

When I am afraid!

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: 04 August 2024

Preacher: John Winter

[0 : 00] Turn to Psalm 56 now. Psalm 56, the heading of the psalm says, for the director of music to the tune of a dove on distant oaks.

It was a classic. You wouldn't get many tunes called that now, would you? A dove on distant oaks. Of David a mictum.

When the Philistines had seized him in Gath. So mictum is probably a musical term. Psalm 56 says, Be merciful to me, O God, for men hotly pursue me.

All day long they oppress their attack. My slanderers pursue me all day. Many are attacking me in their pride. When I am afraid, I will trust in you.

Pardon me. In God whose word I praise, in God I trust. I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me? All day long they twist my words.

[1 : 29] They are always plotting to harm me. They conspire. They lurk. They watch my steps, eager to take my life. On no account let them escape.

In your anger, O God, bring down the nations. Record my lament. List my tears on your scroll. Are they not in your record? Then my enemies will turn back when I call for help.

By this I will know that God is for me. In God whose word I praise. In the Lord whose word I praise. In God I trust. I will not be afraid.

What can man do to me? I am a devout to you, O God. I will present my thanks, thank offerings to you. For you have delivered my soul from death and my feet from stumbling.

That I may walk before God in the light of life. Amen. The Lord will bless to us the reading of his word. So there's our verse again.

[2 : 28] When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God whose word I praise. In God I trust. And I'm not afraid. So what makes you afraid?

It might be spiders. Spiders make some people afraid. Clicky little legs, I'm told. Fiddly little things. Very clever though. It might be something a bit more substantial than that.

Dogs or wild animals. Snakes in my case. But in reality, those are the kinds of things that we don't encounter every day, thank God.

There are other things that make us more afraid. The fear of losing our health. Or somebody we love losing their health.

And being dependent. The fear of losing someone we love. The worry we have about our elderly parents or our impressionable children.

[3 : 30] Sometimes we worry about the state of our relationships. Or our lack of intimacy in relationship. Sometimes we worry about not being good at our job. Or losing our job.

Sometimes we worry about the future. How long we will live. Or how we might die. And of course that's understandable, isn't it? How we might die. As Woody Allen once said, I'm not afraid to die. I just don't want to be there when it happens. All of these fears are very legitimate fears. And they're the kinds of fears that we can't really escape.

Some people might say to us, it's silly to be afraid of spiders. Which is okay if you're not afraid of spiders. But if they freeze you up, like snakes would do for me, then I guess it isn't so silly after all. We're all afraid of various things, whether silly or not. And they do make a difference to our lives if that fear takes hold, gets a grip, and we no longer are in control.

[4 : 31] The psalmist says, when I am afraid, I will trust in you. Notice that. When I am afraid. He doesn't say, if.

He doesn't say, on the odd occasion that I am. He just says, when I am. Because being afraid is a natural part, an understandable part, of everyday life.

just pastorally, over the last few weeks, some of you have been through some very difficult times in your life, whether they're health issues, whether they're family issues, lots of uncertainty. You've been through that. You know what it feels like to be afraid, not having answers, not having solutions, having to trust God when it's not instinctively kind of natural for you to do so. We like to feel we're in control of everything, don't we? We like to think that humans can control everything and keep us from difficulties in life. But we do really have to give up the illusion of control.

[5 : 38] None of us are in control. So many, many things are out of our control. But isn't that where faith comes in? Isn't that where faith is real?

When we have to trust God, when we don't have the answers, we don't have the solutions, and nobody else seems to have them either. That's when we have to trust. And it's not easy. When I am afraid, I will trust in you. The devil, of course, loves to exploit our fears. He knows he's a roaring lion, prowling around, seeking whom he may desire.

And he knows our inmost thoughts. He knows the things we're thinking and fearing. And he likes to expect you down again. Where is God when you need him? Hasn't he let you down again? Didn't God say? That's the devil's strategy all the while. To get you to question, to get you to doubt. To give you the idea that if you free yourself from this slavish faith in God, you will be happier and life will be better.

[6 : 39] But actually, that's a lie. Nothing changes. You just have no faith and no certainty anymore. The devil would rob you of faith altogether. He would try and tell you that all is pointless in a futile, empty, purposeless universe.

Isn't it so much better to believe that all things work together for good? For those who love God?

For those who are called according to his purpose?

Not because life becomes easier, just because we think there must be a reason for this. And God is for me. So who can be against me?

What can man do to me? What can man do to me? So, C.S. Lewis, in his wonderful book, *Screwtape Letters*, tells us about, you know, that experienced devil and his apprentice.

