

“Fear not”
Luke 2:8-11

⁸And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. ¹⁰And the angel said to them, ‘Fear not, for behold I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

The Chapman University Survey of American Fears 2015

When I was a boy I remember being excited when the Sunday edition of the Pittsburgh Press was delivered to our house. There were only two sections of that paper I liked to read: the Sports section and the Parade magazine insert. Every year, Parade had an article on the things that American’s fear the most. Public speaking was usually at the top of the list, followed by spiders, snakes, and things like that. My - how times have changed!

Time magazine and others have featured the Chapman University Survey of American Fears of 2015, and it is both fascinating and – frightening.



Five Categories with the Top Ten

These ten fears are placed in five rather surprising categories. The number one fear is the category of GOVERNMENT. Some 58% of Americans identified their number one fear is "Corruption of Government Officials".

The second category is TECHNOLOGY: 44.8% of us fear "Cyber-Terrorism"; 44.6% fear "Corporate Tracking of Personal Information"; and 41.4% fear "Government Tracking of Personal Information." In 1949 George Orwell wrote the novel, *Nineteen Eight-Four*, which was the basis of the coined phrase, *Big Brother is watching*. It seems like *Big Brother* has showed up on the American scene, and he is not a fun playmate to enjoy but an abusive sibling to fear.

The third category is MAN-MADE DISASTERS: 44.4% of American's fear "Terrorist Attacks"; 40.9% fear "Bio Warfare"; and 39.2% of us fear "Economic Collapse."

The fourth category is CRIME: 39.6% fear "Identity Theft" and 36.9% fear "Credit Card Fraud".

The fifth category is called PERSONAL FUTURE and 36.9% of Americans fear that they will run out of money in the future.

In two generations our world has changed and our fears have changed. Most of these top ten fears could never have appeared in Parade Magazine of the 1960's because they simply did not exist. It is scary how much our fears have changed!

The Big Three

As I have studied these ten fears I simply put them into three general zip codes: (1) invasion of privacy; (2) corruption of authority; and (3) assault on security. The world is not a safe place; America is not a safe place; we live in fear.

What is missing?

What is missing from this list of the top ten fears? - spiders, snakes, public speaking? There is one fear that should be number one on the list but it is nowhere to be found? I fear that this fear is not a fear for most people. I am referring to the fear of ----- God.

The Shepherds

Fear of God was number one on the list of the shepherds who were watching their flocks by night. They were not afraid of the dark as they had worked many night shifts before. They were afraid of the light, a light that reflected the *glory of God* which *shone around them*. We spoke of this *glory* in last Sunday's sermon. *Glory* is a word used to describe God's weightiness, His worthiness, His holiness, and His majesty. Notice that their response to seeing and sensing God's holy presence was that they were *filled with fear*. In Greek it says they literally *feared a great fear*. The word is *phobeo* from which we get the English term *phobia*. We might say they were *glory-phobic*.

May I ask you a personal question: are you *glory-phobic*? Put another way, does God intimidate you? Do you perceive Him as a "Big Brother" or a "Corrupt Government" or a divine being who knows too much about you, including your social security number and your secret sins?

The Good News of Christmas

This sounds pessimistically negative and, for many, morally repulsive. How dare God attempt to steal my freedom, my rights, my autonomy, and my life choices? We pride

ourselves on our freedoms, and for many that includes freedom from God Himself. But we don't believe in absolute freedom. We as Americans have said for years there are two things in life that are unavoidable: death and taxes. The Bible has said that there are two things in life that are unavoidable: death and judgment.

... it is appointed for a man to die once, and after that comes judgment" (Heb. 9:27)

The shepherds knew this religiously because they were Jewish. We know this instinctively because we are human.

Facing a holy God and having our sins fully displayed in His perfect presence is terrifying. Innately, we are all, by nature, *judgment-phobic*. But keep reading the Christmas story!

¹⁰And the angel said to them, 'Fear not, for behold I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Christmas is the story of the greatest Man who ever lived, who offers us the greatest gift that we can ever receive, that removes the greatest fear we can ever fear. This baby Jesus would grow to live a sinless life and perfectly obey God's holy law. He would then go to a cross and die a sacrificial death that God would accept as a substitutionary payment for our sin. He would then rise from the dead proving once and for all that He is God-in-the-flesh and has absolute power over life and death. He would ascend to heaven where He now sits in glory and power. And one day – when you die or He returns – He will come to judge the world and make all things new.

