

UPBC Sermon

8th January, 2023

Proverbs 29:25 *“The fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe.”*

1. Why this topic and why God might be asking you to speak to it.

- Many years ago, I very much benefitted from a sermon on this very bible verse;
- Dr. Barry Chant, co-founder of Tabor College, and the power of saying NO;
- History of being a people pleaser, a characteristic stemming from the fear of man;
- What I’m talking about is **nothing new or necessarily profound** – but it is my conviction that this message will be a timely one for some of you like it was for me years ago;
- **Bottom line**...Make no mistake, the fear of man (which I will elaborate about further) robs us of the life that God has called us to live, breathe, experience, and enjoy.

2. Breaking down the verse into its components:

- **Fear of man**
 - Let’s be clear – fear can be extremely rational. For example, picture approaching the edge of a cliff – fear acts as a safety mechanism (unless you’re looking to take a selfie...number of people that die each year in taking the perfect selfie continues to grow...I’ll talk more about this later!);
 - In a nutshell... the fear of man is where fear of others rules / determines how we live aspects of our lives (a problem when we leave God out of the equation). Can be a fear that someone may inflict physical (injure or kill us, take our possessions) or psychological (expose, humiliate, ridicule, despise, reject us) injury;
 - Fear of man stems from where we replace God with people. Instead of a biblically guided fear of the Lord, we fear others (Edward Welsch¹). It goes by other names...*peer pressure, people-pleasing (overcommitted), co-dependency (relationships that are one-sided, emotionally destructive and/or abusive)*
 - Fear of MAN... broadly defined as any person (man, woman or child) in our lives has the potential to control us (Edward Welsch)
 - Is a major theme throughout the bible – countless examples of individuals who exhibited fear of man (as I will highlight later)
- **Snare**
 - A trap – think of a wild dog or a fox trap
- **Trusts in the Lord**
 - Believing that God loves you and knowing He’s good, He has your best interests at heart, He has the power to help you, He wants to help you, is more powerful than any other and their schemes to harm you, and nothing can separate you from being His child.

¹ When People are Big and God is Small

- **Kept safe**
 - Kept safe doesn't necessarily mean we WON'T experience physical or psychological injury in trusting in God (think of Paul the Apostle [most likely beheaded], Stephen [stoned to death];
 - Bottom line...God's good and perfect plan for your life is kept **SAFE and SECURE** from all that seeks to rob us of this.
 - Eternal life... Luke 12:4-7
 - John 10:10... The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full;
 - Philippians 1:6... being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

3. Contrasting two positions and their outcomes:

- **fear man = caught in a snare; fear God = kept safe.**
- In a sense, it's depicting a fork in the road (a cross road) where there is a two alternative paths to take. This is exemplified in one of the passages for today: **Jeremiah 17:5-10**. Ends with a reminder similar to that in Psalm 139 (v. 23-24) *Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

4. Examples of the contrasting positions and their outcomes in the bible

- **Introducing Abraham**
 - Based on a call from God, at the age of 75 years of age, Abraham (then Abram) left his family, people and country with his wife Sarah (then Sarai) and nephew Lot and go to another land, with the promise of making him into a great nation (Israel);
 - One of the great things about the bible...highs and lows as a means of teaching us!
 - **Genesis 12:10-20**
 - Moved to Egypt temporarily due to a severe famine;
 - (vs. 11-13)...As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, 'I know what a beautiful woman you are. When the Egyptians see you, they will say, "This is his wife." Then they will kill me but will let you live. Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you.'
 - Abraham felt vulnerable and without protection. Rather than trusting God, he trusted in his own self-protective (sinful) scheme. For Abraham, the Egyptians were big and God was small.
 - With a lie, Abraham exposed his wife and Pharaoh to adultery (He was courting Sarah to become his wife).
 - God inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household...Pharaoh, realising this confronted Abraham and kicked them out of Egypt);

