

WHEN FEAR FOLLOWS FAITH

A Study of Philippians 2:12-13

Characteristic: FAITH

Big Idea: Serve Him, don't shame Him

Related Scripture: Matt 10:28; 16:24-27; 25:34-40; Mark 4:35-41; 8:34-38; Luke 9:24-27; Rom 8:1-13; James 1:2-6; 1 Pet 1:3-9

INTRODUCTION

Good morning. Last month, I took a few weeks off to travel back to Minnesota to see my parents. Every night, they watch the "Nightly News" with Brian Wilson. So for a few nights, I found myself not only **READING** the news, but **WATCHING** it as well.

Here's just a sampling of the "news" I've heard in the past month:

- The value of the "once mighty" American dollar is now "just a shadow of its former swaggering self."¹ Compared to the euro, it has fallen nearly 50% in value in just eight years.

Which is part of the reason...

- Oil has risen to over \$140 dollars a barrel. And why...
- Gas has risen to over \$4.00 a gallon; which is probably why;²
- Auto sales fell 18%, and American auto manufactures are in big trouble.
 - GM stock fell to below \$10 a share for the first time in over 50 years;³
 - Chrysler sales fell 22% in the first half of 2008, and may be closer to bankruptcy than GM; and,
 - Ford's sales fell 28%, and its stock is dropping like a rock as well.

And the good news just kept on coming.

- The stock market had its worst first six months since 1970;

¹ Froma Harrop, "Another thing your dollar can't buy: Respect", www.startribune.com/opinion/commentary/22788184.html, 7/1/08.

² <http://zfacts.com/p/35.html>. The price of gas – when adjusted for inflation – peaked at about \$2.50 a gallon in 1976 and \$3.41 a gallon in March of 1981.

³ Associated Press 7/2/08.

- Banks and brokerages are hemorrhaging because of bad mortgages;
- Housing prices have yet to bottom out; and,
- Foreclosures are skyrocketing.

And the storm clouds aren't looming over just the economy:

- The cost of food is also escalating – perhaps with the exception of tomatoes and peppers, because...
- They're being blamed for an outbreak of salmonella poisoning;
- Israel wants to attack Iran;
- High school girls in Massachusetts made a pact to get pregnant – so they'll "finally have someone to love them unconditionally";⁴ and,
- California is going up in flames.

And, the GOOD news? Well, Williams told us about a good old-fashioned American company making the SAME product the SAME way it did 100 years ago – something BOUND to save our economy. You know what they make? Whistles.

Apparently that isn't helping. In late June, the Consumer Confidence Index had fallen to 50.4 – its lowest rating since 1992, and it's fifth lowest EVER.⁵

And then there's the news about "matters of the faith":

- Two Norwegians were arrested for sharing the gospel;
- The definition of marriage was redefined by the California Supreme Court;
- And a church in New Jersey had its real estate tax exemption revoked - for refusing to rent their auditorium to a same-sex couple.

So as I was thinking about what to speak on today, I wondered, "How are people at Moon Valley feeling about all this?" And the word that came to mind was "FEAR". "Fear" is our natural, God-given reaction whenever we feel "threatened".

⁴ <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/>

⁵ http://money.cnn.com/2008/06/24/news/economy/consumer_confidence/index.htm?section=money_news_economy

- Higher gas and food prices means less money for other things – which is a threat to our quality of life – and perhaps even our financial well-being; and
- When someone pushes their views about God and marriage on you, you feel like your values and beliefs are being pushed aside – which is a threat to your identity as a person.

Right now, Americans seem more unsettled, anxious – and even FEARFUL – then we’ve been in a long time. And Franklin Roosevelt once told Americans, “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself”.

But the Bible has a lot to say about “fear” as well –you’ll find words like “fear” over 660 times in the New King James Version. So, what do we do when we’re feeling fearful? What do we do when we feel SOMETHING – or SOMEONE – is threatening us, and perhaps even attacking us?

Well, the apostle Paul had something to say about this. We’re going to see what HE had to say when HE was under attack, and HE felt fear.

The passage we’re going to study is Philippians chapter 2, verses 12 and 13, which read:

- *Phil 2:12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*

Now right up front, I want to address the camel in the room here. Paul is NOT saying our eternal salvation depends on our works. In Ephesians 2, verses 8 and 9, he wrote:

- *Eph 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast*

Paul is very intentional in assuring us that we are saved by FAITH, not by WORKS. Our eternal destiny has NOTHING to do with what WE do, but EVERYTHING to do with what JESUS did FOR us.

