

Exploring Fear

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[0 : 00] This is the evening service of Holy Trinity on the 22nd of June 2003. The speaker is Ariel Gerilowitz.

His sermon is entitled Exploring Fear and is based on Matthew 10, verses 26-39.

Fear. It's amazing the things that people are scared of. Have you actually sat down, ever sat down and made a list of what you might be scared of?

I think it would be an interesting kind of list. I thought I might give us a hand here. I can see someone else has been helping us as well. See, I went to the phobia website to check out some fears.

See, the word phobia means fear. And what happens is, every time someone's afraid of something, they just add the word phobia on the end. And that's what you have a fear of. Now, most of us have heard of arachnophobia, as we saw, the fear of spiders.

[1 : 11] Also, claustrophobia, the fear of confined spaces. But here's some more you might want to put onto your list.

Octophobia. Octophobia. The fear of the number eight. Imagine that. Some people are scared of the number eight. They'd have trouble riding it, wouldn't they?

And really, if you're scared of the number eight, I totally understand if you're not going to be a mathematician. But then there's a glutophobia. The fear of taking a bath.

I reckon most parents think their kids have this one. A glutophobia. But before we go there, you've got to remember, your kids might think that you have ripophobia, which is the fear of dirt.

That's why you want them to take a bath. But then there's bibophobia. The fear of the fear of books. Now, I think we can safely say, someone like Paul Barker probably wouldn't be scared of books, would you, Paul?

[2 : 18] No. But you never know. Paul Barker might have glutophobia. The fear of otters. That's right. There are people out there that are actually scared of otters.

And I have no idea what happens when they're watching a documentary and an otter comes on TV. What do they do? They run and, like, get out of the room or something. It's a real fear.

Then there's, well, phobophobia. We had it up there. It's being afraid of being afraid. How does it work? Like, I'm scared. I might be scared.

Like, but it's a real fear. Then there's papophobia. The fear of the Pope. Look, I thought he was a nice guy, but obviously some people haven't heard.

Then there's xenophobia. The fear of the color yellow. I'd be very scared of you right now, wouldn't I? With that yellow jumper on. And here's a tongue twister.

[3 : 25] Ephephophobia. The fear of teenagers. Who would have that one on their list? See, those big white teeth. The hair that's sort of going everywhere in all directions.

All those clothes. And then all those phrases they use on you. Like, you're a wicked man. You think, oh, I thought I was quite nice. Thank you. The fear of teenagers. There's a lot of fears out there, isn't there?

And it's amazing what people are scared of. But I want to ask this one question tonight. Who are you afraid of? Who do you fear?

Because in the end, it actually makes a big difference. Who you as a Christian fear? Especially. Especially. Especially when you are talking to people about Jesus.

So tonight we are going to answer this question by looking at Matthew 10, 26-33. So if you've got your Bibles there, please leave them open. What we're going to notice is firstly that fear must never stop us from talking to people about Jesus.

[4 : 39] Secondly, we're going to think about who we should really fear. And last of all, we're going to see how having a wrong fear in the end leads to us being shamed.

Well, if you have the passage, you'll notice that the very first thing that Jesus says there is, So do not be afraid of them.

And you might say to yourself, Okay, but why would I be afraid of them in the first place? Now, if we had read the passage that just comes before this passage, you would have noticed that Jesus is sending his disciples out.

Because they're going out to preach the good news, the good news about him. And he's just told them that they're about to be handed over, flogged, arrested, betrayed, hated, persecuted, possibly even be put to death.

And now he says, So do not be afraid of them. Yeah, right. I'm thinking, You've just told me I'm about to be handed over, betrayed, persecuted, hated, be put to death.

[5 : 42] And you're asking me not to be afraid? Come on, get serious. But Jesus is serious. Look at the next two verses, or the end of verse 26 and verse 27.

There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. In other words, the good news about Jesus is more important than anything else.

It is way too important to be left concealed, hidden in the dark, or as just a whisper in someone else's ear. And yes, telling people about Jesus is more important than our own lives.

In the news stories, we often see people who think that other things are more important than their own life. Just the other day, there was a father in Sydney who ran into his burning house to save his daughter.

He saved his daughter. He lost his life. He thought that my daughter's life is more important than mine.

[7 : 06] And he was willing to risk his life. Actually, at that moment, he probably didn't even think about his own life, did he? He was just thinking about hers. And Jesus is saying here, this good news about me, it's far more important than your own life.

Now, I want you to notice, Jesus isn't saying you're not going to be scared. I mean, I would be very scared to give up my own life for my faith.

I mean, it's scary enough talking to people about Jesus, isn't it? But what Jesus is giving us here is perspective. And that makes all the difference.

