

## **The Fear of Man**

### **Exodus 14**

We're going back to Exodus today and talking about the fear of man. We're going to see the fear of man in the Israelites and what that fear did to them. They were terrified of Pharaoh and his army that was chasing them down just days after they escaped Egypt. And in their fear, they responded like most people do – they went into a panic and things started to get ugly.

We face the fear of man in our lives as well. The biggest right now is probably Vladimir Putin and the Russian army and what's happening in the Ukraine. It's happening on the other side of the world, but it makes us afraid of what else could happen. We fear other world leaders as well – the communists in China, the radical Muslims in the Middle East, the dictators in North Korea and other countries. We want to stay as far away from them as possible, but sometimes their influence still feels very threatening.

We face the fear of man right here in America as well. There's all kinds of fear of our own government and political leaders. Some people feared President Trump when he was elected. Some fear President Biden right now and what he's doing. People fear leaders in both political parties and how their policies are going to affect our lives. It might not be that we feel personally afraid of them, but we worry about what they might do. There can be fear of local leaders and officials, or activist groups or extremists or maybe even a coworker or neighbor who's causing problems. The fear of man involves people with some level of influence or power in our lives who want something we don't want and threaten our security, safety, and way of life. How should we respond to such fears?

According to the Healthline website, our natural responses are fight, flight, or freeze. These usually happen when we're surprised with sudden and unexpected danger, but I see the same things happening when we encounter the fear of man. It might happen when you see an alarming headline in the news about a world leader or politician. It might be something you read on social media or an email from a political or Christian group warning you about someone. You might bump into someone in the grocery store that you've had problems with in the past.

Any of these can trigger fear and push us to some kind of response. You might feel like fighting – sometimes physically, but most often lashing out with words –

making accusations or attacks, either to someone's face or more likely on social media because it's so easy. Or we might feel like fleeing— trying to hide or escape a fearful situation, or ignore what's happening in the world or in politics. We just can't handle it and want to get away from it.

These are natural responses and I see them among Christians and non-Christians alike. They've been rampant in the past two years because of all the issues we've encountered and differences of opinion that could threaten our safety, security, and way of life. And from what I've seen, there's almost no difference between what Christians and non-Christians are doing. Both are responding in fear and many are doing it publicly.

Here's the problem: When people see Christians reacting the same way everyone else is reacting, what do you think that does to our witness? What does it do to our reputation and the reputation of Christ? What kind of message does it send about the substance of our faith? There are things going on in our world that pose a threat to us, just like Pharaoh was a threat to the people of Israel. But as Christians, we should respond differently than other people and the passage we're going to look at today will help us see what that looks like.

We're in Exodus 14, and the people of Israel have just left Egypt. Pharaoh forced them out because Yahweh had just put all the firstborn in Egypt to death. The only way to prevent further destruction was to let them go, so he did. The people of Israel were on their way and at the height of what must have been an incredible experience. They finally had hope for the first time in their lives. They were out from the yoke of slavery and the hardships of Egypt and Pharaoh, and on their way to the promised land. They were on top of the world. But circumstances were about to change.

Read Exodus 14:1-4.

*Then the Lord said to Moses, <sup>2</sup> "Tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall encamp facing it, by the sea. <sup>3</sup> For Pharaoh will say of the people of Israel, 'They are wandering in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.' <sup>4</sup> And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord." And they did so.*

This was nothing less than a set up to trap Pharaoh. The great host of Israel had been heading east out of Egypt, but God told Moses to turn them and go to the north. By doing that, it would appear that they were stuck at the edge of the wilderness and could go no further. God wanted Pharaoh to pursue them because he wasn't done demonstrating his power over Pharaoh and Egypt yet. He would deal one final devastating blow, and Pharaoh took the bait.

Read Exodus 14:5-9.

*<sup>5</sup> When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the mind of Pharaoh and his servants was changed toward the people, and they said, "What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?" <sup>6</sup> So he made ready his chariot and took his army with him, <sup>7</sup> and took six hundred chosen chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. <sup>8</sup> And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the people of Israel while the people of Israel were going out defiantly. <sup>9</sup> The Egyptians pursued them, all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and his horsemen and his army, and overtook them encamped at the sea, by Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.*

God lured them in and there they were – the whole army. Right where Yahweh wanted them. But, as you can imagine, this was very frightening to the people of Israel. Their great enemy was back and he had his whole army to slaughter them and drag the survivors back into slavery. This was a huge threat to their newfound freedom, hope, and way of life. They were experiencing the ultimate fear of man. Let's see how they responded.

Read Exodus 14:10-12.