And Paul makes this point to the Philippians in chapter 3, verse 3:

- *Phil 3:3 For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,*

Here, Paul is correcting some Jewish Christians who insisted one needed to follow the Mosaic Law as well as believe in Jesus. Today some might insist:

- You can't drink alcohol;
- You need to be baptized;
- You need to go to confession and take communion; or,
- You must go to church, give money, read your Bible and pray regularly.

Paul used to be one of them. But after believing in Jesus, he came to realize that his works would NEVER be enough. In Philippians 3:8, he says:

Phil 3:8 ...I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ

The Greek word translated “rubbish” here also means “dung”. Can't be anymore blunt than that. But that begs the question, “What is this ‘salvation’ we need to ‘work out’?”

Well, our answer begins with understanding what “salvation” means in the Bible. In the New Testament, the English words “salvation” and “saved” refer to ETERNAL salvation only about 38% of the time.⁶ The rest refer to more “this life” issues, like deliverance from illness, calamity, or a destructive life style.

An example is Matthew 9:21, where Jesus heals a woman with a bleeding disorder:

- *Matt 9:22... Be of good cheer, daughter; your faith has made you well." And the woman was made well from that hour.*

The phrase “made you well” comes from the same Greek word translated “salvation” in our passage. In this case, the woman believed in Jesus, and then ACTED on her faith – or “worked out her salvation” – by asking for healing.

So, what kind of “salvation” is Paul talking about in our passage? Theologian Joe Dillow proposes:

- *“It is probable that the idea of victorious endurance is behind a use of [salvation] in Philippians. This salvation must be worked for.”⁷*

Case in point is Philippians 1:19:⁸

- *Phil 1:19 For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ...*

⁶ See Joseph C. Dillow., The Reign of the Servant Kings (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing Co, 1992), 114-5.

⁷ Dillow, *ibid.*.

⁸ Also see Dillow's reference to 1:27-30.

The word “deliverance” comes from the same Greek word translated “saved” in our passage. So, if Paul has eternal salvation in mind, he’s depending on the prayers of the Philippians for HIS salvation. I’m sure you’ll agree that doesn’t make much sense.

So, how do we “work out our salvation”? Well, Dillow proposes:

- *“To ‘work out your salvation with fear and trembling’ is another way of saying that we should put to death the deeds of the body.”⁹*

And how does he arrive at this? Well, it has to do with why Paul needed deliverance. And it will take a few minutes to work through this, so hang in there with me. Recall in verse 12 Paul begins by saying:

- *Phil 2:12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence...*

The Greek word translated “obeyed” in verse 12 means, “to place yourself under”, and to “listen, hear, and be attentive to. And apparently the Philippians had been faithful in doing this. They had placed themselves under Paul’s leadership, were attentive to his words, and then acted on them.

But Paul is now absent, and he’s urging them to be even MORE diligent in his absence. And that probably has to do with the REASON for Paul’s absence.

Paul was absent because he was in prison. He had been arrested for sharing the gospel. And it seems reasonable to assume the Philippians were feeling a bit FEARFUL about it. And I think Paul is concerned about how they might react in their fear.

An illustration comes to mind here. Picture Paul as the captain of a boat, and the Philippians working as his crew. Picture them out at sea in calm waters, working together with one objective – to get to their destination. The captain is setting the course and issuing commands, while the crew is diligently following his orders.

But then a storm hits. The wind is blowing, the waves are pounding, and water is threatening to capsize the boat. The crew sees this, and they become FEARFUL.

The captain urges them to stay the course, but the crew sees the storm getting worse, and they panic. And they lose sight of where they’re going – because all they see is the danger right in front of them, and all they’re thinking about is self-preservation.

When we feel attacked or threatened, our first instinct is to protect ourselves. And we’ll do one of three things. Either...

⁹ Dillow, 373.

➤ ***Fight***

We'll "fight" – we'll get angry, and we'll attack. We'll do whatever we can to eliminate whatever – or whoever – is threatening us. Or,

➤ ***Fight***

Flight

We'll take "flight". We'll run away, and try to hide. Or,

➤ ***Fight***

Flight

Freeze

We'll simply "freeze" – and do nothing. We'll just stick our heads in the sand, and hope it will all go away.

