

More Praise, Less Panic

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Preacher: Ray Sweet

[0:00] Well, hey, good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. As always, if you'd like to know more, you can check us out at FCCGreensburg.com or you can go to the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.

But our heart is simply this. We want to get into the Word, but most of all, we want the Word of God to get into us and transform these hearts and these lives to truly live for Jesus.

Now, today I'm just kind of in awe because where does the time go, right? It's December the 1st, and you know what that means around the church?

Beautiful Christmas decorations. And by the way, thank you to all who stayed and helped last Sunday to put up the decorations. It also means Christmas songs we love to sing, Advent readings, Christmas Eve communion, Silent Night, Peace Peace over Candlelight, and of course, messages that talk about the birth of our Savior.

And this year, we have a theme not only for our sermon series, but also our Christmas Eve services and everything we do leading up to Christmas. Our theme is more and less.

[1:12] Now, last week, I went to Facebook to ask this fill-in-the-blank question. What's the first thing you think of when you hear more of blank and less of blank?

And the answers, honestly, could be serious, they could be funny, they could be whatever. And here's what we got. More experiences or memories and less stuff. More joy and less stress.

The bosses in our midst said more work and less talk. One young mom said more parenting our kids, less friending them. More money and less bills.

Can I get an amen to that? One EMT said more sugar-free and less diabetes. Several said more love and less hate. More Hallmark Channel and less sports.

I don't agree. The one Baltimore Ravens family at our church said more Ravens wins and less Steelers wins. More activity and less cell phone.

[2:10] More scripture, less TV. More forgiveness and less blame. Of course, we had some John 3:30 references. More of Jesus and less of me.

And then in response to the snow that we've already seen on the ground this year, someone said more warmth, less cold. And then the last one, in my opinion, is just heresy.

Two very confused people said more IU and less Purdue. Listen, just one good year in football and you'd think that they're a perennial powerhouse. So enjoy it, IU fans.

I'm sure it's going to come crashing down soon. But hey, welcome. Welcome to this new series called More and Less. Because to have more of something good, you usually need less of something not so good.

Now let me ask you this. Am I the only one who can easily feel panicky in the world that we live in? See, regardless of who you voted for in the presidential election, I think we all could agree that the ads, the text messages, the calls, the political commercials, man, those can just go away forever as they simply create panic.

[3:20] And I don't know about you, but I try not to let who sits in the White House or who controls the Senate or the House dictate my joy. Here's why. Because I know who sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, Isaiah 40, 22.

I know the King of Kings personally. And when we are His, there's no need to panic. Now, if you want to grab your Bibles and start to turn roughly about three quarters of the way through to Luke chapter 2.

Luke chapter 2. We're going to be there soon. But one cool thing about this series and even the Christmas Eve services is that over the course of this month, we will focus on a passage from each of the four Gospels.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. As we talk about the more and less we need in our lives in order to walk in the love, joy, peace, and hope that Christ offers.

So, if you're a note taker, you should have your outline in your bulletin. You can also go to the YouVersion Bible app under Events and you can see our outline that way.

[4 : 26] But here's the first sentence I want us to see today. It's easy to panic when our eyes are on our circumstances. You and I both know this to be true. It's easy to panic when our eyes are on our circumstances.

Well, here's a few examples for you. When you've had the water heater fixed and the washing machine replaced within a week or two of each other, my home, that can easily create some panic, right?

When your work situation is in limbo or you just know that this probably isn't the job for me, panic.

When you're a new parent and you're up all through the night trying to take care of your baby, praying you're doing everything right while being absolutely exhausted, easy to panic.

When you watch your spouse that you've loved all these years deal with a major health struggle.

When life just feels hectic and busy with every second of every day spoken for, it's easy to panic.

We could keep going, but I think you get it. Panic happens when we put our eyes on our circumstances. Now, one of my favorite things to do when I preach is to put myself in the shoes of these real life, ordinary Bible characters and see as we see, we as people have this tendency, whether we're talking about famous people from history or even our own family members from a few generations back, we have the tendency to embellish how amazing people are and almost make them into these superheroes.

[5 : 53] And I think we could do the same thing when it comes to Bible characters. Oh, they weren't like me with all these doubts and these fears. They were just always perfect and full of faith, always trusting God in the impossible.

And yet, if you've ever truly studied the Bible, you know that's not true. They were regular people like us who had their strengths, who had their weaknesses. They had their doubts and their fears.

And I love how the Bible tells real life stories of the good, the bad, and the ugly.

And if you're here with me in Luke chapter 2, I want to show you a couple examples of how easy it would have been to panic. First, let's look at Joseph and Mary in Luke 2.