*<sup>10</sup> When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried out to the LORD. <sup>11</sup> They said to Moses, "Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? <sup>12</sup> Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness."*

They did what people do in the face of danger – they started to panic. They went into fight mode and turned against Yahweh and Moses. They made all kinds of insults and accusations. It didn't matter that just a few days earlier they had

miraculously been released from Egypt by the powerful hand of Yahweh. Their fear was dominating them and their behavior.

And the same thing happens when we face the fear of man today. We read the headline or email and start to panic. Fear controls us. We get anxious and afraid. We cry out and start hurling insults and accusations. We forget about God. We do what people do. But Moses shows us a much different way to respond.

Read Exodus 14:13-14.

*And Moses said to the people, "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. <sup>14</sup> The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent."*

Now that's much different than the people responded: "Fear not. Stand firm. And see the salvation of the Lord." Stop freaking out. Keep your composure. Trust in the Lord. Don't let fear dominate you and your behavior. How could he say that? This is Pharaoh and the Egyptian army – the most powerful army in the world – and they're in hot pursuit. Didn't he realize the danger they were in?

Yes, he knew all about the danger. But he also knew all about their God. He knew how powerful Yahweh was and that he was with them and had promised to deliver them. Yahweh was on their side and would do what he promised to do. He had promised that he would get glory over Pharaoh and his mighty army. Moses had seen the awesome power of the Lord and knew that the ones who were really in danger were the Egyptians, not the Israelites.

So Moses responded in faith, and his faith dismantled any fear. He was able to respond much differently than the rest of the people and it shows. He didn't fight back and return insult for insult, he stood firm and spoke the promises of God: *"Yahweh will be our salvation. He will fight for us and we will never see the Egyptian army again. You have only to be silent."* God was going to save them. Moses had faith. And here's how it happened...

Read Exodus 14:15-31.

*<sup>15</sup> The Lord said to Moses, "Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward. <sup>16</sup> Lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the people of Israel may go through the sea on dry ground. <sup>17</sup> And I will*

*harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen. <sup>18</sup> And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen.”*

*<sup>19</sup> Then the angel of God who was going before the host of Israel moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, <sup>20</sup> coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel. And there was the cloud and the darkness. And it lit up the night without one coming near the other all night.*

*<sup>21</sup> Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. <sup>22</sup> And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. <sup>23</sup> The Egyptians pursued and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. <sup>24</sup> And in the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and of cloud looked down on the Egyptian forces and threw the Egyptian forces into a panic, <sup>25</sup> clogging their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily. And the Egyptians said, “Let us flee from before Israel, for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians.”*

*<sup>26</sup> Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen.” <sup>27</sup> So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal course when the morning appeared. And as the Egyptians fled into it, the Lord threw the Egyptians into the midst of the sea. <sup>28</sup> The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen; of all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea, not one of them remained. <sup>29</sup> But the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.*

*<sup>30</sup> Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. <sup>31</sup> Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.*

Yahweh saved them. Pharaoh and his army were no match for him. He did what he promised he would do. And he could be trusted.

When you and I find ourselves in those situations where someone is posing a threat to our safety, security, or way of life – maybe a government leader, maybe

a political party or group of activists, maybe a problematic neighbor or coworker – there are two ways we can respond. We can respond with fear, like the people of Israel and the vast majority of people on earth, or we can respond in faith like Moses – trusting who God is, that he is with us, for us, and on our side, and that he will carry out all his promises.

How have you been responding to fear? Jesus calls us to be like Moses. When he was preparing his disciples for ministry, he knew they would encounter dangerous people and he taught them to respond with faith. He says in Matthew 10:28-31: *“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. <sup>29</sup> Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. <sup>30</sup> But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. <sup>31</sup> Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.”* Your heavenly Father loves you, he knows you, he is on your side. You are valuable to him. Don’t be afraid of those who threaten you, trust in God. That’s what Christ wants for us.

When Paul wrote to the church in Philippi, he called them to do the same thing. He wrote in Philippians 1:27-28: *“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, <sup>28</sup> and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.”* When they faced their opponents, they were to stand firm in the Lord and not be frightened. And that would be a clear sign that something was very different about them.

You can see a huge difference between people who are controlled by the fear of man and people who are controlled by faith in God. Who are you?

Moses told the people of Israel to fear not, stand firm, and trust the Lord. And that’s what God wants us to do in the face of our fears as well. We should not panic or hurl insults or run into hiding like everyone else. We should fear not, stand firm and trust the Lord. Instead of fear, there should be faith. Instead of panic, there should be peace. We should be different so that people can see that we have a God who is far more powerful than any of our fears.