**“Whom Shall I Fear?”**

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Psalm 27

Numbers 21:4-9

Ephesians 2:1-10

John 3:14-21

 Lent 4

Jesus said: “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life.”

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord, and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Fear?

My Confirmation Verse (Psalm 27:1 which was our Introit) asks me the question every time I consider it: “**Whom Shall I** **Fear?** **/ Of whom shall I** **be afraid?**”

Chapman University is one who surveys the fears of Americans. Where, at one time, public speaking and death were among the top 5, these have been displaced to a **bottom tier** in the top 80. Now, other issues have apparently moved ahead in our concerns:

**Number 1** is “**Corrupt Government Officials**”. Our **number 1 fear** is, now (apparently) of “**Corrupt Government Officials**”.

**Number 2** is “**Healthcare**”.

**Number 3** is the “**Pollution of Oceans, Rivers and Lakes**”. I’m surprised that this one is number 3, having pushed death itself wayyyy down the list except for death’s suggestion in number 2’s “Healthcare”.

**Number 4** is the “**Pollution of Drinking Water**”, and I’m not sure (and the article I read doesn’t say) where these water “special concerns” have come from of recent.

**Number 5** is “**Not Having Enough Money for the Future**”, and (as I said), **of 80**, “Fear of Public Speaking” is number **52**, Death is “Fear Number **48**”.

While “spiders” and “snakes”, “sharks” and “heights”, “tornadoes” and “racial hatred” make the list, “eternal damnation” does not. **My** repeated nightmare (and, I think, we all have one) is “entering a college classroom not prepared for the day’s test”. It’s possible that “death” (for people overall) includes the question of an “afterlife destination”. I think, for Christians, we could easily separate “**Death**” from “**Dying**”. **I’m** (for instance) comfortable with the notion of **being “Dead”** **(or “In Paradise” as we know of our destiny by the God’s promise)**, but **the process through which I’ll get there in “Dying” I’d not mind “taking a Pass on”**. Maybe my fear is of “**Pain**” and “**Loss of Control**”, and “Fear of **Dying**” might be included in many of the 80 that were **top named**.

Our Old Testament text speaks of **concern turned to fear through the onslaught of situation**. “Pain” and “Loss of Control” replaced general discomfort. And it doesn’t say what the timeframe was on that, but we all know that **our situations could change on a dime**. Tragedy seldom sneaks up on people. So, one day (or one part of a day) we may have the complaints of inconveniences upon our lips, and the next (or any next moment) lightning could strike and sometimes does. A car crash or a phone call with bad news or (any number of things) could make our knees buckle.

God had provided for the Children of Israel miraculously. There was very little doubt that all they had going for them was of God’s recent making. He’d freed them (as a whole people) from slavery. He’d killed off their enemies in the Egyptian army. He’d led them with a pillar of smoke by day and fire by night. He’d gifted them food laid out for them on the plain every morning to just pick up and consume … and they got **bored with the menu**.

Maybe it was children out playing that got bit first, but “Pain” and “Loss of Control” **quickly overcame** a growing percentage of 2 Million people. Families (without a medical solution) were **afflicted towards death**, painfully unable to alleviate the burning and swelling, the fever and, finally, unconsciousness falling-asleep-dying that would follow the bites of serpents epidemic in proportion. No tent could keep them out and parents parented kids unable to protect them or elderly parents or themselves without any ability to even sleep with safety. Their more casual **complaints** had ushered-in an all-of-a-sudden **swarm of disaster**. No slow opportunity to get used to the circumstances that got unleashed upon them. These swarms of approach and attack and then quick effect and helplessness and the funeral pyres of burying one’s child and spouse and parent **left no one safe or comfortable or happy**.