And he's trying to teach his apprentice demon about human beings and how to attack them effectively. And this is what he says to his apprentice. Nearly all vices are rooted in the future.

[7 : 48] Gratitude looks to the past and love to the present. Fear, avarice, lust, and ambition look ahead. And according to Lewis in *Screwtape*, he says, there is nothing like suspense and anxiety for barricading a human mind against the enemy.

He means God. There is nothing like suspense and anxiety for barricading a human mind against the enemy. He wants men to be concerned with what they do.

Our business is to keep them thinking about what will happen to them. It's very clever. What's going to happen to me? Everything's going wrong. It's all going to get out of control.

That catastrophizing that goes on. You've experienced it, haven't you? Hey! And suddenly you're saying, I no longer believe that God holds the future. And now I'm afraid that everything is out of control.

The psalmist says, when I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust. I will trust in what God says, not in what my anxious mind is saying to me at this present time.

[9 : 05] Remember that. Lewis and the psalmist would say, when tempted by the devil, trust. Trust. Trust in God and don't be afraid.

Trust in God's word, what God says about himself. Why? Next slide. Because God is with you all the time.

No place is any closer to God than the place where you are right now. God is with you all of the time. I will never leave you, he says, or forsake you.

Even in the darkness, even in the difficulties of life, even when things are going wrong, even when there seems to be no answers, God is saying, I'm with you. Don't be afraid.

God is not powerless. Listen to his word. God is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine. I don't know how it's going to work out, but God has it.

[10 : 11] He's in control. God is not powerless. God is not indifferent toward you. The Bible says, cast all your cares upon him for he cares for you.

It doesn't say some of your cares and some of your worries, only the ones he can manage. It says everything, including the ones you can't cope with, especially the ones you can't cope with.

We become good at managing our worries. We're not meant to manage our worries. We're meant to give them to God. And God is not distant. He is near to all who call on him.

Psalms 145, verse 18. He may feel far away, but he says, I will never leave you or forsake you because God is with you all the time.

No place is any closer to God than the place where you are right now. Remember, the devil will say, where is God? He's left you. He'll exploit your fears and your emotions.

[11:16] God is saying, no, no, I'm here with you in the darkness, in the difficulties, in the storm, as Jesus was with the disciples. I'm right in the boat with you.

Trust me. Trust me. When I am afraid, I will trust in you. Next slide, please. We have, of course, reasons to be fearful. David had them in this psalm.

We're told that it was when he was captured by the Philistines. Remember what had happened? Maybe you don't, but I'll tell you anyway. David was going to be king of Israel, but Saul was currently king.

David had had that great victory over Goliath, a man full of faith, but he was hounded from place to place and he lived in the wilderness by Saul's men. And so David thought, I know what I'll do. I'll escape to the Philistines. Perhaps they won't know me there. I'm not a celebrity, after all, in Philistia and nobody reads my Facebook page. I'm really out of date on my TikTok page or whatever it would be.

[12:17] So I'll get away with my kind of, like, lack of being known. Well, unfortunately for David, when he gets there, he is known. Isn't this the one they said, who they used to sing in Israel at their parties, sores in his thousands, but David is tens of thousands.

We know who you are. And he was captured and he was likely to die. And he actually tells us in this psalm, there are people lurking around in the shadows, ready to kill me at any moment.

He didn't know from day to day whether he would survive. No wonder he was afraid. But, then he says, when I am afraid, I will trust in you.

In God, whose word I pray, in God I trust. When I'm facing death, I'll trust God. When everybody's against me, I'll trust God. When things are going wrong in my life, I'll trust God.

I'll not be afraid. I will hope in his word. He had lots of reasons to be fearful, but he didn't. He trusted. Next slide, please.

[13:19] So, how do we deal with fear? Two things. We own it. Then we put our trust in God. We own it. We don't pretend that we're not afraid.

You know, we're very good in the Christian church of kind of sin. How are things? Well, it's all fine. Thank you. Really? Really? It's all fine? Your life's a mess and, you know, you're ill and, you know, it's quite serious and things are going wrong.

No, you're not fine. Are you ever afraid? Own it. There's no shame in being afraid. God understands it.

Indeed, God compensates for it because he gives you courage when you are afraid. He says, peace be to you. Own it, as David did.

Nelson Mandela, next slide. Nelson Mandela famously said, I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it, the brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers fear.

[14:26] And I would say, as a Christian, the brave man is not the one who does not feel afraid, it is the one who trusts God to help him overcome. So, own it.

Don't be ashamed of it. Acknowledge it. Receive it. Accept it. But then, see it as a signal. Now I need to trust because I'm afraid.

