

Psalm 20:7 Some *boast* in chariots and some in horses, but we will boast in the name of the Lord, our God.

### Running/Bear Illustration

It becomes harder and harder to recognize. Everyday we become more and more numb to the noise, but if you take a step back and look, it's really amazing how much fear we've lived in since 9/11. Pre 2001, it was easy not to think about political goings-on, vacations, travels. Any report of terror or war seemed to generally be something that happened "over there" or an occurrence outside of our daily ritual. But with the events that unfolded in 2001, fear was brought to our front door. We as a country were brought to our knees. In some ways 9/11 robbed us of our innocence. We could no longer live in such a carefree way, but rather we became confronted with fear on a daily basis.

Overnight, we saw radical changes in transportation. I can remember dropping my parents off at the airport several months after the September attacks and armed guards surrounded the regional airport. I'm not referring to an international, bustling enterprise, I'm speaking of a local, regional, minimal airport, a feeder at best. Armed guards! I can remember having to circle several times around the airport before the entire dropping-off process was complete.

As the country continued to become more knowledgeable about what had transpired months earlier, we began to see more and more "us vs. them" situational considerations. No longer could you look at a stranger, a foreigner without a second thought. We heard countless stories of innocent people being attacked, because of their apparent association to a foreign country. [Slide 4: Fear Culture]

We witnessed campaigns and endeavors based solely on the idea of 'keeping America secure' the only noticeable results were massive casualties and bloodshed. Although these efforts were seemingly done in the name of finding security were still repeating the similar plots today. It would seem the security we were hoping for has yet to arrive.

[Slide 5: fish/ocean graphic] Fear is something we see in many different places in our culture. In this season of lent, we're calling system failure, we're looking at sin as something bigger than just what you and I do. We're exploring larger institutions that shape our world and our worldview. We've looked at various issues that resonate with different aspects of our humanity. Because these institutions are broken, we have been spending time identifying how they stunt our growth and rob us of life.

Fear is no different. It's not that I live in fear by myself. It's not that you have fear. It's that we, collectively live in fear. This is a problem. We need to confess it and be better. We don't have to live a life in which fear paralyzes.

In recent years, I have flown a lot for work. My normal weekly commute involves getting on an airplane, going through security. Dealing with all the complications that exist therein. I've done this several times a week for the past several years. There's not a flight that goes by that I don't think about a fear of something happening on the flight. You see certain people getting on the flight, and in the back of your mind, you have a second about who they are and if they have intentions other than arriving at the destination without complication. It's an unspoken energy that exists.

You can't get away from it. It's ingrained in what we're taught, what we see, what we read. But it doesn't have to occupy my entire time.

For those of us who are afraid, I have good news for you. Fear is not the end. It doesn't have to make our decisions for us. We don't have to live in fear because we are called by God and he is with us. When God is with us, we have security.

But if we're honest, based on what we've heard so far, you are likely thinking to yourself "What you said is true, but my fears are legitimate fears. The things I'm afraid of are legitimate fears." And you are probably right. Sometimes fear is legitimate. I would submit that sometimes fear is even healthy.

Fear is a God-given gift. There is a healthiness to fear. Running see the bear, turn around. It was not secure for me to continue running towards the bear. It was more secure in the hotel on the treadmill.

Yes, I believe my security comes from above, but there were practical implications to remaining on the same path and continuing towards the bear. However, I didn't become paralyzed by the fear that I stopped running outside all together. I became more aware of my surroundings, allowing a healthy dose of fear to make me more aware, I stayed secure because I listened to my fear. It was a healthy fear that kept me from running into the bear.

But we know fear can take us too far. What if I chose to never run outside again? What if I started protesting marathons because they involve people running outside and I feel they shouldn't? That would be absurd!?

But we all get that fear can paralyze us, particularly from keeping us from doing what God has called us to. Fear goes too far when it paralyzes us from doing what we're called to do. It becomes an idol.

But this is nothing new. It's not a new idea and it's not something that has just been born within the past couple of centuries. A life paralyzed by fear is a theme that has been around from ages past. There's a particular group in the bible that knew a thing or two about living in fear. Actually, they knew quite a lot about living in fear.

[Scripture Slide] The story and plot of the Israelites is multifaceted. For our particular aspect of the story today, we find the Children of Israel in captivity in Babylon. Jerusalem had been conquered some time earlier and now the people were living in exile. Not only had they been conquered, beaten down, stripped of the familiar, forced into exile but also a large number of Israelites had been dispersed among various geographical landscapes.

So we're dealing with a people, a nation, that had been given a promise of being distinct, blessed and chosen but nothing about their current situation seems anything like those descriptions. For the Israelites, every day is a reminder of being conquered. Every day is likely lived in fear because there is no apparent security inside being captives. When you're displaced, beaten down, scattered fear becomes the familiar.

