

From Fear to Faith in the Face of Christ

Mack Tomlinson | *illbehonest.com*

I want to speak to you in this last session on: From Fear to Faith in the Face of Christ. From Fear to Faith in the Face of Christ. Or if you wanted a simpler title: Faith up. Fears down. One thing of mortifying sin is killing our fears. I want to speak on fear and replacing it with faith today. Let's read from two Psalms. Psalm 34. We read it earlier this morning - the whole psalm. But I want to read three verses. Psalm 34:4-6 "I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. They looked to Him and were lightened. Their faces were not ashamed. This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles." And then, Psalm 56:3. "What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee." Fear or the choice of faith.

About four years ago, I got the news that in six weeks, I would have a second open heart surgery. I had one ten years earlier. And fear came. When fear comes, it's like a cloud, right? It's like a fog. It comes over you. You can't just swat it away like a fly. So, I had to face this. And I just prayed one day, "Lord, this is scary again. This is going to hurt again. I'm insufficient. I'm inadequate. I can't get through this in victory without You helping me. So speak to me and give me something from Your Word that will take me through." See, we can either choose to yield to our fears and sink in discouragement or depression or anxiety. Or, we can choose another path. Lord, please help me. What I'm saying applies to every one of you - universally.

So God gave me two Scriptures that came alive just in my normal course of Bible reading. I didn't run to another book. I didn't go searching for something. My morning readings - as I read, two Scriptures came alive. And the main one was Psalm 56:3. I came one morning a few days after the news to Psalm 56. And as I read verse 3: boom! It was a rhema to my heart. There it is. "What time I am afraid..." well, there's going to be opportunity.

The night before the surgery, I didn't sleep much. I had to be up there at 5 a.m. getting prepped. Fear. Fear rises. Going under the anesthesia... still conscious - fear rises. Coming out at 12 hours when you're kind of groggy and you're hurting and you can't breathe, you have claustrophobia, fear rises. Every single fear that week that came, that verse came to my mind. I couldn't pray it out loud. I had tubes, but in my mind and heart, I prayed it. Every time, peace came. Every time.

So, I want to talk to you about your fear. If you were to list five things you fear the most, what would be on your list? Make the list in your mind. Make it later on paper. What would be on your list? Every one of you has got a list. Edmund Burke said, "No human passion so much robs our mind of acting and thinking rightly as fear." Fear is a thief. It's an enemy. It's a confuser. Confusion. It is a drug that suddenly makes us not even be thinking right. It makes us think wrong things. And fear is the beginning of defeat in any situation we face.

Now, brethren, your fears, as you journey in the Christian life, will either rob you because you stay passive about them, or you'll learn to become proactive and kill them with the promises of God. And faith will rise. Fear is the offspring and the fruit of unbelief. And nothing can cure us of fear, until faith - or God through faith - cures our unbelief.

Now, I want you to think of the reality of fear. How historically universal fear is. Every person in history, except Christ, has had the problem, the disease, the sin of fear. And even the

Lord Jesus humanly, had a holy, pure - not sinful - dread and fear of the cross in the Garden, didn't He? He didn't want to experience it. He didn't want to drink the cup. So the horror of it came over Him and He experienced it, but He didn't yield to sin in that. But universally, every person who's ever been born has fears. John Flavel the Puritan said, "It cannot be said of anyone that he or she is without fear." You think of the preachers you love the most or you respect the most. They're human beings that week in and week out will struggle with fear about something. Fear will come on them. Flavel said, "Even the most courageous have fear at times."

Now think about it. What all kind of things do we fear? We fear things. We fear people. The fear of man's a snare, the Bible says. We fear speaking up in public around others. We fear praying in a prayer meeting when we ought to pray, even though we're a Christian. We don't pray out loud, because we fear being judged. We fear being unspiritual. So we give in to the fear. We feel people dressed like clowns. Any of you have that fear? See, there's weird fears. Some people fear dolls. They couldn't sleep in a room with a bunch of dolls up on the shelves. They're staring at me. Fearing dolls? Really? Yeah, we fear a lot of things. Snakes. Storms and lightning. I read one time that Jonathan Edwards would take prayer walks during lightning storms. I tried it once. It didn't work. I ran in the house real fast. I said maybe I can just stay out here like Edwards. I couldn't. I couldn't handle it.

