

DISPLACING FEAR
2022 Theme: Trust More. Fear Less.
Daniel 4:4-37
Chadron Berean Church

I. THE “PANDEMIC” OF FEAR. (VV. 4:4-33)

We are going to revisit our theme of “Trust more. Fear less.” for the final time today. We chose that theme this year because of the culture of fear that spiked with the covid pandemic. It seems like there always is a culture of fear because many companies sell fear and the MSM can’t get by without it, but it definitely spiked during covid. And it wasn’t just the covid virus and the fear of death, but everything else that came with it. The fear of what would happen to the economy, and the direction was going. But also, beyond that we all struggle with other, lesser fears. For example, did you know that they say the #1 fear in America is public speaking? The fear of death is #2 or down the line even further. Why would we fear public speaking? Typically, it’s because we’re afraid of humiliation and rejection. We care what people think of us. We want to be accepted. So even though you might not fear covid, you still have other fears.

Fear is universal.

Fear was the first response of Adam and Eve in the garden and we’re their descendants. There’s no escaping it. We fear failure. Many people live in fear of missing out (FOMO). We fear loss our jobs or homes or other things.

Fear is limiting.

Because of fear, many people never reach their full potential or blossom in creativity of fear of stepping out of their comfort zones or afraid of being able to do the higher levels of work or education required. Fear is a dream-killer. We might be afraid to do what Christ has called us to do because we fear being different or being rejected or failing at it. Fear kills our walk with the Lord. It quenches the Holy Spirit and our walk with Him.

Fear is harmful/unhealthy.

It’s been said that fear or anxiety places more stress on our body than physical exercise or fatigue because it’s all connected: physical, spiritual, emotional. I read one statistic that said 2/3 of physical illnesses are due to emotional stress like fear. Anxiety is a major driver of suicides today. A majority of Americans would admit that the covid pandemic and everything that came with it had a significant impact on their mental health.¹

Fear is paralyzing.²

The other day I was on my way into town and standing in the middle of my lane on the highway was a whitetail buck. He was locked on a doe standing in the ditch. When I got closer to him, he freaked out and tried to get away as fast as he could, but his hooves couldn't get traction. It reminded me of the effect fear and worry has on us. Lots of activity internal or external, but a whole lot of going nowhere. Now God did build within us an alarm system to save our lives that tell us to get out of the way when a vehicle is coming, but we weren't made to live in that state.

When fear overcomes us, we tend to shrink back and isolate. We shrivel up. Take an entire generation of Israelites who died in the wilderness for example (Num. 13-14). Even though they saw God's power and glory and how He carried them, they feared the inhabitants of Canaan and refused to take the promised land. God said, "*Do not be shocked, nor fear them,*" but they, "*did not trust the Lord*" (Deut. 1:29-33). It crippled them for 40 years.

Fear is unattractive.

Seriously, fear makes us unpleasant to be around. For one, it makes us negative, complaining, self-centered busy bodies. Fearful people have a hard time relaxing and enjoying life, accepting themselves or loving others because they are so concerned with "what might happen" or "what people might think" (**Prov. 26:13**). There's a lion around every corner for them. And second, they push others away. Others just don't want to be around their high stress levels all the time. It isn't attractive to others, and especially unbelievers because it tells them our God isn't real or at least He isn't very big – that He isn't able to be trusted or help with our problems.

I don't share all of this to give us something to fear, but to help us realize that none of us escapes fear. We can't avoid it. And it does affect our lives in substantial ways. By the way, **most of the things we fear will never happen to us – research says somewhere around 90% and above.** But since we can't avoid fear, we need to learn how to counsel ourselves and others with the Word of God. We aren't to *ignore* our fears or *downplay* them. We are to use God's truth to counsel ourselves. And today we'll see how **there is one good fear that drives out all other fears.** Just like if I have a cup of water and I drop a rock in it, and it displaces the water in the cup, so there is a good fear that displaces all other fears. It's fluid mechanics. A heavier object pushes another out the way. I like to think of a rock in the ocean and the ocean and the crushing waves are displaced by that rock. That's what we're looking at today from **Daniel 4.**

The context is the Israelites, having been exiled from their homeland to **Babylon** in modern day Iraq, find themselves living in a foreign world and wrestling with all of that. It's kind of like us. But a **main theme in Daniel is that even though they are not in the land, God is still sovereign.** He's not just in Israel. He's not limited to a temple. He's in Babylon too! And **Babylon** was the world's superpower at the time. **Nebuchadnezzar**, the king, essentially ruled the world at the time but he's a tool in God's hand. And Daniel, who became a higher up in the

Babylonian kingdom because of the wisdom and insight God gave him, recorded some events that happened and one of them was a dream that Nebuchadnezzar had. We'll read **verses 4-27**.