And **of that** they were sorry: “’We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you, Moses. Pray to the Lord on our behalf, that He **take away the serpents from us**, and **so Moses prayed for the people**” …

… and what **happened there** was a **micro version of a fallen and complaining world … and even among Christians who should know better**. Pleasure over any **Good stuff at all** should be **ecstatic** **pleasure** knowing **we live where death prevails (and that because of sin)**. God’s protection giving quiet times (in other words) is **blessing to be cherished** because bad stuff is ultimately inevitable and shouldn’t surprise us knowing that sin is where that kind of lousiness comes from.

No need to … by Grace

Yet **“don’t” (God says) “fear those who kill the body but can’t kill the soul and body in Hell”**. God didn’t **take away (you’ll notice) the “Pain” and “Loss of Control” of swarming serpent bites way back when**. He did not **remove that physical circumstance**. What He **did, however,** was **provide** “**Hope**” … and a **physical cure that would suggest the final** **eternal cure**.

**That preview** is what Jesus related to all of us in His run-up to John 3:16: “in just the same way / **AS** Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, **SO MUST** **the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have** **eternal** **life**.” See, looking upon **the cause of the problem “lifted up”**, believing God’s Words that **in that look one** **attached to promise** **healing could be gained** **... both times that was the case in the serpent and sin upon God’s Son Jesus “lifted up”**. In the **wilderness version**, one would return home after their looking upon the serpent lifted upon the pole and **assume (believe in) the promise of a restraining of death**. We, too, have that respond to that look with the same faith in **a promise**. The look, though, **has to occur** … and we are purposefully in the Lenten season. And we do so looking upon also a “crucifix” because it’s not just the **pole alone**, but it’s **Jesus hung from it for His death with our sins**. Yet we (like they back when) don’t look with, just, an intrigue or curiosity but knowing Jesus as the **purposeful gift of God to sacrifice for what we’ve done**. **Promise** attaching **hope for us to it** … and we **accept that gift**. **IT** as the very definition of God’s love for each one of us … **IT’s the** **HOW** of God benevolence.

The opposite **could have been true for us**, “dead and without hope in the trespasses and sins that we’d even at one point walked, following the course of this world without a remedy to look upon, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions, purely, of our flesh, carrying out (without abandon or any divine conscience) the desires of the body and the mind, by nature, then, children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. **But God**” (saying John 3:16 in a different way) “**being rich in mercy,** **because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses,** **made us alive together with Christ—by grace** **you have been saved—and raised us up with Him and seated with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus … by grace you HAVE BEEN saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast**.” ….

The story really is the same … different by degrees, but the same by process: a **dilemma** (self-made in grumbling and groaning against God’s every even Good gift, amplifying sin by complaint), **intercepted by God’s deliverance upon the pole of a cross**, shedding blood Himself so that **people might not have to, and have to eternally**.

THAT’S the gift: it’s **grace where human effort can’t help us**. It’s **love by its ultimate definition of it, healing and “change of course” from our deadly one to one of divine promise and hope and encouragement**.

Psalm 27 says that it’s **because** “The Lord **is my light and my salvation**; whom, then, shall I fear? **Because** the Lord **is the stronghold of my life**; of whom, then, shall I be afraid? Though an army encamp against me, **my heart shall not fear**; though war arise against me, yet **I will be confident**. One thing have I asked of the Lord, **THAT** will I seek after; that I may **dwell in the house of the Lord ALL the days of my life**, to **GAZE UPON THE BEAUTY OF THE LORD**” (most especially even upon His cross where He “loved” me) “and to **inquire in His temple**. For **He will** hide me in His shelter in the day of trouble; **He will** conceal me under the cover of His tent; **He will** **LIFT ME** high upon a rock.” ….

You know, Nicodemus (the Pharisee who snuck out at night to visit with Jesus for **fear** of how his **homage there** would look to his other societal leaders of the day), he was who Jesus offered **this wonderful view of grace to**. We, thankfully, don’t have to **sneak around**, but **have it full-offered in any moment that we’d like it to re-address us**. God’s Son, Jesus, “**must be**” lifted-up in love for you. Enjoy that vision. In +Jesus name. Amen.