In May of 2015, James White the apologist came to our church for one weekend. In the springtime, Texas is tornado alley. Right? Now, that alley is widening. Alabama gets them. Mississippi gets them. All over. So here we are, and he finished the ministry on Sunday and he's at our house for lunch. And the tornado siren goes off. Do you remember this? Jesse wasn't there at our house for lunch but the siren goes off. So we find out that a tornado on the southwest corner of Denton is moving across Denton, low to the ground, and it's going from the Southwest to where we live, the Northeast corner of Denton. So, you know James is cool, calm, and collected. He said, in his manner, "what do we do?" He was wanting to run to a basement, and Linda said, well, the only thing to do is get in the hall and cover yourself up with a mattress. He said, "Is that all?" So the tornado passed, we sit down and have lunch.

But the reality is, whether it's a tornado warning or something in your mind you can't get rid of, we battle so many fears we can't control. But we can learn, by God's grace, and getting our mind renewed to respond rightly to fear. And we can conquer fear conquering us. Because fear - we can't control it, but we can and we are to control our responses to it. Fears like: Divorce has happened in my family. Could it ever happen to us? I'm divorced and my mate was the one in sin, when I was faithful - can I ever be married again? Fear of walking alone the rest of your life. Job security. How are we going to provide for all these children? I don't make enough on paper. Everything in life aims to produce unbelief and fear in us. Everything breeds it. Like John Piper said, godlessness is in the air we breathe in America. Everything in America - the air we breathe and the society we live in and the whole culture will breed fear in us if we let it. Our hearts, our unrenewed minds, things within us in our hearts, like gravity pull us towards fear. Things without - outside of us try to pull us to fear. People can try to make you afraid, either on purpose or unconsciously. Trials and circumstances. Demonic assaults. Discouragement and depression. Stress and pressure. All kinds of things attack you with an end goal to make you fear. To push you into fear. And if you're passive, and you're just kind of

defensive but passive, you're a sitting duck. And we have to learn to respond differently. The simplest things can deceive our mind into thinking wrong and believing lies.

In the 1970's, I was in Fort Worth, Texas where I went to graduate school. And later in the 70's, I stayed at a friend's house they were selling, and they weren't there. I went to bed. And in the night, at 2 a.m., I hear noise in the house. Fear comes over me. Somebody's in the house. I didn't know what to do. I didn't know the house. I didn't know where the rooms were really. In the dark, I didn't know the layout. I laid there fearful. I tried to go back to sleep. In a little while, two hours later, same noise I heard. And you know when you're sleepy or groggy, you don't know. Things sound louder than they are. I was robbed by fear all night. The next morning, I'm in the kitchen. Suddenly there's the same sound. It was the ice maker producing ice. That's the enemy that robbed me through fear all night. What a lie! What a pansy I was!

The simplest things can produce fear in us, can't they? Right? Well, faith is the antidote. It always is. It's the only antidote. Because faith is at the heart of Christianity. Scripture says this, God raised Christ from the dead that our faith and hope might be in God. It says we're justified by faith. We're saved by faith. By faith, we have peace with God. We are to live by faith, the Bible says, and we're to walk by faith.

Now what is faith? In the early years of my Christian life, this was such a confusing topic. I would hear men preach about faith. I would read it in the Bible. And I honestly could not come to terms with what is faith? Is it something I'm just to produce? Is it an action on my part? Is it just mental assent? Is it something God has to do? Do I need to be zapped with faith? I couldn't figure out how to understand faith. I really couldn't. It was a long battle for me. Until God began to sort it out and put the pieces in the puzzle. Here a little, there a little. Line upon line. And I finally began to have my fog cleared that faith is not mental assent. It's not intellectual agreement with facts. It is personal trust and dependence on Christ. It is personal casting myself, personal dependence and trust, from the heart on what God has said to me. Faith. Without faith, it is impossible to please God. Faith is at the heart of Christianity. Christ is the object of our faith. He's the object of all faith. We don't put faith in our faith. We don't put faith in our repentance. Christ is the object of our faith. But the only way to Christ, the only means of getting to Him, is faith. It's faith that unites us to Christ. It's faith that is the means to justify us. And it's by faith that we lay hold of Christ.

In living by faith and conquering fear, what characterizes faith? Let's think for a few minutes here about what is the nature of a believer's trust in the Lord. Because it's good to be clear on some things about what faith is and what it's not.

Let me say first, faith is a difficult thing. It's not an easy thing to trust God. It can be a real battle. It's difficult. If it weren't difficult, why don't we all do it well? Why do we gravitate so much to struggle in trusting the Lord? William Jay said this, "It is no easy thing for a person whose conscience is truly awakened to trust one he cannot see Who he has sinned against, and especially to trust Him, not only for pardon, but for acceptance, for salvation, for daily provision, for your future, for taking care of you, and for getting you all the way to heaven." It is no easy thing to trust One Who is invisible, Who you are to love and believe and follow all the days of your life. But you can't see Him. We walk by faith and not by sight. Faith is a difficult thing. Because, we battle fear, and we tend in those moments to trust in ourselves or what we can see, instead of, as Abraham, enduring by seeing Him Who's invisible.