He does this in verse 28. He gives his disciples perspective. Look at the verse with me. Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul.

Rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both body and soul in hell. The point is, what can they really do to me?

[8 : 13] You see, the absolute worst case scenario is that I will die. But guess what? I still get to go to heaven. But hang on, what if we had a backwards kind of fear?

I mean, we don't really do this, do we? But let's just imagine it for a second. In other words, my fear is upside down. I'm more scared. I'm more scared. I'm more afraid of those who can kill my body than of God.

Sure, I get to live because I haven't been persecuted. I haven't risked my life. None of that has happened. Maybe another 20 years. Maybe another 40. Hey, maybe another 60 years I get to live. But then my body's going to die anyway, isn't it? And because I did not fear God, nor did I care about him, well, my soul dies as well.

I'm totally fascinated how we constantly have this upside down kind of fear, especially when it comes to evangelism.

[9 : 24] Now, in reality, in your life, here in Australia, what would be the worst case scenario? Well, for a teenager, it might be something like this.

Your friend might look you straight in the face and say, Oh, you're an idiot. You're just one of those Jesus freaks. I don't care about you. Seriously, that would be the worst case scenario.

And you think, hey, I'm still alive. I mean, my bones are okay. I'm not bleeding. Yeah, my feelings were very hurt.

But when you think about it, if your friend says something like that to you, then, hey, maybe it's time for some new friends. Just on a side note, how about we think about it this way?

You've got a friend, right? Now, because you're friends, you have similar tastes. You enjoy the same things. That's natural. You enjoy each other's company.

[10:32] You both like the same music, probably. You say the same jokes. They're not always that funny. But, hey, you both laugh. You watch the same TV programs. You probably cry at the same sappy movies.

Because you're similar. You're friends. Now, here you are, right? And you like Jesus. You love Jesus. Now, don't you think because you're so similar, just maybe your friend might like Jesus too, if you gave them a chance?

You see, I think half the time we decide for our friends anyway. We think, oh, no, they won't like Jesus. I'm not going to tell them about him. We haven't even given them a chance.

We haven't even let them decide. You know what we've done? We have denied them the privilege of knowing God. Seems that sometimes we are more afraid of what our friends will even think before they've even thought it than we are about God.

If there's anyone who should be feared in this universe, it is the creator of the universe. Be careful that your fear is not backwards or upside down.

[11:52] At this point, you might say, okay, I get it. Anyone I should be afraid of, it should be God. But hey, I feel so cheap. I mean, God just, there you can live or you can die, you can get persecuted, humiliated.

You think, does God really care? Yes, absolutely he cares. Look at the next three verses. Look at verse 29 to 31.

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

So don't be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows. If God cares about the birds, the insignificant birds, how much more does he care about you?

We know who this God is. He's the God that was willing to send his son to die on a cross for us, that we might live with him forever. There's absolutely no doubt in God's love for us.

[13:03] You see, it's not a question as to whether God loves us or not. No, it is a question as to whether we love our friends enough to tell them about Jesus.

Are you actually willing for your friends to have a go at you, to laugh at you, to humiliate you, so that they just might have a chance of knowing God? Next Friday night, some of you guys are going to this contagious event.

It's a perfect chance for your friends to meet Jesus. The question is, have you actually asked them to come along? If you have, fantastic. If you haven't, why not?

What's the worst thing is to say, no, I don't feel like it. No, I'm not into that. It's okay. You've given them a chance. And remember, if our friends don't accept Jesus, that's not our fault.

That's not our job to save people. That's God's job. You see, that's the wonderful thing about evangelism. If you do it, then you never fail.

[14:17] See, if your friend says, yeah, I believe in Jesus, you think, fantastic. If your friend says, no, I couldn't care less, you think, oh, all right, fair enough. But you have done a great job.

You've spoken to them about God. Well, Jesus knew that in the end, having this upside down, having this wrong kind of fear, leads to us being shamed, not him.

So I think he actually gets tough here with his disciples. Look at verses 32 and 33. Jesus says, whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven. My friends, be very careful that you do not disown Jesus.

Trust me, it is very easy to disown Jesus. Look at Peter, one of the disciples. She said to him, you're going to disown me three times, Peter. He said, me?

[15:34] No way. I love you. I would never disown you. Next thing you know, he's disowning Jesus. The rooster crows and Peter cries. I want to tell you two stories.

One about an 11-year-old boy and the other about a 25-year-old man. I was in the sixth grade. I had a friend who was Muslim, so he already knew something about Jesus.

And one day, it was a lunch period and I was sitting there reading my comic book. It was a great comic book because it was a comic book based on the Gospel of Matthew. Oh man, this is like gold for a little, you know, sixth grader.