Fearful friends, when you admit your sin and failure before this holy and loving God, and you surrender your life to Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, He promises to forgive all your sins and make you a new person – someone who no longer needs to live in fear!

There is no fear in love, for perfect love casts out fear (I John 4:18).

Fearful friends, God's perfect love can cast out your greatest fear. You can trust Him.

- He wants to rule over you, and His authority is not that of a corrupt government but rather a benevolent Lord.
- He doesn't have to track your personal information with technology, because He already knows everything about you, including the number of hairs on your head. Knowing all there is to know, He loves you and offers you forgiveness.
- You need not fear your future, because He holds your future in His strong and loving hands, and no war or recession or illness or adversity can *snatch you from His hand (John 10:28)*.

American's fear identity theft and understandably so, but the gospel is all about identity death. When Jesus went to the cross to die for your sins and mine, He assumed our identity. The sinless One became sin. All of our sin debt that we could never pay, He paid, in full? And after stealing our identity, He offers to give us a new one: *if anyone is in Christ he is a new creature; the old has passed away, the new has come (II Cor. 5:17)*. Oh, what a blessed larceny! – stealing my sinful identity to die in my place and giving me a new

identity as His forgiven and beloved child! This is the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Repent and believe the gospel!

Have a Charlie Brown Christmas

The “Charlie Brown Christmas Special” debuted when I was in middle school (1965). The infamous Peanuts character created by Charles Schulz is sad and depressed as Christmas approaches. He goes to see Lucy in her psychiatrist booth and she counsels him that he needs to direct a Christmas play. He purchases a little tree for the play but the tree only adds to his sadness. Linus is with him. You know Linus – the fearful and insecure little boy who walks around with his beloved blanket, which no one on planet earth can persuade him to give up. While they are back stage on the day of the rehearsal, Charlie becomes even more agitated.

Everything I do turns into a disaster. I guess I really don't know what Christmas is all about. ISN'T THERE ANYONE WHO KNOWS WHAT CHRISTMAS IS ALL ABOUT?

Linus responds to his depressed friend and says: *Sure Charlie Brown. I can tell you what Christmas is all about.* He then walks to the center of the stage. He asks for the house lights to dim. The spotlight focuses on Linus. Clutching his beloved blanket, he recites our Scripture text:

¹⁸And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.⁹And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.¹⁰And the angel said unto them, Fear not; for, behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.¹²And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,¹⁴Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and goodwill towards men."

"...That's what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown."

There is a wonderful You Tube video about this scene that Pastor Todd Denholm shared with me. It was created by Pastor Jason Soroski and has gone viral and touched many lives – perhaps God will use it to touch your life tonight.

At the very moment when Linus recites the words - *Fear not* – **he drops his blanket**. The point is obvious. When we understand the real meaning of Christmas, when we trust in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, we can let go of our blankets that we have clung to for so long. Would you like to do that tonight? For some it is the blanket of secrecy, for others the blanket of shame, or the blanket of an IRA, of the blanket of self-righteousness.

Part two of Pastor Soroski's analysis is even more profound. Linus picks up his blanket again and walks off stage. “Charlie Brown Christmas” ends in an outside scene with the entire Peanuts gang gathered around the Christmas tree singing, “Hark the Herald Angels Sing”. In a profoundly touching scene, Linus has wrapped his blanket around the base of the tree as they sing:

*Hark the herald angels sing, 'Glory' to the newborn King;
Peace on earth and mercy mile, God and sinners reconciled!*

*Joyful all ye nations rise, Join the triumph of the skies;
With angelic host proclaim, 'Christ is born in Bethlehem!'
Hark the herald angels sing, 'Glory to the newborn King.'*

*Christ, my highest heav'n adored; Christ the everlasting Lord!
Late in time behold Him come, Offspring of the Virgin's womb:
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; Hail the Incarnate Deity,
Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel.
Hark the herald angels sing, 'Glory to the newborn King.'*

*Hail the heav'n born Prince of Peace, Hail the Sun of Righteousness;
Light and life to all He brings, Ris'n with healing in His wings.
Mild He lays His glory by, Born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth, Born to give them second birth.
Hark the herald angels sing, 'Glory to the newborn King.'*



Fearful friends, there is a Savior from our fears, and His name is Jesus. He commands and invites you to lay down your false security strategies, your sins, your failures, your successes, your hopes, your disappointments, your agenda, your pain, your brokenness, and your FEARS - at the foot of His cross.

The Savior has come to save us from our fears and our sins, now and forever.

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Merry Christmas!