Well, faith is not only difficult, it's also practical and it's daily. Practical and daily. We can tempt God in a thousand ways, can't we? But, we can only trust God in one way daily: obedience, trust, and dependence. The life of faith is a narrow path. And it's not complicated. But it's not easy. We can tempt God in a thousand ways. But there's only one way to live a life of faith. Daily obedience and trust and dependence. Our head - that is, our brain, our mind - is not the thing, ultimately, that exercises faith. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing when God speaks to us. But from the heart man believes, Romans 10 says. We believe Christ. We believe God when our hearts believe and trust in what God has said to us. Also, faith is perpetual. That is, it never is to end. It's continual. That's why the Bible says, Trust in Him at all times, ye people. Pour out your hearts before Him (Incomplete thought) You can probably even ask God to let you trust Him in your dreams and in your sleep. Do you ever pray for good dreams? My granddaughter often says, Papa, would you pray for me that my dreams would be good? Do you ever commit your sleep and your dreams to the Lord? There's not a moment, whether waking or sleeping, but certainly whether waking that we're not called to abide in Christ and trust Him, living a life of faith. Because fear flees when faith acts. Fear goes down as your conscious trust and dependence goes up to the Lord.

Now, faith is also extensive. That is, we're to trust the Lord in all things. You can't trust God with your marriage and not with your job and career. You can't trust Him in spiritual things and not trust Him in the secular. There's no divorce between the sacred and the secular. All of life is the Lord's. All of life is to be lived for His glory. You can't categorize or compartmentalize, faith here to trust God and walk with Him in this area and not over here. No. All of life, we're called to walk by faith and live by faith. Daily in all things, in all circumstances, for every need, in every opportunity. For all things past, present, and future. Now beloved, that's a big challenge to learn that because before your conversion, all you did was depend on the world and others and yourself, and now, you talk about rerouting. You talk about your GPS being messed up. You've got to re-route your whole life and shift from trusting man or yourself to trusting One you can't see. This is a big deal. This is extensive. This is not tuning the engine; it's getting a whole new engine.

So, think about the disciples on the sea. The Lord Jesus was always calling them to trust Him; to believe Him. And the two things the New Testament says Jesus was amazed by were what? Unbelief and great faith. Those were the two things that always amazed Him. Can you imagine what Jesus felt and thought when He was amazed suddenly? He suddenly experiences amazement. I wonder if He rolled His eyes. I wonder if He (shook His head). I wonder if He just was in wonder and awe. I wonder if He uttered a prayer to His Father. Father, I just can't believe this. Father, what do I do? What do I say? He was always dependent on His Father. But He was amazed by unbelief. And He was amazed by great faith. So, here the disciples are on the sea, experienced fishermen, the storm is raging. They're very afraid. And one time, Jesus asleep in the boat, rises, stops the storm, and He asks them a question that if I were answering the question, it would be like, man, I'm glad I didn't say what I'm thinking because I'd probably show myself to be a fool. What did He say to them? Why are you afraid? Didn't they have a right to be afraid? Didn't they have an excuse to be afraid? Isn't it justifiable to be afraid? But Jesus goes right to the heart of it. He's in the boat. Why are you afraid?

Now, every storm you face, everything that wants to rip your comfort zone, and make you afraid, the Lord is probably asking you, "Why are you afraid?" Why? Oh ye of little faith. That's what He said oftentimes. After the resurrection, He says to Thomas, Be not faithless, but believing. Most of our struggles are rooted in, that my eyes are not on Christ, but they're on the waves, and I'm choosing fear instead of trust. Think of even a few promises God has said to you. He's already said these to you because they're in your Bible. They've already been given to you. Learn them. Milk them. Pray them. Use them. Meditate on them. Because they're the only antidote. They're the only antibiotic. They're the only medicine to apply to fear. I am with you to the end of the age. I will never leave you nor forsake you. The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life. Of whom shall I be afraid? Fear not. I am the One Who helps you, Isaiah wrote. Fear not, little flock, it's your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom. What all's in the Kingdom? Full inheritance, salvation, righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Shall I continue? The Kingdom of God is yours. Fear not, little flock, it's your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom. You don't have to earn it. You don't have to work for it. You don't have to be good enough for it. Fear not. Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom. Paul said, God has not given us a spirit of fear, but what? But of power, love, and a sound mind. God has not given any believer a carnal spirit of fear. There's a godly fear - you know that. I'm not talking about that today. There's a clean, reverential awe and fear of God that's healthy and that makes you love Him and draw near to Him and be reverential. But God never gives you a spirit of carnal fear that leads to bondage. Ever. Now that might be one you just pray when you feel fear come on. Just stomp that little devil of fear out by saying out loud to yourself, "God hasn't given me a spirit of fear. He has given me in Christ, power, love, and a sound mind. So I'm not going to give in to that." One place Jesus said, Do not fear. Only believe. You see the contrast? There it is. Do not fear. Only believe. That's not a shallow, simple, easy believism. That is, don't give in to fear, you instead trust Me in this. Faith, which is active trust, must replace fear. Turning to the truth and the promises of God when you fear, when you feel fearful, faith must be our response instead of giving in to fear, right?

