

Sermon for February 24, 2008

Boscobel & Mt. Zion UMCs

Text: Deuteronomy 1:19-40

Title: "Giant Fears"

Introduction: Do you all remember playing "Freeze Tag" as a kid? What a great game! If you are tagged, you have to stop in your tracks as if you are 'frozen' and you can't move again until someone who is 'not it' comes and tags you. What a great game!

The problem is that for some, "Freeze Tag" is still played, but it's not a game anymore ... it's LIFE! We're going along in life and things are going pretty well ... and then it happens: something that brings FEAR to us jumps up and tags us. Maybe that fear comes from health problems, sudden unemployment, and an unexpected divorce, death of a loved one or something similar. What happens to us? We freeze! We cannot function properly because all of our thoughts and feelings are wrapped up in whatever has just happened or something we think *might* happen soon!

Now, let me get one thing straight here; fear is part of life! But, there is healthy fear (hot burner on a stove, busy street crossing, etc.), but there is also irrational, unhealthy fears that paralyze us when they don't need to!

This morning we continue talking about the emotional Giants that stand between us and who God wants us to be. One Giant that prevents us from experiencing what Jesus said; "I came that your joy would be complete/full" is FEAR!

Now, to me, it really doesn't make sense that Christians should have to deal with fear. If we truly believe that God loves us and that God has all the power in this world and the next, what do we have to be afraid of?!? BUT, it happens throughout our Scriptures. For example:

The disciples were afraid of the storms on the Sea of Galilee ... then, they were afraid of Jesus walking on the water and thought He was a ghost! Old Testament Hebrews were afraid of their enemies, the weather and their shadow ... everything.

Well, that doesn't sound like people who had faith in God does it? (How many of you have a fear this morning? How many of you have faith in God this morning?) You see, as I understand it, faith and fear can't really live together in the same room. If we have faith in God, what do we have to fear? And, if we have fear in our lives, how could we say we have faith in a God that is powerful and loves us?

Alright, get excited! Get out your slings and your five smooth stones, because today we are going to take down another Giant that stands between us and all the great things God has planned for us! Let's go after FEAR!

Before we go any further, I invite you to take the insert out of your program. On one side you will find a whole lot of Scripture and on the other side you will find some more Scripture and a place to fill in some blanks and take some notes. For those of you who are "TYPE A" out here, you just got so excited you can hardly stand it ... "I get to fill in blanks! A feeling of accomplishment is coming my way!"

A little background: The Book of Deuteronomy is kind of like a journal written by Moses. This is Moses telling the Hebrew people what had happened the previous 40 years that they spent in the wilderness after leaving Egypt. The Books of Exodus and

Numbers are more like history books and Deuteronomy ... Moses reflecting in a speech to the people what had happened.

Some of you remember the story of Moses and the Hebrew people. The Hebrew people had been slaves in Egypt for generations, but God delivered them, through a series of miracles, out of slavery. Moses led over 600,000 men, not counting the women and children (2 million people = conservative figure), out of Egypt, through the Red Sea (that God parted for them to walk through on dry land) and on to Mt. Sinai (Horeb). At Mt. Sinai the Hebrew people spent about a year getting the 10 Commandments and setting up the tabernacle for a place to worship God. The people were fed by God every day with manna from heaven.

Then God told Moses it was time to go to the Promised Land ... The land of milk and honey. The land God promised was a beautiful land where the people could grow food and prosper and become a great nation. That was God's plan.

A trip from Mt. Sinai to the east side of the Jordan River in the time of Moses would have taken about 11 days. So, off they went. That's where we pick up our Scripture for today. Again, this is Moses telling what happened:

READ DEUTERONOMY 1:19-40 NOW AND PRAY!

Did you catch what happened? God's plan was for the Hebrew people to spend about a year near Mt. Sinai after coming out of slavery, and then going straight into the land of Canaan that God had promise Abraham. ONE YEAR! Just 1 Year!

BUT, the FEAR of the Hebrew people caused them to spend FORTY YEARS in the Wilderness! 40 YEARS! That's 39 Years they gave up that they could have been experiencing the great stuff God had planned for them! 39 Years wasted because of ONE GIANT ... FEAR!

In Verse 21 Moses repeats what God said, "Look! The Promised Land is right in front of you. Go get it! It's yours! I promised this land for you and now you can go right on in and take it over! I've been with you this far, I'm not letting you down now!"

Then at the end of Verse 21 God tells the people the only thing that will prevent them from doing what God wanted ... the only thing that will prevent them from experiencing that "Complete Joy" in this life that Jesus talked about: "Don't be Afraid!"

When FEAR comes in it wreaks havoc on our lives!

