

Fear Not! • Isaiah 43:1-7

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *The Three Boys*

1. Power is a funny thing; people want it, but once they get it, they worry about losing it
2. So they keep *using* it to make sure it's still there
3. Such was the case with Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon
4. He was the most powerful man on earth in his day - but he was insecure and want to make sure everyone *else* knew he was the most powerful man
5. So he came up with a plan to affirm his power -
 - a. he had a huge statue made and covered it with gold
 - b. it was 90 feet tall by 9 feet wide
 - c. he set it up in a prominent place there in the capital
 - d. and then sent out orders to all of the regional governors and provincial officials to come to the dedication
 - e. he commanded that whenever the musicians played their instruments, everyone within earshot was to stop what they were doing and bow down in worship toward the image
 - f. anyone who refused to worship would be roasted alive
6. On the dedication day, when everyone had arrived and was standing round the statue -
7. Nebuchadnezzar gave a nod to the chief musician, and the band started to play
8. Far and wide the people bowed to show their loyalty to the august and mighty Nebuchadnezzar
9. *All* that is but three young Jewish men; Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah
10. When everyone else fell down, they remained standing
11. Now, it seems they were out of the sight of Nebuchadnezzar
12. But it wasn't long before a couple of the king's advisors informed him that they had refused to bow
13. Nebuchadnezzar was *infuriated* and demanded the boys be brought before him and answer for their *outrageous* behavior
14. In they came, and the king asked them if they had indeed defied him or had just misunderstood the command
15. They explained that they understood the command well enough, but would not bow to Nebuchadnezzar's idol
 - a. he warned them what would happen to them if they refused again
 - b. but they told him there was no need to give them another chance - the outcome would be the same - they would not bow, not now, not ever
 - c. their actions, they explained, were not an act of *defiance* and rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar but an act of *obedience* to God, who sits higher than the king of Babylon
 - d. besides, they said, Nebuchadnezzar could go ahead and throw them into the fire, but they believed their God would protect them

16. This only incensed Nebudchadnezzar more, so he ordered that the furnace be stoked even hotter
 - a. extra fuel was added , the billows were pumped
 - b. and as they dragged the bound captives toward the door of the furnace,
 - c. the heat was so great, the guards that took them were killed
17. But Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were unharmed
 - a. from a distance, Nebudchadnezzar looked in and saw them walking around free
 - b. their arms were no longer bound - the ropes had burned away
 - c. far from being burnt to a crisp - they seemed to be enjoying themselves with a 4th figure who had appeared with them
18. Nebudchadnezzar told them to come out - and when they did; there was no evidence of the flame
 - a. not a hair had been singed
 - b. there wasn't even the smell of smoke on their clothing!

B. Where Did They Get Their Courage?

1. Where did Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, or as we know them by their Babylonian names, Shadrach, Meshech, and Abed-Nego, get the courage and faith to take this stand?
2. What did they know that others didn't?
3. How could they stand with such apparent *confidence* before Nebudchadnezzar and say that their God could protect them from the fiery furnace?
4. They got it from the verses we will be looking at this morning . . .

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 1-2

- 1 But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine.**
- 2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you.**
 1. Isaiah prophesied these words roughly 150 years *before* the days of Shadrach, Meshech, and Abed-Nego
 2. But they were well aware of them and didn't dismiss them now as mere poetic niceties
 3. As they stood there before Nebudchadnezzar, not far from the oven, they realized they had an opportunity to see God *literally* fulfill His promise
 4. They took Him at His word - and proved it to be solid

B. Fear

1. Chances are, living where and when we do, none of us will have to face the prospect of martyrdom as these three Jewish young men did

2. Yet we will all do battle with the same thing they did battle with that day - *fear*
3. Fear challenges every one of us at some level or another
4. But this promise from Isaiah, while potent and effective for the people of God in every age, is especially helpful for our time
5. You see, Jesus said that as His return drew closer, the troubles that would descend on earth would be so great, fear would become epidemic; it would literally paralyze people
6. In Luke 21:25 & 26 He said,

25 And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring;

26 Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.

7. It's no secret that our world is in grave trouble
 - a. Jesus well describes our time - "distress of nations with perplexity"
 - b. this pictures whole countries faced with problems so intense that there seems no way out
 - c. the best minds go to work to come up with solutions, but they arrive at none
 - d. they are lost and throw up their hands in resignation
 - e. and the result is that the rest of the world loses hope
8. Today there are a host of doomsday-sayers who are forecasting imminent ruin
 - a. just a few years ago, REM identified this trend with the chorus of a song - "It's the end of the world as we know it."
 - b. there are the radical environmentalists who are calling man a cancer on earth, that soon we will have used up all the natural resources and polluted the earth beyond survivability
 - c. there are the dismal economic forecasts of a coming world financial market crash
 - d. there are the political pundits and theorists who say that unless we go to a one-world system our world will be torn apart by regional conflicts like Kosovo and Timor
 - e. on a more local level we see the slow decline in general public civility and manners
 - 1) there is a growing disregard for the law
 - 2) it seems its rare to be treated politely in public any more
 - 3) you have to be careful about honking your horn because you might get shot
 - 4) you can't take it for granted that at a 4 way stop people will go in order
 - 5) driving defensively has moved from being a good idea to being an absolute requirement!
 - 6) and you have to think twice about letting your young child ride his or her tricycle in front of the house because some pervert may be on the prowl
 - 7) we have to fingerprint and screen the workers in our children's ministry!
 - 8) and on and on the list of things that cause fear goes . . .