I need to pray. I need to trust. I need to ask God to help me. I put my trust in God when I am afraid. I will trust in you. I will cast my fear upon you because you care for me.

So, David moved from fear to faith by trusting in God and by trusting in his word. And he knew that this would work. Think back to Goliath. Remember when he faced Goliath?

He was a youth and he saw that big, giant Philistine and everybody was afraid and he said, who is this uncircumcised Philistine to defy the armies of the living God?

[15:28] And then Saul kind of tried to dress him in his armor and thought of him as rather impertinent and kind of wild youth. But David said, I can't wear these. These are not my, it's not my armor, it's not my weapon.

And he went out with his sling and his stone and he remembered something really important. When he was a shepherd in the fields and a bear attacked the sheep, he grabbed the bear by the beard and give it a good old kicking.

He did the same with a lion and he said, God who delivered me from the mouth of the lion and the mouth of the bear will deliver me from this uncircumcised Philistine. That's faith, you see.

in the face of giant obstacles and real fear, his faith came through. Faith is tested in the arena of violence, of difficulties, of trials, of tests.

Faith can only be tested in such circumstances. Everybody can have faith when things are going well, but when faced with a great enemy, that's when your faith is tested.

[16 : 39] When I am afraid, I will trust in you, in God whose name I praise, in God I trust. Next slide, please. So what makes you afraid?

What reasons do you have to be fearful? David says, trust. David actually says in the psalm something that Paul says in Romans 8.

He says, I discovered when I was afraid that God is for me. God is for me. And when he discovered that God was for him, he realized that actually the world couldn't do much to him.

If God was for him, his eternal life was secure. The temporary pressures and difficulties of this life would pale into insignificance in the knowledge that the Lord is my shepherd.

I shall not be in want. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. For God is with me. His rod and staff comfort me. He prepares a table for me in the presence of my enemies.

[17 : 44] He anoints my head with oil, my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. What can man do to me?

He says. I'm going to dwell forever in the house of the Lord. What can man do to me? You need an eternal perspective to be able to say that.

Man can do an awful lot of bad things to you, but they can't take you away from God. They can't rob your soul of that eternal life that he has placed within it, the eternity that he has set in your heart.

So, what do we do when we're afraid? We trust in God. We trust in his word and we know that God is on our side.

Has this world been so kind to you that you should leave with regrets at C.S. Lewis? There are better things ahead than any we leave behind. and sometimes we have to kind of go through the valley of the shadow and experience the difficulties of life to really grasp the reality of that.

[18 : 59] It is only as we realize that these are but toys and drinkets that we will outgrow, that will never ultimately satisfy us, that we realize that our treasure is in heaven in Jesus and nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

It's only as we realize that we become more than conquerors through him who loved us. And when Paul said that in Romans he wasn't writing the people who had their mortgages paid off and were able to enjoy their retirement.

He was writing that to people who were going to go to prison and some to death for following Jesus. But they discovered that their treasure, their real life was in God and he was their ultimate security in life.

When I am afraid I will trust in you. In God whose word I praise, in God who I trust. So are you sorrowful? God's word says my soul is weary with sorrow.

Strengthen me according to your word. Are you sorrowful? Read your Bible and be strengthened. Make it your daily delight for in the word of God you are strengthened. Are you overwhelmed by troubles?

[20 : 10] Psalm 61 says when my heart is overwhelmed lead me to the rock that is higher than I. Are you in fear for your health, for your well-being, for your life and your future? God's word says nothing can separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Not hardships or troubles or famine or nakedness of sword. Nothing in this world can ever separate you from God no matter how horrible the world becomes. No matter how horrible it is to you.

we should satiate and satisfy ourselves in the word of God and in the promises of scripture and as we do so we overcome the world.

When fears come and they will come this verse tells us what to turn to God and to trust in his word.

Two slides to close with. Two quotes.

Both faith and fear may sail into your harbour but only allow faith to drop anchor. That's Bear Grylls. He's a brave guy.

[21 : 15] But what a quote. Both faith and fear may sail into your harbour but only allow faith to drop anchor. When fears come as they will remember that what the fear catastrophizes is not the end of what God has promised.

God has promised that you will overcome by faith. And the next quote. The presence of fear does not mean you have no faith.

Fear visits everyone but make your fear a visitor. and not a resident. If you are living with chronic anxiety and fear bring it to God every day until you learn to live by faith in the Son of God who loved you and gave himself for you.

That doesn't mean that fear will go away. It means that you will overcome fear with faith every day. when I am afraid I will trust in you in God whose word I praise in God I trust.

Try and remember that scripture. I said it enough didn't I? Committed to memory. What a great scripture it is. Amen. skill skill Thank you.