And we're going to start in verse 4. As a decree has already gone out for everyone to go to their family's town of origin to register. And let's start here in Luke 2 verse 4.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea to Bethlehem, the town of David, because he belonged to the house in the line of David.

[6 : 59] He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son.

She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger because there was no guest room available for them. And we know we're talking about Jesus, who was conceived of the Holy Spirit.

Now, I'm not sure if you've noticed a couple real big things, though, in that passage that could have caused some panic. Well, first, Mary is very, very pregnant.

Spoken like a boy, she's about to pop, okay? They live in Nazareth. They have to go to Bethlehem. There's no other option. And as you look up the distance from Nazareth to Bethlehem, depending on the route that you took, it was somewhere between 70 and 90 miles.

They do not have cars in those days. The Bible doesn't mention exactly how they got there, but we assume they either walked the whole way or they possibly rode a donkey, or both, which would have been probably a four- to seven-day journey, probably on the longer end with Mary being very pregnant.

[8 : 08] But regardless, it would have easily caused panic. She's almost full term. I can't imagine how hard of a journey that had to be for her, as she's already super uncomfortable.

Now you add in the walk. You add in the bumpy ride. For her husband, he wants to make sure she's okay, that the baby's not going to come in the middle of nowhere. For both, this is overwhelming.

This is scary stuff. But praise God, we know they made it to Bethlehem safely. But the contraction started. And like it or not, this baby boy was going to be born in the town of David.

And guess what? Luke snuck in here at the end of verse 7. We learn that there was no guest room available for them. Can you imagine the panic Joseph had as he's going door-to-door trying to find

a place for them to get shelter, knowing his baby will need to be delivered soon?

Now, going back a few years, there's a story that's been told about a small-town Christmas pageant and a little boy named Wally Perling. Wally was a big kid with an equally big heart, but he came from very humble beginnings.

[9 : 14] He was a little slower than some of the other kids. He was in second grade, but he had been held back a couple times. He was very kind and compassionate. And yet, he struggled to make friends.

And one year, during the Christmas pageant, he wanted to be a shepherd so badly, but instead, Miss Lambert assigned him to the role she thought fitting better, the innkeeper.

Like I said, he was a big teddy bear, but being a head taller than all the other kids, being a big kid, he sure did fit the part of an imposing innkeeper turning Mary and Joseph away.

Well, they all worked hard on their parts. They knew their lines. They were ready for the big performance. And the day came, and Wally was standing behind the curtain, watching it all with such excitement.

Finally came his part. He got in place. Joseph tenderly leads Mary to the inn. They knock on the door, and Wally swings the door open with a stern look, and he says, What do you want?

[10 : 11] Sir, we seek lodging. And then Wally says, Seek it elsewhere. The inn is filled. Sir, Joseph pleaded. We've traveled far, looked all throughout the city. My wife is heavy with child.

Well, once again, Wally sternly said, like he was supposed to, I told you there's no room here for you. But Joseph persisted. Surely there's got to be a corner in the room for her. Please, she's so tired and pregnant.

But this time, Wally kind of relaxed his stance a little bit, and he didn't say anything. And Miss Lambert's starting to kind of freak out, and she's behind him, and she's whispering, Say no room. Be gone. No room. Be gone. And finally, after a long, awkward pause, he says, No room. Be gone. And as Joseph and Mary start to walk away, Wally began to fill up with guilt.

Tears began to form in his eyes. And that's when the plague took an unexpected turn that no one expected here, where Wally yells out, Don't go, Joseph.

[11 : 11] Bring Mary back. She can have my room. And while some criticized him, ruining the original story, others loved his heart of compassion, and they considered it the most Christmas of all Christmas pagets they had ever seen.

But, you know, we know the story went just a little differently, right? There was no room for them, and they were directed to a stable where God in the flesh was placed in a manger.

I can't imagine the level of panic that Joseph and Mary could have felt that night leading up to his birth. And then, as we continue to look here in Luke 2, we see another example, excuse me, of what could have been pure panic.

But this time for a group that we know as the shepherds. So if you've got your Bibles to open there to Luke 2, let's start here in verse 8. Luke 2, 8 through 12.

It says, And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

[12 : 18] But the angel said to them, Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord, and this will be a sign to you.

You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. No question, this turned out amazing. But once again, put yourself in their shoes.

You're a shepherd. And while shepherds weren't necessarily despised in that culture, although some did have a reputation of being a little wild, they were probably better described as being forgotten in that culture.

And as they're in their field that night, keeping an eye on the sheep, probably hoping no wild animals are going to try to come for their flock. It's nice and quiet when suddenly an angel appears. Talk about freaking you out. Verse 9 said they were terrified, as we would have been too, of course. And I can't imagine the first thoughts of pure panic that could have gone through their minds as they don't know what's happening.

