

Be Afraid – Be Very Afraid
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(Revelation 21:1–4 NRSV) Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. {2} And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. {3} And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; {4} he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."

Many of us grew up with a Gospel of fear.
I think we all know what that is . . .

Believe the right things

- 1) The Bible is the inerrant word of God
- 2) Jesus was bodily resurrected from the Dead
- 3) Jesus is God
- 4) Only Christians know the truth
 - a. Catholics only know the truth
 - b. Protestants only know the truth
 - i. Baptists
 - ii. Lutherans
 - iii. Methodist
 - iv. Participants in Emmaus

And if you don't believe the right things → You are going straight to hell

But, of course, over the years – all kinds of things were added on:

- No smoking
- No drinking
- No dancing
- No card playing
- No gambling
- No working on Sunday
- No pre-marital sex

- No extra-marital sex
- No non-procreative sex

And if you were doing any of those things, then it was a sure sign that you were on the fast track to hell

One could even add another layer to this

- You need to tithe
- You need to engage in proselytizing
- You need to be engaged in a ministry

And if you failed to demonstrate any of these “fruit”, well then you certainly were on the wrong path

Some might even add to these lists

- The need to speak in tongues
- Or have been slayed in the Spirit
- Or have been born again

And millions of Christians abide by those “rules”

Preachers loved to deliver pulpit pounding “*Hell, Fire, and Damnation*” sermons. Some would argue that there is not enough of that kind of preaching today

Millions of others have adjusted those rules to fit their own religious system
Fundamental Islam and fundamental Judaism come to mind

And what happens if you fail to live up to these proscriptions?

(Matthew 13:41–42 NRSV) The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, {42} and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

And this torment is not just for a little while → it is for all eternity

We have been taught all our lives that God is an angry God -- — God is a Jealous God

God will inflict punishment for our sins

Not just to us

But to our children and even our children's children

God sent plagues on those he was angry with
 God swallowed up those who worshiped the Golden Calf

Some would even suggest that God caused
 HIV/AIDs
 September 11th Terrorist attacks
 Hurricane Katrina (four years ago this weekend)
 H1N1 or Swine flu

But of course, Jesus → if we believe properly and if we live properly has paid the penalty so that we are protected from that kind of problem

But the reality is most of you gathered here this morning reject that idea . . . well sort of.

We are not too sure what we should believe
 And we are loath to give up on those ideas . . . just in case

Fear is a great tool used through-out the ages to keep people in line
 And it does not matter if we are talking about Christians or spouses
 Fear is a powerful emotion

But when it is used to manipulate people → is that ever a good thing?
 Whenever we have power over another person we must be very careful in how we demonstrate that power – how we use that power

Last week Nathan shared with you some of the bad news that exists in our society. And it is everywhere.

And some of it is so subtle
 The debate over healthcare is a case in point
 But some of it is not so subtle

- The man and his wife accused of abducting an 11 year old girl and keeping her locked up in his yard for 18 years and fathering two children with her.
- The desecrating of graves just up the road from us

If God is in charge --- Why did those things happen?

- What did the child born into poverty do wrong?
- What did Donald Trump's kids do right?
- Why did 11 year old Jaycee Lee Dugard do to deserve to be held captive by a known sex offender for the last 18 years?
- Why are there sex offenders and pedophiles in the first place?

Earlier this week a woman said to me "It is better not to think too much when it comes to faith."

And in many ways --- I think that she is right!

BUT → I can't help it!

And my hunch is neither can most of you.

We struggle with evil and the notion of a good and loving God

Is God the God of love that 1st John speaks of?

(1 John 4:8 NRSV) Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.

Or is God an angry and jealous God who is willing to kill and destroy if we fail to follow His (and it is always a His) commands?

The author of the book of Revelation struggles with these same questions. And his solution was rather straight forward.

He lived in a time of great conflict

A time of great persecution

A person had to follow Rome - or die!

It was pretty simple

The question that the author of Revelation struggled with is what is the Good News for those who are stuck in the midst of this Roman way and want to follow a different path. A different one than the than one offered by Rome.

They wanted to follow a path that offered:

Hope

Love

Peace

Justice

For all of God's children - and not just for a select few.

As I said his answer was pretty straight forward and is found in our Scripture this morning.

(Revelation 21:1–4 NRSV) Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. {2} And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. {3} And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; {4} he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."

But how?

How does that New Jerusalem happen?

I went into detail about the author's vision and the cultures understand during my series on Paul last month. If you want you can go to our website and find those sermons, or get them in the entryway.

But it is clear that for the author of Revelation, this "New Jerusalem" would only take place after a bloody and violent revolution.

And I will be honest with you → I hope he was wrong!

Jesus vision did not appear to be one of a violent revolution
Jesus instead offers to us a WAY → a new approach to life

BUT, and hence the title of this sermon --- it is a way that is very costly

It is a way that requires that we put others first

And I am not talking about our families or even our nations

We must put the least, the last, the lost FIRST

And we are masters at explaining all the ways that we should not do that

When are we going to stand up and fight so that everyone has access to quality health care?

I know - it'll cost too much → cost me too much (see it's about me again)

When are we going to provide quality education for the disenfranchised of our own nation?

Do I need to go on??

Yes, we should be very afraid.

Not because God is going to get us if we fail our brothers and sisters.

Afraid, because whenever the gap between the haves and the have nots has gotten larger → there are terrible consequences.

What makes Christianity unique is not that those who God loves get a pass to eternal life where everything will be taken care.

No, what makes us special, is Jesus laid out the path that will lead to God's ultimate vision for the world. One in which:

(Revelation 21:3–4 NRSV) “the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; {4} he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more”

But to make that happen – We have to get out of our seats and be change.

Mahatma Gandhi → “Be the change you want to see in the world”

It's gonna cost you

It cost Jesus his life.