And there's always a crossroads. There's always a moment. You will either yield to fear, or you'll choose to turn to the Lord and trust Him. And that will determine everything about that battle. Think about Philippians 4:6. What does it say? Be anxious for nothing, but, in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God, and the peace of God that passes all understanding will guard, will keep, your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Two choices there, Paul says. Anxiety... or praying in faith. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, let your requests... Two choices. Now, analyze this with me. If you choose to give in to anxiety, does it help you? What good's it going to do you? It's wasted energy. It's wasted. Everything's wasted in it. If you give into anxiety, you will reap fear, condemnation, discouragement... I could name probably twenty other things anxiety will bring.

So, anxiety is a wasted choice that dishonors your Savior. So if we learn to say I am not yielding to anxiety. My Lord has told me in Philippians 4:6 the response is prayer. Father, You know what I feel right now. Faith is not denying the presence of fear. It's facing it. And it's turning to the Lord and addressing it. Father, You know I'm afraid right now. That's what I did about that

surgery. Father, You know I'm afraid right now. Help me right now. And I would use God's truth and the fear would dissolve. Peace would come. So, be anxious for nothing, but in everything... it's a learned habit. It's a spiritual discipline. You replace and you defeat fear with a response of trust. Father, here's what I'm fearing, but I'm giving this to You. I thank You - with thanksgiving - I thank You that You're sovereign, You rule over this. Take care of this. I'm asking You for this.

And then, Paul said, the peace of God will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Turning to the truth and promises must be our response. Because what will fear accomplish? Nothing. What will faith accomplish? You know what it will accomplish? It will kill and extinguish fear. You remember what Ephesians 6 says? This is amazing. Think about this Scripture in the context of this. Paul said, taking up the shield of what? Faith. Taking up the shield of faith, that you may be able to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one. Faith quenches fiery darts. It stops them. You've seen those commercials - those little ugly bugs running around and here comes the pest control guy or the housewife with a can of Raid. (sprays) It's over. Faith applied, trust applied, Paul says, taking up the shield of faith. Faith will defend you. Taking up the shield of faith that it will quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. Now, brethren, you either believe the Bible or you don't.

How about this one? Leonard Ravenhill used to say all the time, one day, a believer's going to come along and really believe the Bible and we'll all be embarrassed. So, this issue of faith in quenching fear, or any other fiery dart of the enemy, is a monumental issue. And there is no greater or more constant fiery dart than fear. You can win the battle once, and a week later, here comes another one. Faith stops fear. Faith, active trust, and fleeing to Christ and using the Word of God as a shield of faith - I'm not talking about positive confession. You know what I'm saying. Faith conquers fear. It dissolves fear. It drives it away. I cried to the Lord, and He heard me, and He delivered me from all my fears. Fear springing up from unbelief is idolatry.

Why? Because fear directly denies that God is Who He is and what He's promised. When you are fearing something, you're believing a lie and you're acting like an atheist. Because you're not believing that God is Who He is and you're not believing what He's promised. We fear things down here so much because we fear and believe God so little. The moment of fear is the time to flee and trust. The moment of fear is the time to flee and trust. What time I am afraid, I will trust in You. The moment of fear is the time to trust. The Scottish pastor Maurice Roberts said this, this is wonderful - listen to this: "Fear or panic is the sinful failure to apply our knowledge of God to particular problems." "Fear or panic is the sinful failure to apply our knowledge of God to particular problems." Or as the hymn writer Anne Steele said, "This only can my fears control, and bid my sorrows fly, what harm can ever reach my soul beneath My Father's eye?" Now, sister or bother, what harm that your Father doesn't want in your life can ever reach you? Car wreck? Plane crash? Cancer? Child dying? What harm that your Father doesn't want for you can ever reach you? Leonard Ravenhill also said, "By the time a situation gets to you, it's God's will for you." Meaning, God has allowed it. There's no accidents. God's in control of what gets through His sifting process; His screening. Nothing's going to come to the Christian that God is not going to allow to work for good. Paul asks and answers in Romans 8. Can tribulation? Can distress? Can persecution? Can famine? Nakedness, danger, death, life, things present, things to come? Nothing. Nothing can separate you from the love of God.