I. What Fear Does to Us

A. Fear Disregards God's Plan

1. God laid out the Promised Land like a present under the Christmas tree. Unwrap it and enjoy!
2. God had brought the Hebrew people out of slavery in Egypt.
 - a. Walked through the Red Sea on dry land.
 - b. Left Pharaoh's army in the dust ... or the drink.
 - c. Led through wilderness by a cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night ... 24/7 hand-holding by God!
 - d. Fed each day in the desert by manna from God ... for over 2 million people.

- e. Journeyed across the rough wilderness to the border of the land that God promised ... the land of Cana.
 - f. They were on the threshold of God's greatest promise to His children.
3. Paul writes in II Timothy 1:7, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline."
 - a. Power doesn't second-guess a decision.
 - b. Love is not beatable.
 - c. Self-Discipline is not about quitting.
 4. When Fear sets in, we miss out on God's great plan!
 - a. The Hebrew people wasted 39 years.
 - b. How much time have you wasted because you're just too scared to step across the border of what God wants for you?!?

B. Fear Distorts God's Purpose

1. One thing that I can guarantee FEAR will do: Screw up our perspective. FEAR will make us think irrationally every time!
2. The Hebrews choose not to just go in and take the land promised by God ... they are just afraid enough to use their brains and decide to tip-toe in. "Let's send some scouts in to just check things out first!"
 - a. 12 scouts = one from each tribe of Israel.
 - b. Report back = Yep! Great land! Here's some fruit for ya'll to try ... mmm good. God kept His promise about it being a great place to live.
 - c. Only problem is that the people are very big and strong and their cities walls are very high.
3. Verses 27-28 = People in their tent grumbling and complaining that God had brought them to the Promised Land because God hates them.
 - a. What? Yea! God brought them out of slavery, out of Pharaoh's grip, through the Red Sea, cared for them in the wilderness (food, etc.) just so they could be killed by the Amorites.
 - b. Fear brings out our worst: complaining, finger-pointing and distrust.
4. Ever listen in on what other people are afraid of? From our perspective it seems silly!
 - a. God is out to get me!
 - b. When we allow FEAR in, we lose sight of God's promise that "we can do ALL things through Christ who strengthens" us!

5. When fear controls our lives, we cannot think rationally. “If you choose to let fear control your thinking, you will have a distorted view of the situation you are in and life in general.”

C. Fear Discourages God’s People

1. Discouragement is Contagious!
 - a. The word ‘discouragement’ means to take away courage.
 - b. When we give in to our fears, it causes the people around us to be discouraged.
2. Remember that Moses sent out 12 scouts? 10 of those scouts came back with what the Bible calls a ‘Bad Report’. 10 men infected the entire nation and ruined a generation.
 - a. Those 10 came back and said, “We can’t do it. The men living there now are too big and the city walls are too high.”
 - b. The result? God said that those people making those decisions couldn’t go into that great land and have more great fruit!
 - c. 10 men influenced over 2 million people with their fear. Fear is catching! Cost them 39 years!
 - d. Fear is more infectious than any disease you can name!

D. Fear Disbelieves God’s Promises

1. Verses 29-33 = Proof of what God has already done for the Hebrews.
2. When God told the people through Moses to cross the Jordan River and take the land, it wasn’t like the people had never met God before!
3. They were being told to take the land by the same God that had been with them throughout their journey!
4. We should be able to look in the rearview mirror and see all the great things God has done for us ... BUT, as soon as we get the next difficulty in our headlights, that’s all we can focus on!
5. Unfortunately, it seems that when we have a new test come up, we need new faith. Yesterday’s faith is not enough for today.
6. *Fear makes us forget what God has already done and disbelieve what God promises He will do!*

E. Fear Disobeys God’s Principles

1. Let me make this simple: FEAR is DISOBEDIENCE.
2. Numerous times in our Scripture God finds it important to say: “Do Not Be Afraid” or “Fear Not”.
 - a. And the way it is written is not as a suggestion. It is a COMMAND!
 - b. To live in fear is to live in sin ... simple as that.

- c. “But, Pastor Stan, I can’t help it!” God has given us everything we need to deal with fear. It’s up to us to use those tools. More about that in a minute...
 - 3. When we are disobedient to God, it’s costly. It cost the Hebrew people 39 years ... a whole generation of their people living in the wilderness instead of paradise!
- F. God wants you and me to just accept the gifts He offers!
 - 1. He has a better life planned for us than we do ... whether that’s a relationship, a career direction or a new way to serve God in ministry.
 - 2. I work with a number of people who have felt God tugging at their hearts. God has something special planned and it will bring incredible blessings into their lives if they will only be obedient!
 - 3. They want to accept what God has for them, but guess what gets in the way? FEAR!
 - a. What if it’s the wrong decision?
 - b. What if that’s not the right person?
 - c. What if I get homesick?
 - d. What if I can’t do what God says I can?
 - e. What if? What if?
 - 4. It doesn’t ever seem to click that God never calls His children out just to desert them (The Amorites are going to eat us!)
 - 5. Guess what happens to those people who shy away from what God calls them to do?
 - a. Restless wandering in the wilderness of their jobs.
 - b. Restless wandering in the wilderness in their relationships.
 - c. Restless wandering in the wilderness of broken dreams and missed opportunities.
 - 6. Isn’t that kind of life scarier than taking the risk of being obedient to God?
 - 7. So, now you ask, “HOW DO WE FACE OUR FEARS?!?” Glad you asked...