No one would blame them if they just continued to live in fear. At some level it would be easy to empathize with Israelites and completely understand if they chose to continue on living in that way.

I'm sure that at even some level not only does Israel live in fear because of their current situation, but they likely live in pity. After all, it was their own sin that led them to this place. It was their own idolatry and led to being conquered. A direct byproduct of their sin, turning away from God, resulted in their being where they are right then. Fear, pity, desolation, no security. I wonder are there any of us here today that can relate to how the Israelites feel. Are there any of us today that some level feel that way?

Let me tell you, the story doesn't end here. God is a redeemer and he has words for the Israelites. In spite of all that has happened, all that Israel has done to herself, God still has something to say.

[Slide 43:1-7] - What a beautiful passage. To a people group living in fear, with no real security. He tells them twice. Do not fear! I am the redeemer, I have called you.

Let's take a closer look at the text :

[slide v.1] You're creator O Jacob, He formed you, Israel. God is the creator - Jacob and Israel - parallel - idea of man and idea of the nation. Talking to both, all encompassing. I created you: you as a people, you as a nation. Regardless of your present circumstance. Irrespective of your current surroundings. Do not fear. I have redeemed

you. We already know why they're in the place they're in. They sinned against God, they stopped following him. Had they chosen to always follow God, they likely wouldn't be in the predicament they were in. But God, the creator, the one who formed them says do not fear. I am the redeemer. I will redeem you in your circumstance.

[slide v.2] water and fire are used as a metaphor for problems and obstacles both physical and spiritual. God is not going to deliver us from problems, we're not going to have an easy life. We will have difficulties. God will walk through circumstance with us. Fear not, I am with us because nothing is greater than the promise of god's presence. 'nor flame burn you' - babylonian captivity - When you pass through the waters, when you cross the rivers and when you walk through the fire. I will be with you through all of these.

[slide v.3] For I am the Lord your God. Never mind the gods of other people or other nations. I am your God and this is what I do. That has a parental aspect to it. Do you remember as a kid when you say something like, "yea but so and so gets to do..." The reply was something similar to "Yea, but i'm not their parent. I'm your parent. And I say this.." That's the father has to say to us.

[slide v.4] I will give other peoples in exchange for your life. This is the mystery of God's love - substitutionary atonement.

[slide v.5] Do not fear, another reminder.

[slide v.6] Even though you are all spread out across the world, I will go to all areas to bring you back. Not only does he want to bring them back to Israel, he wants to restore them.

[slide v.7] This is for Everyone who is called by my name, everyone I formed. What's interesting here is there is no evidence a changed people of Israel. God's word doesn't say, "Israel because you look so different spiritually, because you tried really hard..." Not at all. God's unconditional love is greater than the sin of his people. God is taking initiative to bring his people back to him. It's based on his grace not our merit.

Not only are these words for Israel, they're for us. A reminder of who we are, but even more so a reminder of who God in the midst of wherever we find ourselves. Isaiah says, "don't let fear make you forget who you are, and more importantly, don't let fear make you forget who I am, as your God.

God formed us, God redeemed us, God called us and is with us. Do not fear. Our security is found in Him.

But what does this look like for us today?

In case you weren't aware, we are in the middle of an election season. Regardless of where you line up politically you have likely seen that both sides rely on campaign tactics that stir up fear within us. Campaign ads are designed to lure us into a more secure way of living, a promise to protect our liberties. If the other side wins, our nation will go into another recession, maybe even another depression. We're continually pitched an idea that if we let the other side or even the other person within the right side we won't have security. Our nation won't be secure, our jobs won't be secure, our borders won't be secure, our economy won't be secure. We're told that we must make the correct decision and if we don't we're left to our fears.

The common theme to all of this is that it plays on the fear that we've been so accustomed to living in. We have slowly died to a life outside of fear. We've lived so long in the shackles and chains of fear that we don't know what true security, what true freedom or true fearlessness looks like.

It's not just campaigns or elections. It's other areas of our landscape. Every week, if not every day, we hear of another terrorist attack. We hear about ISIS conquering another city, taking prisoners, killing more people. We're told of new threats to our nation, either raising or alerting to a new level of threat or we're shown some new propaganda video encouraging others to attack us. It's a constant state of fear that is aroused in us.

How do we react to this?

We have elected officials that literally say, "unless we wipe out all of them, we will not be safe." Unless we destroy an entire people group, our country will not be secure. We have others that say, your refugees cannot come here because they might foster terrorism and we don't know what they might do if we let them inside our borders.

I submit to you, all this talk is based on fear. These are propositions that grasp at trying to find security.

[Slide 43:14-21]

Again God's words to the Israelites, despite their circumstances:

[slide v.14] For your sake, I have sent to Babylon and will bring them all down. God has already put into place the thing he's going to use to bring about the redemption of his people. God is already at work to redeem and secure his people. As history reveals

itself, we later discover that God uses Cyrus II to overthrow the Babylonians and eventually restore the Israelites. Cyrus was not a believer, Cyrus wasn't Jewish. Yet God still used him to bring about his plan. Again the mystery of God. He's at work.