Paul is telling the Philippians to stay the course, and to keep sight of their destination – to spread the good news about Jesus. Paul refers to "the gospel" EIGHT times in this letter – FIVE of which are in the first chapter alone.

So Paul is telling us that "working out your salvation" means spreading the good news about Jesus – not only when the winds are calm and the waters are still, but even when – and PARTICULARLY when – the storms are at their worst.

But with Paul in prison and people out to get them, here's how the Philippians might have reacted in THEIR fear:

- They might have fought back. They might have went to Paul's defense, and fought for his rights; or,
- They might have fled. They might have left the church altogether; or,
- They might have froze. They may not have run away, but out of fear of ending up in jail, they might have gone silent about Jesus.

But Paul urges them not to panic. Because he saw their destination in sight:

- *Phil 1:12 ...the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the **gospel**, 13 so that it has become evident to the whole palace*

guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; 14 and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Paul saw that his imprisonment was serving a purpose – GOD’S purpose. He didn’t let his fear get the best of him – instead, he kept his sights on how God was working.

That’s what Paul is referring to when he says:

- *Phil 2:13 ...it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*

And Paul was simply following the example of Jesus, who suffered in HIS obedience. A few verses earlier, Paul wrote:

- *Phil 2:5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,...8 who, humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.*

And that’s Paul’s challenge to the Philippians – and US – as well:

- *Phil 1:29 For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,*

Now “suffering” isn’t something we enjoy – in fact, its something we’d like to avoid altogether. But Paul adds something in the next verse that is I find helpful:

➤ *Phil 1:30 having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me.*
The “conflict” Paul is referring to is his struggle with fear. For twenty-some years, he had “put to death the deeds of his body”. He had suffered for Jesus in ways we can only imagine.¹⁰ But he feared how he might react with imprisonment – and even the threat of execution – hanging over his head.

Now Paul did ask the Philippians to pray for his deliverance. But that wasn’t his primary concern. Paul feared something MORE than prison, and even more than his own DEATH. Paul’s biggest concern was:

- *Phil 1:20 ...that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.*

¹⁰ Note 2 Cor 11:23-28

Paul's biggest fear was doing something he would be ashamed of, something not worthy of Jesus. He was afraid that he would be a bad witness for Jesus – that he would bring SHAME to the name of Jesus.¹¹ And he challenged the Philippians to have that same fear:

➤ *Phil 1:27 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel 28 without being frightened in any way by those who **oppose** you... (NIV)*

Paul is telling us not to fear those who OPPOSE us. Instead, we are to first fear JESUS. Yep, you heard me right – fear JESUS. And I'll be the first to say, I've struggled with this.

I've had a tough time reconciling the loving, gracious, compassionate Jesus with “fear and trembling”. I read the Gospels, and I see Jesus:

- Hanging out and drinking wine with the moral low-lives of His day;¹²
- Protecting an adulteress from a lynch mob;¹³
- Welcoming a convicted thief and murderer into heaven; and,¹⁴
- Recruiting a cheater and swindler named Matthew to not only be an apostle, but to write one of the books of the Bible as well.¹⁵

I read about Jesus healing the sick and lame, and offering hope to the hopeless. And I can't help but wonder, why should the thought of Jesus cause me to shake in my sandals?

Well, my first thought was to look at the Greek words translated, “fear” and “trembling”. I thought maybe there's something in the translation that will soften this a bit. Here's what I found.

The Greek word translated “fear” is *phobos*. It's where we get the English word, “phobia”. And it means,¹⁶

➤ ***phobos: “fear, terror, reverence, respect, deference.”***

¹¹ Dillow sums this up well. He writes, “*The thought of deliverance from danger is the obvious meaning of salvation here, but more than that, Paul wants to be delivered in such a way that Christ will be honored in his body.*” Dillow, 115.

¹² Matt 9:10-13; 11:19; Mark 2:15-19; Luke 5:29-32; 7:34; 15:1-7.

¹³ John 8:1-13

¹⁴ Luke 23:39-43

¹⁵ Matt 9:9; 10:3; Mark 2:14; 3:18; Luke 5:27-29; 6:15.

¹⁶ James Strong, Strong's Exhaustive Concordance; and, William D. Mounce, The Analytical Greek Lexicon to the New Testament.