[13 : 22] I'm guessing they fell flat on their faces. They're thinking, are we in trouble? Did they see me kick those sheep yesterday? Little did they know they'd be the first ones outside of Joseph and

Mary to see the newborn king, to see the Messiah.

Now, I wonder what in your life may be causing you panic right now. Is it too much month left at the end of your money and the bills are piling up?

Is there still a lot of Christmas to buy? Is that what it is? Is it intense grief over losing someone you love so dearly and the reminder that the holidays are here without them?

Is it your to-do list? Is it so long that you always feel like a slave to it? Is there a prodigal child that you want to see come home to the Lord and maybe even to the family so badly?

Maybe it's something that's happened in the past, a grudge you hold, that continues to cause panic in your mind. Could it be a relationship you know isn't godly? Maybe it's loneliness, maybe it's sadness you can't explain.

[14 : 26] Listen, it's easy to panic when our eyes are on our circumstances. We've all done it. Maybe we're all currently doing it. And yet, here's the second sentence I want us to see today. Panic turns to praise when our eyes are on Jesus.

Now, if I can fast forward for a moment here, I love the story of when the disciples are in a boat with a furious storm raging. The boat is filling up with water. They're scared they're going to die.

These are professional fishermen who are scared they're going to die when they've been on the water all their life. And then they look out and they see what they call a ghost walking on the water towards them.

It turns out to be Jesus. He is, in fact, walking on the water. And that's when Peter says so boldly, Jesus, if it's you, call me out on the water. And Jesus says, come on.

And while this seems crazy to the others in the boat with their eyes on their circumstances, Peter's eyes are on Jesus and he starts to walk on water. And when his eyes are on Christ, he does the impossible.

[15 : 31] But the second he puts them back on the storm, on his circumstances, that's when he starts to sink and he has to be rescued by Jesus. Now let's hit reverse a little bit and go back to our story here in Luke 2.

And let's pick up here in verse 15. Luke 2, verse 15. When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.

So they hurried off and they found Mary and Joseph and the baby who was lying in the manger.

When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child. And all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

Can you imagine that night for the shepherds? Just another boring night, caring for dumb, stinky sheep, when suddenly your mundane is interrupted with an angelic choir and news of the Messiah's birth.

And then you find this young couple with their baby in the manger. And you're amazed as you look into the eyes of God, knowing that he called you a blue-collar, forgotten shepherd onto the scene first to show that God loves all of us, no matter our earthly status.

[16 : 48] That you matter to the God of the universe, no matter what you've been told, or no matter what you've bought into, no matter where you've been. And I love how we see their panic turn to praise.

When verse 20 here in Luke 2 says this, the shepherds returned, glorifying and what? Praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Church, there's something powerful about praise, isn't there? Now let me be clear that praise can happen in a worship service. Praise can happen in your prayer closet as you're reading and meditating on the word, laying your heart out to him in prayer.

Praise can happen on the mountaintop when life is grand. And it can happen in the valley when pain is too real and life just stinks. Listen, praise can happen and should happen anywhere.

Let's break that down a little bit. I love coming into a worship service on Sunday morning where we are doing life with other believers, just like the Bible talks about, joining our voices, singing lyrics that are biblical and full of praise, where you're praising him through the study of his word, through submission of your will, where we take the Lord's supper, remembering his death on the cross, praising him for grace, and even the life that comes because of the empty tomb, where we cheerfully praise him as we give back to him a small portion of what he's blessed us with.

[18 : 15] And even as we lift our concerns to him in prayer, see, every part of our worship service is designed to praise him and to join with Psalm 136.

It says, Give thanks to the Lord for he is good. Yes, his love endures forever. Give thanks to the God of gods. His love endures forever. Give thanks to the Lord of lords.

Say it with me. His love endures forever. And this is why I encourage you not to miss a corporate worship service like this every Sunday. Not because it's about checking the church attendance box, but instead it's about praising Jesus with the body of believers, not just together at 425 North Broadway, but with the church universally around the world.

See, this is an important fueling station that we all need to see the panic fade as the praise goes up to the Prince of Peace. Now on the other end, what about in your private life that just you and maybe your family see?

Do you have a prayer closet? A place where you can escape the chaos, meet with the Lord? Are you actively seeking his face through his word? And when life smacks you in the face, are you giving it to him, praising him all the way through?

[19 : 28] Or do we just panic? And although this may be tough to hear, panic isn't just for those of us who maybe are more likely to freak out and express it all.

It's also for the quiet. It can also look like complaining or making excuses or walking with no joy or just suppressing everything deep down and living in depression.

See, the enemy, Satan, loves to see us panic and to put our eyes on our circumstances. But in the words of Anne Graham Lotz, one way to drive Satan to distraction and to overcome him is through praise to Jesus.

