Number 2,852. In the Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons. He says. When we have to battle with trouble.

Let us always begin with ourselves. Our own fears. Mistrust. Suspensions. Selfishness. And self-will. For the chief danger lies there. All the trouble in the world cannot harm you so much as half a grain of unbelief.

There is nothing we can face in the world that is going to be more costly to us individually. Than our unbelief. Toward God. In Psalm 146 verse 5 says.

Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob. Whose hope is the Lord his God. Turn with me to Psalm 46. Psalm 46 verses 1 through 3.

It says. God. Is our refuge and strength. A very present help in trouble.

[32 : 29] Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way. Though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea. Though its waters roar and foam. Though the mountains tremble at its swelling.

We will not be afraid.

Our refuge is in God. God is our refuge. God is our strength. We will not fear. Though everything around us. Changes and shifts.

The things that are so big. And seemingly so planted. Even if the mountain went into the sea. The thing that would seem absolutely impossible to us. Even if that happened. We will not be afraid.

Because God is our refuge and our strength. Turn to Psalm 112. Man I could have just gone one Psalm after another. To deal with this today.

[33 : 44] Psalm 112 verse 6 and 7. It says. For the righteous will never be moved. He will be remembered forever. He is not afraid of bad news.

His heart is firm. Trusting in the Lord. He will not be moved. He will not be scared. He will not be shaken. He's not afraid of bad news.

His heart is firm. He's trusting in the Lord. God is his refuge and strength. In Hebrews 13 verse 6. Says that we can confidently say.

The Lord is my helper. I will not fear. What can man do to me? God is my helper. He's my refuge. He's my strength.

He's my hope. He's my comfort. He's my peace. What can man do to me? Because there's nothing that can separate me. From the love of God. In Christ Jesus. Oswald Chambers says.

[34 : 50] The remarkable thing about fearing God. Is that when you fear God. You fear nothing else. Whereas if you do not fear God. You fear everything else. So.

My encouragement. My challenge to you. Is to be like the father. Who cried out to Jesus. In Mark 9 verse 24. When he cried out. Lord I believe.

Help. My unbelief. May we indeed believe. And have confidence in God. That he be our refuge and strength. In times of uncertainty.

When we feel fear. Welling up. Let's turn to him. And cry out. Lord I believe. Help. My unbelief. Let's pray.

Lord. What a week that we have had here in Maine. Lord what devastation.

[35 : 55] Has rocked us. Lord. Something that we've seen. Over and over and over again. In the news. Throughout our country. Lord that we never thought.

Even for a moment. Would affect us here in Maine. As much as it has this week. Lord our hearts break. For evil.

That runs rampant. Lord how long will you allow this to happen. How long will you let this continue. In Lord.

I pray for the families. I pray for the friends. I pray for all those affected directly. By what took place in Lewiston. And Lord I pray that you would give us.

The wherewithal. To call on you. To look to you as our refuge and strength. Lord to bring the gospel message. To people in desperate need of encouragement.

[36 : 56] And comfort. And peace. Lord we believe. We believe. That you are in control. Lord help.

Our unbelief I pray. Help our confidence to be in you. Always. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.