II. What We Do to Fear

Now, I know that you all would like your fears just to wear off over time or just disappear, but that’s not how it works. When it comes to fear, we have to gather up our five stones like David and go and face the GIANT!

Are you ready for your five stones?

- A. #1 = **Confront Your Fear Honestly**
 - 1. 1st thing = discover EXACTLY what you are afraid of. Best way = Ask God to show it to you!

2. Many people don't even know what they are afraid of, they are just afraid.
3. God knows EXACTLY what we are afraid of and will show it to us if we will take the time to ask and LISTEN!
4. Hard to attack a Giant if we don't even know what it is!
5. Some people are AFRAID to find out what they are AFRAID of. Don't be. We have to know so we can ATTACK IT!

B. #2 = Confess Your Fear as Sin

1. God says throughout Scripture, "Do Not Be Afraid!"
2. Guess what?!? FEAR = SIN!
3. We have to go back to God and tell God that we understand we've been disobedient by being afraid.
4. We bring our fear in front of God and say, "This is it!" But, there's more ... we also have to "REPENT" = to purposefully turn and walk away. It's a Choice!

C. #3 = Claim God's Promises of Protection

1. The Bible is filled with Promises about fear and how we can overcome fear through God. Let's use them!
2. If you are a fearful person, get some 3X5 cards or post-it notes and write God's Word on them and put them on your bathroom mirror, your car visor, your desk, and your computer screen saver, whatever... READ THEM out loud when you need to claim God's victory over FEAR!
 - a. *Deuteronomy 31:6* = "Be strong and of good courage..."
 - b. *Psalms 27:1* = "The Lord is my light and salvation..."
 - c. *Psalms 118:6* = "The Lord is on my side..."
 - d. *Proverbs 3:25-26* = "Do not be afraid of sudden terror..."
 - e. *Proverbs 29:25* = "...whoever trusts in the Lord will be safe."
 - f. *Isaiah 41:10* = "Fear not, for I am with you..."
 - g. *John 14* = Jesus telling his disciples not to be afraid.

D. #4 = Cultivate a Closer Relationship With God

1. There were 12 scouts sent into Canaan to check out the Promised Land. 10 of them came back full of fear. 2 came back saying calmly, "We can do this."
 - a. Joshua and Caleb were the two scouts who were ready to be obedient to God and go in and take what God had promised.
 - b. You know what we read about Joshua and Caleb? Scripture says, "They have whole-heartedly followed the Lord." (Numbers 32:12)
 - c. They had a close relationship with God ... and they WERE NOT AFRAID!

- d. God rewarded them as the only two adults from the 2 million Hebrews who got to go into the Promised Land!
- 2. Our fear level is kind of a Spiritual Measuring Stick! If we are full of fear, we aren't close to God. If we are close to God, we aren't full of fear!
- 3. Most of us have children or have been around children who are afraid. If you have a child that is scared, what do you do?
 - a. Run in and tell them to toughen up and quit their crying? Okay, sometimes...
 - b. Most of us get down to their level and talk softly and try to take them into our arms ... show love and comfort them and tell them that you are right there with them and they don't have anything to be afraid of, right?!?
 - c. That's what God wants to do for us, but it's hard for God to do if we choose not to be close to God.
- 4. When we've experienced God holding us like that when we are afraid, it makes us want to do that for others. We are to "love others like God first loved us."
 - a. Best way to take your eyes off of your fears ... focus on caring for others.
 - b. "The more we reach out to other people with needs, the smaller our fears become." Try It!

E. #5 = Commit Your Life to Jesus Christ

- 1. If you could guess, what do you think most people are the most afraid of? Right, DEATH!
- 2. What happens if we conquer our greatest fear? Well, it makes sense that all other fears would be conquered as well.
- 3. I had this conversation with a man at the last church I was at up in Chili. He and his family had been attending our church for a few months and he came in my office one day ... he said, "Okay, Stan, I've been listening to you about Jesus and life and death and heaven and hell. I didn't really think that there was life after death and I'm still not sure about heaven and hell; but I figure if I'm right and you're wrong, you're still okay. But, if you're right and I'm wrong, I'm in a lot of trouble. I don't like my odds. I want to be right with God!"
- 4. When Joe left my office that day, he didn't have to fear death anymore.
- 5. We have other Giants to conquer over the next few weeks ... nothing will get you ready like telling Jesus that you're ready to live life His way!

Jesus said, "Do not be afraid" and that was a command, not a suggestion.

Let's Pray!