- **Genesis 20**
 - It appears that Abraham didn't learn from this experience. A few chapters later, he uses the same ploy (hey, she's my sister);
 - His lie again put his wife in a situation where she could have been defiled, he also sinned against the king of Gerar, Abimelech (not as powerful as Pharaoh, but a man of significant reputation and power);
 - It was only God's forceful intervention (God came to Abimelech in a dream stating 'you're as good as dead because of the woman you have taken) that kept Sarah and Abimelech from adultery, but also utter shame from Abraham.
- **Genesis 22:** lessons learnt? Abraham stood the test of being willing to sacrifice his own very son, through which all of God's promises to Abraham would be fulfilled (Sarah....Hi Abraham, have you seen our son Isaac?)
- **Introducing Ananias and Sapphira**
 - Early testament church...all the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had... there was no needy person among them;
 - As an example...Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means 'son of encouragement'), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet [an example of the fear of the Lord]
 - **Acts 4:32 - 5:11**
 - A man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet [an example of the fear of man]
 - Both Ananias and Sapphira died as a result of their sin (fell down and died at the exposure of sin);
 - There is no evidence to suggest they were under any obligation to sell the land they owned or to hold back a part of the proceedings to pay any debt owed for the land or provide for any children;
 - Their motivation...to spin the story win the praise and a favourable position amongst the believing community (an example of the *fear of man... to earn the favour of influential Christian leaders*), while straining to continue to be self-sufficient through the keeping of their wealth.
- **A contrast...introducing David**
 - **1 Samuel 17**
 - War...Israelites vs. Philistines, each camped on opposing hills at battle in the valley, a stand-off developed because of a big problem...;
 - Problem...a Philistine champion called Goliath...estimated to be 3 metres tall (9 feet & 9 inches), invincible;
 - Israelites were dismayed and terrified;

- A young man, a shepherd, called David (son of Jesse, youngest of 8 sons) said “The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of the Philistine.”
 - Subject to much taunts from his brothers and fellow Israelites...
 - [brother] I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is;
 - [King Saul] You are only a boy, and he has been a fighting man from his youth;
 - [Goliath] Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?
 - His reply...You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, who you have defiled.
 - Cut to the chase, used a slight shot, flung a stone which hit Goliath in the forehead and killed him. David, finished the task for all to see without doubt and severed Goliath’s head with his very own sword.
 - Reflect on this: David, no armour, relying on a slingshot with no backers but strong in trust in God takes out the Philistine champion, 3 metres tall, strong, fully protected with armour, experienced and strong in self-confidence. He was able to act as his future was safe in the faith he had in God.
- **Many other examples in the bible** (see Hebrews 11)

5. Yes, but what has this got to do with me?...

- **Remember**...the fear of man is where fear of others rules / determines how we live aspects of our lives / our behaviour (a problem when we leave God out of the equation). We’re more concerned about people and their perspective rather than God and His GOOD will for our lives.
- **Indicators include (not the principle, it’s not an exhaustive list):**
 - Constantly seek affirmation / approval from others to feel good about ourselves?
 - Addicted to affirmation of others
 - In awe of / worship someone
 - Driven to please others and/or struggle to say no to others and their requests (incessantly busy, not feeling in control of our lives and demands)?
 - Make compromises in our lives, act in a particular way (or choose not to act) out of concern of how others may perceive us / or to be accepted by others?
 - Fear being cancelled for standing up for what we believe to be Godly? (note the Godly perspective, I’m cancelled by some because I’m a crows supporter).
 - Overly preoccupied by social media and the image we portray?
 - Jealous of others or incessantly compare ourselves with others?
 - Reluctant to reach out to those we trust with issues we struggle with?
 - Struggle to share the gospel out of fear of how people will respond?

- Suffer from an imposter syndrome, waiting to be exposed as a fake?
- Lie (small ones right?) to place ourselves in a more favourable light?
- Remain in an abusive relationship [1800 737 732] [www.1800respect.org.au]

6. The antidote...don't place your trust in mankind, place your trust in God

- **Prayer**.....Psalm 139 (v. 23-24) Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.
- **Asking for forgiveness**
- **Reading and meditating** (see Psalm 139; see Hosea...one of the great revelations of God's love for us)
- **Fellowship** (join a bible study group)
- **Service**...ask God ways in which you can serve Him and the work He is doing where he has placed you...where He has called you to.

[from commentary provided by Jason]

29:25. The last verses of this chapter and the conclusion of the proverbs collected by Hezekiah's men (cf. 25:1) name Yahweh and king (cf. 29:13 – 14) and repeat the contrast between the wicked and righteous (cf. 29:2, 7, 16). The first of two Yahweh sayings contrasts fear of human power with "trust in the LORD" (cf. 28:25). The first line depicts that fear as a hunter's trap, but the second line speaks of protection, being set high above all dangers like a tower on a mountain (cf. 18:10 – 11; Job 5:11). One can show kindness to enemies without fear, since Yahweh rewards (Prov. 25:21 – 22). Perhaps the legal context of the previous verse is still in view, warning judges to fear no person, great or small, "for judgment belongs to God" (Deut. 1:17, 29).

Bible passages for the sermon:

[main]

Proverbs 29:25

"The fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe."

Jeremiah 17:5-10

"5 This is what the Lord says:

'Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who draws strength from mere flesh and whose heart turns away from the Lord.

6 That person will be like a bush in the wastelands; they will not see prosperity when it comes. They will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives.

7 'But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him.

8 They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.'

9 The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

10 'I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve.'

Luke 12:4-7

4 'I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more.

5 But I will show you whom you should fear: fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.

6 Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God.

7 Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.