Then I looked at the Greek word translated “trembling”. It’s *tromos*. It comes from the root word *tremor*. From these words, we get English words like “tremor” and “trauma”. And it means,¹⁷

➤ *phobos*: “*fear, terror, reverence, respect, and deference.*”

***tromos*: “*fear, awe, terror, reverence, respect, astonishment, amazement.*”**

So no matter how you slice it, there’s something about Jesus that should cause us to “fear and tremble”. And here’s what I think it is. I think Paul is referring to that day when he is standing before Jesus. Because the apostle John said something similar:

➤ *1 John 2:28 And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.*

Paul is looking ahead to that day when he is giving an account for his life as a believer. It won’t determine if he gets into heaven or not, because his FAITH determined that. Instead, it will determine the REWARDS he’ll receive – or WON’T receive.¹⁸ Because Paul’s hoping he’ll here Jesus say:

➤ *Matt 25:21 "... 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'*

Now EVERYONE who has believed in Jesus as their savior will have this same experience. And from what I see in the Bible, here’s what I think it will look like.

I don’t think Jesus will chew us out, or tear us to shreds for those times we’ve humbly given Him our best, but fallen short. In fact, I don’t think Jesus will say much – because I don’t think He’ll have to. I think we’ll see it for ourselves.

We’ll find ourselves standing before our Lord and Savior – the perfection of God’s love and compassion in the person of the man who died for our sins. And at that moment, I think we’ll see two things with perfect clarity.

First, we’ll understand what “grace” really means. And second, we’ll come to see just how much we needed that grace. Any pride and ego we left this earth with will crumble in the presence of His love, and goodness, and mercy, and grace. And we’ll feel a bit of shame for all those times we puffed ourselves up by judging or looking down on someone else.¹⁹

Jesus will reward those who humbly served Him. He said:

¹⁷ Ibid. Note as well that we get the English word “trauma” from *tromos*.

¹⁸ Note Rom 13:10-13; 1 Cor 3:1-15; 9:24-27; 2 Cor 5:10; 2 Tim 4:1-8.

¹⁹ Note Matt 7:1-5.

- *Matt 23:11 "But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. 12 "And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.*

And Jesus told us what His idea of servanthood looks like:

- *Matt 26: 34 "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:*
- *35 'for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; 36 'I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'*

We'll look back on our lives, and we'll see it for what it really was through the eyes of Jesus. We'll see with perfect clarity whether we really lived a life worthy of the gospel. And if we were humble servants exhibiting the loving, gracious, compassionate, and merciful example of Jesus, we'll hear, "Well done".

But if we were prideful, self-righteous, and judgmental, we'll see that as well. And we'll shrink away in shame.²⁰

And I think the GREATEST rewards will be saved for those who responded well when the storms were at their worst. Jesus said:²¹

- *Matt 5:44 "... love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, 45 "that you may be sons of your Father in heaven;*

for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 46 "For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

Paul wasn't treated well by his jailors. But he didn't see OPRESSION – he saw OPPORTUNITY. So he chose to humble himself by loving them. Because that's what Jesus did – and Paul didn't want to disappoint Jesus.²²

Here's a definition that I think best captures the "fear" Paul is referring to. It is a:²³

²⁰ See Matt 7:1-5; Jam 2:1-10; 1 John 3:16-19.

²¹ Note Matt 5:3-12. There Jesus says there is a great reward for those who suffer gladly – like Paul did.

²² See Acts 16:22-40. Paul shows compassion to the very jailor who had put him in stocks, which led to the jailor and his family becoming believers in Jesus.

²³ Vines Complete Expository Dictionary.

- *“Reverential fear of God as a controlling motive for life, not merely fear of His power and righteous retribution, but wholesome dread of disappointing Him, which banishes the terror that shrinks from His presence.”*

So I think President Roosevelt was on to something. I think he was concerned with how Americans might react in the face of adversity – just like Paul was concerned how the Philippians might react to the adversity they faced. He feared if they stopped SERVING Jesus, they would SHAME Him.

And that’s the big idea of this message:

- *Serve Him, don’t shame Him*

When we feel threatened or attacked, we’ll do one of two things – we’ll either SERVE Jesus, or we’ll SHAME Him. If we humbly respond in a loving, gracious, understanding manner, we’ll SERVE Him. But if we react out of pride, or anger, or fear in a judgmental, self-protective way, we’ll SHAME Him

As I’ve thought about this, I’ve wondered, “What would I do if I was in Paul’s sandals?” What would I do if I was threatened with imprisonment for talking about Jesus? Would I shut my mouth, or would I just keep on talking?