[slide v.15] I am the Lord your Holy One. Again the reminder

[slide v.16-17] Who makes a way through the sea and the mighty waters. Who brings down the chariot and horse? The very tactile element of those who crushed us. The chariot and the horse. God says he brings them down. Psalm 20:7 - Had a contemporary Jewish person heard 16 and 17 they would have immediately remembered the exodus, being led out of Egypt. The imagery used here is a reminder of the past events with God, the parting of the Red Sea and provisional care for Israel.

[slide v.18] But it doesn't stop there. Yes, that was historical. That was real, I was with them then. But Do not think about the past things, do not ponder in history. While it may be easy to get caught in the things of the past, what God did then. Yes, he did something then for the people then, but...

[slide v.19] I will do something new. Yes, I was with your ancestors then. and I am with you now, but I will do not do what I did then because I am going to do something new. And will you be aware of it? Are you with me? I will make a way in the wilderness. You may find your again in the wilderness, because you're not promised a worry free life, but I will make a way. I will make rivers in the desert. The wilderness, there is real danger in the wilderness.

The takeaway - there is no path of security in our situation without God's provisions. The reality is that following God may take us to some scary places. The text doesn't say, "do not fear not because there is no danger." The text says, "do not fear, because I am with you." Do not fear because of what I have done. Do not fear because of what I am doing. Do not fear because of what is yet to come. I will make a path!

As believers how we act and we live should be guided by God's promises not by our fear. This entire season of lent we have dealt with very large, very complex issues. Issues and ideas that have many layers. This is not intended to give you a textbook answer. This is not intended to instruct on how to align on a particular issue or agenda. I'm only trying to point out that the Gospel should be the foundation of shaping our decisions, not fear.

Yes, fear can be a good thing. A healthy amount of fear can obviously keep us from all sorts of danger. But it must be balanced and controlled as only that. It can rob of us of

our God given to live in the freedom of his promises. We are promised that God is with us and just like he made for Israel he will make a way for us.

The real temptation for us all is that it's the go back to saying "Yea, but I'm just afraid that.." - "I know what the Bible says, but I'm afraid of this." - and it's easy to miss the point entirely. That's the struggle of idolatry. It's easy. God's word reminds us not to overcome with fear. It reminds that we were created and formed by Him. So too shall we be redeemed and secured by him. But when we look for security in anything other than these promises of God we commit idolatry. The thing about idolatry is that it paralyzes us. It keeps us from doing what God has called us to do. Whatever that calling is, whatever that responsibility God has given you, if you let fear have the control you will not be able to live out that calling. To live out that calling regardless of the circumstance or the danger. Because our security comes from God.

God's promises, despite our circumstances are the basis for our decisions, our lifestyle and our security. There is a risk to following God. It's the risk of a cross. There will be danger, there will be threats, but our security is not found in the absence of those things. Our security is found in God and his promises. Because he promises that even through those things, he is one who formed us, who called and redeemed and who will secure us.

What would Catalyst look like if our lives were ruled by the love of God rather than fear? What kind of impact could we have if we were able to replace any idols of security with the promises of the Almighty? In what ways would we change the world if we commit ourselves to living each day in the security of God? When we choose in this manner, we absolutely fulfill a role in helping bring about heaven, here, on earth.

**Psalm 20:7**

### **Communion Set Up**

We come to the table today as a people taught to live in fear. And at the table, we find the God who promises, "I am with you." This table invites us back to the meal Jesus shared with his followers the night before he was killed. That night, he broke bread and gave it to us as his body, broken for us. Later in the meal, he passed a cup of wine as his blood poured out as a new covenant between God and humanity.

By coming to this table, we come to a God who is with us even in Death, a God who has never left us, forsaken us, abandoned us. This God promises that his way is life *even* when that way goes through the sea, through the valley of the shadow of death, even with that way goes to the Cross.

You don't have to be a member of Catalyst to receive this meal today. If you're willing to trust God, to refuse to let fear order your steps, then you're welcome to come.

Let's pray.

"God, our creator and Lord, we come to your table today as a people who live in fear. We hear the voices of our world shouting loudly for us to be afraid and we confess we listen all too readily to them. We have allowed that fear to warp us, to make us a people suspicious of the stranger, unwelcoming, cold and distant.

As we come to your table today, may these wafers and juice become for us a spiritual food that gives us the grace we need to follow your Son to his cross. May we be a people who sets tables rather than builds walls. May we be known by our welcome, not our suspicion. May we be known for our love, not our fear.

We hear your promise to be with us. And so, confident that you are faithful to your word, we approach your table this morning in the name of your son, Jesus. Amen."