Now let me apply this to us as I begin to wind toward my close. Fear is an ongoing battle for most of us. For some, it's a stronghold. For some of you, this is your biggest battle. Others, it's just an annoying, continuing area of sin and battling to trust God. But beloved, whatever level it is for you, we must face the issue of fear if we're going to conquer it. We must learn to face every fear and not be passive. We must learn to conquer fear with trust and dependence. Are you afraid of your fears? What do you fear? We must realize this and go to war in our sanctification with this enemy fear. Because I promise you this, the Word of God and the Gospel and the Spirit of God and all our inheritance in Christ, and all the resources we have, God wants to set us free progressively from fear robbing us or defeating us. Our text said, "I sought the Lord, and He heard me and delivered me from all my fears." Christ wants you free from fears that rob you. He really does. He can, He will set you free. Only grace through you believing the promises of God, and the power and dependence on the Holy Spirit, only that reality can deliver us from fear. Right in the middle of the Bible it says it is better to put your trust in the Lord than in men. It's better to trust in the Lord than in princes. That's right in the heart of the Bible.

You know what one of my greatest fears is? I've said this to my wife before. I don't express it often. I probably need to say it more. One of my greatest fears is soon, whether that's five or ten years, I don't know... leaving my children and my grandchildren in this world without us being here. I must be convinced somehow that I can handle them a lot better than God can. When I'm gone, it's all over. You know, my parents died by the time I was eight. And he had a cousin who was a school teacher take me in. I was in church all my life. God saved me when I was 19. He did an ok job just preserving me. Look, God is able to deliver us through the most real fears if we'll face them and be transparent about them. We must let our fears drown in God's promises. You must let your fears dissolve in light of God's truthfulness and His faithfulness. He is perfectly, infinitely true and faithful and loving and dependable. He cannot lie. He cannot fail. Not one word from Him can fall to the ground or not come to pass.

We must kill fear regularly, like a spider; like a fly, with the flyswatter of faith. I don't mean to sound trivial, but you use faith to overcome every attack of the enemy with your fear. The hymn writer said, Be gone, unbelief! Get out of here. Be gone, unbelief, my Savior is near. And for my relief shall surely appear. And then it says at the end of it, with Christ in the vessel, I smile at the storm. I smile at the storm. I promise you, beloved, you feed on the promises of God, you face fears and you attack them in prayer, applying the truth. When you feel fear, Lord, what time I am afraid, that's now - I trust in You instead of giving in to that. You feed on the promises of God. And your soul is strengthened by grace. You're killing fear. And fears will fall off. And the peace of God will rule in your hearts and minds more and more by Christ Jesus.

What do you have to fear if Christ is with you and in you and ruling over everything about you? Not one hair of your head can fall to the ground. I've had a few fall to the ground. Not one of them without my heavenly Father. Not one sparrow can fall to the ground without Him being right there. Or have you not much more value than the birds of the air. Fear not, little flock. It's your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom. Let's pray. Father, seal this word in our hearts, by Your Spirit in Jesus' name, Amen. Let me give you one more thing. This is so good. John Flavel - I quoted him earlier. Just listen to this. "When the church is in the storm of persecution, and almost covered with waves, the stoutest passengers in the storm can suffer from fear all through a lack of believing and remembering that the Lord, High Admiral of the

ocean, and Commander of the winds is on board the ship to steer and preserve her in the storm. The Lord of Hosts governs all creatures and their actions. All the armies of heaven and earth are at His command. We can rely upon His care and love if we look to Him in the day of trouble. We can trust Him in danger as a child trusts in the care and protection of his father. Who would be afraid to pass through a large army of troops when they know the General is their own father? If we sanctify the Lord of Hosts as our heavenly Father, He will be a sanctuary to us in times of danger. He will surely protect, defend, and provide for us in the worst of times. We can follow Him as a cloud by day and a flame of fire by night. His glory will be our defense and place of refuge. Let the winds roar. Let the rain beat. Let the lightning flash. You are in safety." Glory to God! I would dance in the aisles, but I'd scare some of you. So I'll sit down. Praise the Lord.