And if I WERE thrown in jail, what THEN? Would I bemoan my poor fortune? Would I fight for my rights? Or would I be looking to see how God wanted to use my circumstances for HIS purposes?

And what if the threat wasn’t JAIL, but a revocation of OUR real estate tax exemption here at Moon Valley. If that happened to us, it would cost us upwards of \$100,000 – and possibly my JOB here. Would I FIGHT to save my job? Or would I look to see how God wanted to use me in whatever I did to make a living?

Either way, I’m quite sure I’d be feeling a whole LOT of fear. The question is what would I fear more – the people threatening my freedom and ministry position, or the fear of standing before Jesus? Would I SERVE Him? Or would I SHAME Him?

What seems clear to me is that Paul is telling us our mission isn’t to preserve our way of life, but to proclaim new life. And he might remind us who the REAL enemy is:

- *Eph 6:12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*

Paul is calling us to do what Jesus did – to model God’s love, grace and compassion – even to those who threatened Him. But Satan wants to undermine that.

Satan wants us to forget HE’S the real enemy. Instead, he wants us to believe PEOPLE are our enemies.

- He’ll use dwindling financial resources to put husbands and wives and families at war with each other; and,
- He’ll use the threat of downsizing and layoffs to put employees at war with each other; and,
- He’ll use differing religious, or political, or ideological interests to put Americans at war with one another.

Satan wants us in conflict. He’ll use a falling economy and opposing beliefs and lifestyles as battlegrounds. He’ll use FEAR as his weapon of mass destruction.²⁴ And he’ll laugh as our “approval” rating as followers of Jesus continues to plummet.

The Barna group recently completed a survey of 867 Americans aged 16-29. Of those respondents declaring themselves “Non-Christians”:

➤ ***Christianity is “anti-gay”: 91%***

91% see us as “anti-gay”;

➤ ***Christianity is “anti-gay” - 91%***

Christians are “judgmental” – 87%

87% see us as “judgmental”;

➤ ***Christianity is “anti-gay” - 91%***

Christians are “judgmental” – 87%

Christians are “hypocritical” – 85%

And 85% see us as “hypocritical”. And we didn’t fare much better with those who are regular church-going youth:

²⁴ Note 1 Peter 5:6-10.

➤ *Christianity is “anti-gay” - 80%*

Christians are “judgmental” – 52%

Christians are “hypocritical” – 47%

80% see Christianity as “anti-gay”, 52% see us as “judgmental”, and 47% think we’re “hypocritical”. Perhaps this common response sums it up best:

➤ *“Christians are proclaimers of the Prince of Peace who fail to live peaceably with others.”*

Seems we’re more apt to FIGHT for Jesus than FOLLOW Him. Seems we’d rather swing the hammer of the law than share the hope of His love. And if I’m understanding Paul right, I’m afraid we are better at SHAMING Jesus rather than SERVING Him.

Before Pastor Bob went on vacation, he challenged us to “pray the prayer of Jabez”. He asked us to consider how God wants to “expand our territory” but without “doing evil”, or “causing pain”. We might consider how we could:

- Mend our relationship with that family member or friend we’ve been in conflict with – even if, and particularly if he or she owes us an apology; or,
- Invest time in developing relationships with our neighbors; or,
- Deepen our relationship with one or more of our co-workers; or,
- Get involved in one of the missions efforts here at Moon Valley.

But this requires sacrifice – we have to be willing to give up our time, talents, and perhaps even our treasures to do this.

- It might be giving up some of the already limited time we’d rather spend on OURSELVES, or,
- It might be setting aside some of our already dwindling treasures to help those in need; or,
- It might be simply setting aside a grievance to restore a relationship.

And let’s be honest – this is hard, and it requires a big step of faith. And Jesus knew this. He said:

- *Mark 8:34b... "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 35 "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.*

We'd rather SAVE our lives than LOSE them. And with the threats of a poor economy and opposing beliefs and values swirling around us, we'd rather PROTECT our territory.

Instead of going out and planting new seeds, we'd rather build walls – walls that keep THOSE people out, but keep US in. But here's the question: will that SERVE Jesus, or will it SHAME Him? Let's Pray.