And a little over a month ago, my family was blessed to go on a vacation with a couple families from the church. And one of them, one family was a couple named Larry and Deb.

And if you know Deb, you know that she's had more than her fair share of health struggles in her life. It's been awful. She's almost died many times. And she goes in for infusions about every week and finds herself spending a lot of time in the hospital.

[20 : 35] And when we were on vacation, she had to get an infusion at the ER, which she knew about ahead of time. And then the day before we left, this is what we didn't know about, she ended up getting admitted to the hospital because of other complications.

And I can guarantee you she wouldn't talk about any of that because she doesn't want anyone to feel sorry for her. And having known her for two or three years now, I'm just blown away by her gift of faith.

I think I would have thrown in the towel a long time ago if I were her, if I'm just being honest. But she continues to have a great attitude. She even is ministering to everyone she encounters in the hospital. And what I've noticed is whether her circumstances are good, bad, or in between, there's a smile on her face.

She is still praising Jesus with all her heart. There is a joy in her soul as she trusts Him completely. And I'll tell you, when you meet someone like that, man, they preach a better sermon with their life than I ever could with my mouth.

So let me ask you why. Why would I choose to praise over panic? Because praise reminds me of the God that I serve and just how awesome He is.

[21 : 42] Praise brings me before His throne showing me once again that He is the Alpha and the Omega. He is the beginning and the end. So, so worthy is He of my praise that He could take care of Joseph and a very pregnant Mary on too long of a journey to Bethlehem.

That He could find the perfect spot for the Savior to be born. That He could send down an angel chorus to interrupt the shepherd's night showing them that they matter to God. That Jesus could withstand every temptation that we face and never sin, not even once.

That He could endure persecution from the hands of the religious leaders and still go to the cross to take our sins. And when they thought the story was over, He was powerful enough to raise to life, calling His church to the greatest mission the world has ever known.

To preach the gospel, to raise up faithful Christ followers. So, listen, as we stare at our December calendars that I'm sure, if yours is like mine, is way, way too busy.

As we watch our bank accounts head downward, usually at Christmas time. As we run around crazy trying to cook every meal, buy every present, be everywhere we're supposed to be, remember all of everything.

[22 : 59] Whew! Remember to surrender that panic to Him. Because this Christmas season, church, we choose more praise and less panic.

Say that with me. This Christmas season, I choose more praise and less panic. Amen. Let's pray together. Father, we are so very thankful for Your Word spoken to us this morning through this passage in Luke.

Father, I'm so thankful for Jesus. I'm so thankful for Your perfect plan to send Him in the most unexpected of ways to this earth to live a perfect, sinless life, dealing with every temptation, every struggle that we deal with, and yet, He was still perfect.

And He is the Savior. I'm thankful for His life He lives showing us what the kingdom of God is all about. How He healed the blind and cured the leper.

How He met people who were the down and out that everyone else despised, and He loved them, forgave them, and used them. I'm so thankful for His life that eventually led then to His death, where He suffered, where He was persecuted, lied about, arrested, beaten severely, and carried His cross to the, carried His cross to that hill where He was crucified.

[24 : 36] And Lord, I'm thankful that He died to take my place and every person who's listening here today when we, by faith, make Him our Lord and Savior. So Lord, thank You for Jesus and what He has done for us.

Thank You for what this Christmas season represents, that hope and joy and love and peace came into this world to show us the way.

So Father, I just pray over every person listening to this right now that You will just interrupt the chaos, interrupt the panic, and that You will be praised this Christmas season, that You will change our hearts and help us to praise You through the good and the bad, through everything life throws our way, and to trust You because You are good and You have plans for each of us.

So Father, take our hearts, mold us and shape us into Your image, and let Your Word just come alive as we live for You. We pray all of this in Jesus' precious name.

And God's people said, Amen and Amen. Hey, real quick, just want to give you this invitation. I have no idea who is listening to this message, but I know that God does and God brought you to it for a reason.

[25 : 58] And I pray that He has used His Word to encourage you, maybe to convict you, but most of all, to draw you to Himself and make you more like Jesus.

And if you're one who is listening to this and you don't know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, that is the first priority. So, hey, I want you to reach out to us if you want to talk about giving your life to Christ or maybe just have some faith questions that you need to get settled in your mind a little bit or maybe you want to talk about the church.

Once again, we are First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana. My name is Ray Sweet. I'm the lead pastor. You can check us out more online, fccgreensburg.com.

But hey, if you have any questions, here's a couple ways you can reach out. You can call us in the church office Monday through Thursday, 8 to 430. You can call us at 812-663-8488.

That's 812-663-8488. Or you can email me at ray at fccgreensburg.com. Hey, God bless you and we hope you have a great week.