C. **The Cure for Fear**

1. Isaiah prophesied these words to comfort the exiles and those who would make the return to rebuild Israel
2. Though the challenge was daunting, and the obstacles fearsome, God said, "Fear Not!"
3. Because so much had happened to them, they might be tempted to think that God had forgotten them, that He had cast them off
4. So God reminds them that He never forgets His promises; He never, ever breaks His covenants
5. The problem with fear is that when we fear, we take our eyes off God and we put them on our circumstances
6. We allow *trouble* to eclipse our vision of God
 - a. compared to the Sun, my thumb is a very little thing
 - b. but because my thumb is closer to me, it can actually block out the Sun from my sight
 - c. trouble so often seems nearer to us than God
 - d. and if we fix out attention on the trouble, we lose sight of God
 - e. when we do that, fear comes
7. So God gives us the cure for fear - keep your eyes on Him
8. Look at what He says . . .

1 But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine.

9. Before He tells them not to fear, He reminds them *who* He is
10. He is the Creator who knows His creation
 - a. think of how well a sculptor *knows* the statue - they are intimately familiar with every curve, every line, every little crevice
 - b. think of how well the painter knows the painting
 - 1) every color; the pigments used to make them
 - 2) the amount of time spent on each section of the canvas
 - 3) the size brush used and what colors were built up one on top of the other to get just the right effect
 - c. such is the creator's knowledge of what he or she creates
 - d. how infinitely more intimate is God's knowledge of *His* creation - of us?
11. Not only did God *create* each individual person who comprised the Jewish people, He *formed* them into a nation
 - a. it was His hand that had carved them out as a special people
 - b. the Exodus gave them birth and their entire history had been the long story of His forming them into an instrument He would use to accomplish His purposes
12. He was also their Redeemer!
 - a. this is a rich and precious word that carries two important pictures in the OT
 - 1) God *redeemed* them from slavery in Egypt
 - 2) and He lifted them from being slaves, to being His *wife*

- b. over and over in the OT we see this two-fold sense of redemption
 - c. God lifted Israel from being a downtrodden and powerless slave and elevated her to the rank and position of His bride
 - d. all of that is conveyed in the idea of redemption
13. Finally, God said that He had called them by their name - literally, He had *given* them their name!
- a. in the ancient world of the middle east, a person would show their authority over someone or something by naming it
 - b. here God says that He had given Israel their name
 - 1) He had done that when He changed Jacob's name to Israel
 - 2) that act of changing his name revealed a new day when Jacob would no longer be ruled by his own wits - but instead would be ruled by God
 - 3) and so it was for all his descendants
14. *Because* God is their creator, the One who formed them, their Redeemer and the One Who gave them their name - here's the command: **Fear Not!**
- a. fear doesn't fit in the life of the person whose God is their Creator, Former, Redeemer and Owner
 - b. fear is incompatible with faith in that kind of God
15. How far should this "Fear Not!" attitude go?
- a. surely there is a limit to this kind of faith
 - b. I mean, aren't there some things we should be afraid of?
16. Look at v. 2 . . .

2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you.

17. If our eyes are fixed on God, there is no room for fear of anything but Him!
18. The fear of God will drive out the fear of any and everything else!

III. CONCLUSION

A. Peter

1. This is what happened to Peter
 - a. he and the disciples were in a boat, crossing the Lake of Galilee
 - b. Jesus had told them to go on ahead and He would catch up with them
 - c. but half-way across the lake, a fierce storm rose up and they were in fear of losing their lives
 - d. then they saw someone coming to them, walking on the water
 - e. when Peter realized it was Jesus, he quickly lost his preoccupation with the storm and began to be in wonder and awe at the spectacle of the Lord overcoming the law of gravity and the rules that govern physical matter
 - f. in that moment, seeing the Lord in His glory and power, his faith was ignited in a new way, and far from trying to hide, he asked if he could join Jesus on the water
 - g. fear repels, but faith draws
 - h. so Jesus invited him and Peter stepped out of the boat onto the water
 - i. we don't know how long he stayed up - but as long as he kept his eyes on

- Jesus, he was surfing without a board
- j. it was only when he took his eyes *off* Jesus and began too look at the foaming waves around him that he sank
 2. For Peter, as for us, the critical issue was keeping his eyes on the Lord and not his circumstances

B. For Us

1. I don't know what storm has blown into your life
 - a. I don't know what deep waters you are in
 - b. or what fiery trial you've been thrust in to
 - c. but this I do know - when you boil it down, it's either a choice of fear, or faith
2. Either we will go through life looking around at the circumstances of our lives
3. Or we will keep our eyes fixed on Jesus
4. Either we will be consumed by fear, or filled with faith
5. As the world around us descends ever more into a state of fear and perplexity
 - a. as things go from bad to worse
 - b. those who live by faith in Christ will become ever more obvious as time goes by
 - c. the line that marks the distinction between fear and faith will only become more bold
6. We are not a people of circumstance - We are the people of God
7. He created us and knows us!
8. He formed us - He carved us out of all others and made us His own.
9. He redeemed us by setting us free from slavery to sin and death and has engaged us to be His bride
10. He has given us a new name and made us His own people!
11. Don't let fear paralyze you and keep you from entering in to all that God has for you