

Fearless

Luke 13:31-35 NIV

“Five-year old Johnny was in the kitchen as his mother made supper. She asked him to go into the pantry to get a can of tomato soup, but he didn't want to go in alone. ‘It's dark in there and I'm scared.’ She asked again, and he persisted. Finally, she said, ‘It's OK—Jesus will be in there with you. Johnny walked hesitantly to the door and slowly opened it. He peeked inside, saw it was dark, and started to leave when all at once an idea came, and he said: “Jesus, if you're in there, would you hand me that can of tomato soup?”¹

This story reminds us of one of the most common emotions of human beings, fear. One of the sad truths of our days is that we are a culture dominated by fear. Advertising, political ads, news coverage, and social media send the constant message that people should be afraid—*very afraid*.

We fear job loss, health crisis, a financial collapse, losing control. But, being fair, we have to acknowledge that fear is not always bad. In some ways, it is a critical part of our lives that is necessary for survival. However, when fear becomes excessive and is not properly handled, it can cause distortion of emotions and perceptions, poor decisions, anxieties, and uncontrollable flight-or-fight responses with dangerous ramifications.

Experts say that we often fear the wrong things, and incredibly out of proportion to reality. When this happens, fear is nothing more than our reaction to:

F*alse*

E*vidence*

A*ppearing*

R*eal*

For instance, statistics show you have a much higher chance of being killed by lightning than by a terrorist. Nevertheless, we are more afraid of terrorists and the appearance of certain individuals than lighting. Let me show you some evidence. Let's watch this... ([**play video here**](#))

The reason I am talking about fear today is because in the Gospel account for this morning we saw how the Pharisees came to Jesus with a “seeming concern” for the safety of Lord. I said “seeming concern” not because I am biased against the Pharisees, but because I see these religious leaders trying to get rid of Jesus by instilling fears in the heart of the Lord.

How do I know that? If you read the context of today's story you will know that Jesus had been teaching and doing things that were at odds with the authority and credibility of the Pharisees. For sure, they needed to get rid of Jesus, and they thought that the best way to accomplish their

¹ Taken from <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/f/fear.htm>

goal was by scaring the Master away. *“Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you” (Luke 13:31).*

Isn't this the way we operate at times? People instill fears in other people to manipulate and get things their way. Fearful tactics are used to create dependency, strike self-confidence, make profits, safeguard the status quote, etc. There are folks who use fear with “good” intentions. There are religious people, including Christians, that try to lead people to salvation through intimidation and fear (accept the Lord if you don't want to burn in hell). Even in the presence of the best of intentions, I would encourage people not to use fear as a means to an end.

So, the Pharisees were trying to instill fear in Jesus to manipulate him and get things their way. However, in the account we see Jesus being **fearless**.

“Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you” (Luke 13:31 NIV).

Let us focus on how Jesus responded to such a threat. Listen to Jesus' response. *Go tell that fox... (Luke 13:32 NVI).* I want to stop here because this phrase is an important piece in the text.

Being called a fox in our culture is a good thing. It is a compliment. It means you are good looking, intelligent, and crafty. But, in Jesus' time, this expression had a different meaning.

So, don't think that Jesus is trying to appease Herod with flattery. Don't think that Jesus is telling the Pharisees, “Go and tell that good looking, intelligent, crafty king that I will be here for the next three days.” In fact, Jesus is not offering a kind word to Herod. The Lord is criticizing the monarch in a very derogatory way.

Many people have this idea that Jesus was always kind and mild. But when you read the Gospels you see that Jesus had moments when he was bold and sounded very harsh when speaking the truth. For instance, you may remember that:

- When people were after him because of food Jesus said, “I know you are following me because you want fish and bread, but the kitchen is closed. If you want lunch, eat my flesh and drink my blood (John 6).” The menu Jesus offered that day was too tough to swallow and many of those who had been following Jesus left him immediately.
- Jesus called Peter Satan because Peter was trying to interfere in the mission God the Father had given God the Son.
- Jesus called the Pharisees, broods (sons) of vipers. In modern-day parlance, we have an equivalent to this phrase. We just use a different kind of animal.
- Jesus drove the merchants out of the temple with a strong hand.