And my friend came up and he said, hey, what is that? I said, oh, it's a comic book about Jesus. He says, yeah, I know Jesus. And so we sat there and we chatted for like the rest of the lunch period looking at this Gospel of Matthew in comic form.

And it was fantastic. We had a great conversation. Now, he didn't believe everything I believed and we disagreed on a lot of points. But you see, that day, I, Ariel Curloas, told someone about Jesus. [16:50] 14 years later, I'm going to Bible college each day catching a train. And there's this shop I walk past every morning and the guy's always up the front.

So I sort of get chatting with him sometimes, get to know him. And he knows I go to Bible college but it's never come up. He's never taken it anywhere. And I remember this clearly because that one morning I prayed to God.

I said, God, just give me the chance to say something about you. Just somehow let it come up in the conversation. I'm going to make you really proud. And so there I'm off again that morning and he's out the front again and it was really weird.

He almost like came up to me that morning and he goes, hey, you're a Bible college aren't you? You know about this God stuff. Can you tell me something about Jesus? And you know what I did? I looked him straight in the eye and I said, I've got to run. I'm actually running a bit late. And I was out of there. I wasn't running late either.

[17:53] That day, I, Ariel Curloas, was ashamed of Jesus. I was a better evangelist when I was 11 years old than when I was 25 and going to Bible college.

It's funny the excuses we make up. Like we say, I just don't know enough. Well, they're not really interested. Well, none of those two I could have used that day. He was interested.

I should have known. Of course I knew. The problem wasn't in my head. The problem wasn't with him. The problem was here. I was ashamed.

The wonderful thing is that I know Jesus has forgiven me. The wonderful thing is that that one mistake hasn't stopped me talking to people. And the wonderful thing is I've had heaps of opportunities since.

But be careful. Be careful. You don't give in to the wrong fear. It's easy to do. I've done it. The backwards kind of fear where you're more afraid of others than you are of God.

[19:13] So be careful. Whatever you do, you do not disown Jesus. Because if you keep disowning him, he says he will disown you.

Well, we've looked at three things tonight. Firstly, that fear should never stop us from talking to people about Jesus.

What he has done for us and others is more important than our own lives. Secondly, that fearing God is more important than fearing others. And lastly, that having a wrong or this backwards kind of fear in the end leads to us being shamed, not him.

You see, in the end, it boils down to this one question. Who do you fear? See, when you're at school and someone asks you about Jesus, are you going to be more afraid of what they're thinking of you or the fact that if you don't tell them anything, they will never get to know God?

Or when you're at work and you're having this great conversation, really meaningful conversation, heading in this direction and you suddenly see the opportunity to say something about God, do you get ashamed of Jesus?

[20:32] Are you more afraid? Are you more afraid of that than rather one day him disowning you? Or what about when your church runs an evangelistic night or an event that promotes Jesus are you afraid to bring someone because you think they just might say no if you ask them?

Or they'll bag you out, call you a Jesus freak? Or do you have a healthy fear of God knowing that he loves the fact that you're a Jesus freak?

Perspective. that is what we need and that is what we have. What's the worst they can do to me? Break my body, can't touch my soul. Imagine how foolish you'd feel if you got to heaven, right? And there's Jesus and there's his father and you think, oh wow, I finally made it, I'm here. Hey Jesus, remember me? He sort of looks at you blankly.

He thinks, well, I never died for this guy. He just kept denying me all the time. Actually, every opportunity he had to talk about me, he never did.

[21:52] He always walked away. Turns to his daddy, says, Dad, sorry, I don't know him. But imagine you stumble into heaven, a bit bruised and battered, you know, you felt humiliated now and then.

Maybe you've got a scar on your body. Hey, I'm sure you've got heaps of scars in your heart. But Jesus sees you, sort of picks you up and says, hey, and you think, whoa, you remember who I am?

Well, he knows what you're thinking and he says, yeah, I remember you. How could I forget you? You kept talking about me all the time. Turns to his daddy, he says, Dad, I want you to meet. Then he says your name. Perspective. In the end, who do you fear? Why don't we pray? God, we thank you so much. We thank you so much that you love us and you love all our friends who don't know you.

[23 : 08] We love us and them so much that you're willing to die on a cross that we might have a life with you. God, first of all, just really forgive us for the times that we have been weak and we have been ashamed of you and the times that we have had a chance to talk about you and we've failed.

God, please give us the courage. Please give us a good perspective. Help us have a healthy fear of you, not of them. Help us to be willing to make sacrifices so that our friends might hear about you. Thank you, thank you that you do answer our prayers. We pray this in your great name. Amen.