Of course, Jesus was compassionate and kind, but there were times when he was bold. On this specific occasion Jesus was telling the Pharisees, “Go and tell that fox (inferior, small fry, coward, crooked, worthless, degenerate king) that I will be around for the next three days doing what I'm supposed to do.” With these words, Jesus was pointing out Herod's ineptitude, or

inability, to carry out his threat. Or perhaps he pointed out that the Pharisees were projecting their desires through the person of Herod.

Remember, more than often we fear wrong things, and incredibly out of proportion to reality. When this happens fear is nothing more than our reaction to:

F*alse*
E*vidence*
A*ppearing*
R*eal*

This is perhaps what the Pharisees wanted: to get Jesus to a point where he would perceive **F**alse **E**vidence **A**ppearing **R**eal.

- I wonder how many of our fears are just a response to **F**alse **E**vidence **A**ppearing **R**eal.
- I wonder how much of the news we consume in regard to certain groups of people is just that: **F**alse **E**vidence **A**ppearing **R**eal.
- I wonder if this **F**alse **E**vidence **A**ppearing **R**eal (F.E.A.R.) will lead us to a contracted position to shield the heart.
- I wonder if this F.E.A.R will lead us to a self-protective, defensive place where the heart is out of reach, and one cannot feel love or even friendliness.

That was the goal of the Pharisees, to lead Jesus to a self-protective place and prevent him from doing what he was called to do. But Jesus remained immune to the threats of the Pharisees. **How did Jesus remain fearless?**

The Lord was able to see things for what they were. I believe that Jesus was able to discern that the comment the Pharisees made reflected their own desires more than those of Herod. Jesus was able to discern that most likely Herod was incapable of doing what the Pharisees were saying he would do without peer pressure.

It had happened with John the Baptist. Herod got John killed only after he was pressured by the whims of a young girl and her mother. And later on in the story, we learn that Herod would not take part in the accusations against Jesus. I think this is the main reason why Jesus was fearless, bold, and courageous to speak the truth.

I can see more evidence of this in the answer Jesus gave the Pharisees: *“Go tell that fox, ‘I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.’ In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem” (Luke 13:32-33 NIV).*

You see, Jesus’ answer was directed to the Pharisees rather than Herod. Jesus was speaking about the real point and not about the “camouflaged” concerns of the Pharisees. This discernment of Jesus is what gives us the certainty that the Lord was not afraid.

What is the Good News in this text?

Here is the Good News: We can be fearless just like Jesus was.

- We just need to pay less attention to the comments of certain interest groups that wants us to perceive **False Evidence Appearing Real** in order to promote a certain agenda.
- We can be fearless by seeing people and circumstances through the eyes of God.
- We are going to be fearless when we focus more on our God-given mission, which is to love God and love our neighbors, rather than playing power and blaming games.
 - Let us always keep in mind that *“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear...”* (1 John 4:18 NIV).

Dear church, you don't have to fear. “The **one** who is in **you** is **greater** than the **one** who is in the world” (1 John 4:4). In this Lenten season fast from fears, worries, pessimism, and have trust in God. Put your hope in the Lord.

- Do not fear scarcity, the Lord is your provision.
- Do not fear any kind of crisis, the Lord is the giver and sustainer of abundant life.
- Do not fear losing control, you don't have it anyway. God is in control.
- Do not be afraid of the unknown, God is in your present and your future.
- Don not be afraid of taking risks, God is your shield.

God's word says, *“Do not be afraid,”* at least 365 times.²

So,

- Be fearless, confident, bold, courageous...
- Be fearless to denounce injustice and speak prophetically of God's vision for the world.
- Be fearless, bold, and courageous to stand up for what is right.
- Be fearless to learn, be bold to explore and expose yourselves to new things, and people...
- Be fearless, bold, and courageous to do God's work no matter the cost.

Amen.

² Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002