"I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and happy in my palace. 5 I saw a dream and it startled me; and these appearances as I lay on my bed and the visions in my mind kept alarming me. 6 So I gave orders to bring into my presence all the wise men of Babylon, so that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream. 7 Then the soothsayer priests, the sorcerers, the Chaldeans, and the diviners came in and I related the dream to them, but they could not make its interpretation known to me. 8 But finally Daniel came in before me, whose name is Belteshazzar according to the name of my god, and in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and I related the dream to him, saying, 9 'Belteshazzar, chief of the soothsayer priests, since I know that a spirit of the holy gods is in you and no secret baffles you, tell me the visions of my dream which I have seen, along with its interpretation.

10 'Now these were the visions in my mind as I lay on my bed: I was looking, and behold, there was a tree in the middle of the earth and its height was great. 11 The tree grew large and became strong and its height reached to the sky, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth. 12 Its foliage was beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The animals of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the sky lived in its branches, and all living creatures fed from it. 13 'I was looking in the visions in my mind as I lay on my bed, and behold, an angelic watcher, a holy one, descended from heaven.

14 He shouted out and spoke as follows: "Chop down the tree and cut off its branches, shake off its foliage and scatter its fruit; Let the animals flee from under it and the birds from its branches. 15 Yet leave the stump with its roots in the ground, but with a band of iron and bronze around it in the new grass of the field; And let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him share with the animals in the grass of the earth. 16 Let his mind change from that of a human and let an animal's mind be given to him, and let seven periods of time pass over him. 17 This sentence is by the decree of the angelic watchers, and the decision is a command of the holy ones, in order that the living may know that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and He grants it to whomever He wishes and sets over it the lowliest of people."

18 This is the dream that I, King Nebuchadnezzar, have seen. Now you, Belteshazzar, tell me its interpretation, since none of the wise men of my kingdom is able to make known to me the interpretation; but you are able, because a spirit of the holy gods is in you.' 19 "Then Daniel, whose name is Belteshazzar, was appalled for a while as his thoughts alarmed him. The king responded and said, 'Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its interpretation alarm you.' Belteshazzar replied, 'My lord, if only the dream applied to those who hate you, and its interpretation to your adversaries! 20 The tree that you saw, which became large and grew strong, whose height reached to the sky and was visible to all the earth, 21 and whose foliage was beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in which was food for all, under which the animals of the field lived and in whose branches the birds of the sky settled— 22 it is you, O king; for you have become great and grown strong, and your majesty has become great and reached to the

sky, and your dominion to the end of the earth. 23 And in that the king saw an angelic watcher, a holy one, descending from heaven and saying, “Chop down the tree and destroy it; yet leave the stump with its roots in the ground, but with a band of iron and bronze around it in the new grass of the field, let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him share with the animals of the field until seven periods of time pass over him,”

24 this is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king: 25 that you be driven away from mankind and your dwelling place be with the animals of the field, and you be given grass to eat like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven; and seven periods of time will pass over you, until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes. 26 And in that it was commanded to leave the stump with the roots of the tree, your kingdom will remain as yours after you recognize that it is Heaven that rules. 27 Therefore, O king, may my advice be pleasing to you: wipe away your sin by doing righteousness, and your wrongdoings by showing mercy to the poor, in case there may be a prolonging of your prosperity.’

So Nebuchadnezzar had a dream where this tree, representing him and his kingdom reigning over the earth, but then an angelic being came down from heaven and shouted to chop it down. It is then banded and kept from growing for 7 years. And Daniel reveals the reason for the dream: **Nebuchadnezzar thinks he’s God.** And we know that not only from this, but **Isaiah** tells us that Nebuchadnezzar, with Satanic inspirations, wanted to be God. He wanted to make himself “*like the Most High God*” (Is. 14:14). Remember this is the guy who set up a giant statue of himself and made everyone bow down to it like many other rulers have done. Well, **God is going to humble him this man and make him realize that God is God, and he is not.** It’s interesting that while he had the dream and knew its interpretation, he still didn’t humble himself. One year later, God fulfills the dream. **Verses 28-33:**

28 “All of this happened to Nebuchadnezzar the king. 29 Twelve months later he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon. 30 The king began speaking and was saying, ‘Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the honor of my majesty?’ 31 While the word was still in the king’s mouth, a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you, 32 and you will be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place will be with the animals of the field. You will be given grass to eat like cattle, and seven periods of time will pass over you until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes.’ 33 Immediately the word concerning Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled; and he was driven away from mankind and began eating grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair had grown like eagles’ feathers and his nails like birds’ claws.

So because of his pride, Nebuchadnezzar is reduced to an animal essentially. He loses his **sanity** and begins to operate like an animal. We can dive into the annals of history where a similar thing happened to others. But let’s be honest with Nebuchadnezzar: he really wasn’t sane before this

either. What I mean by that is that if **we lightly define insanity as someone living irrationally or in delusion and not in accordance with reality (what really is), that's Nebuchadnezzar. He was living under the irrational, delusional thought that he was in control of the world – which was not the reality.** He was already mad. Insanity has been described as living against the grain of reality and when you do that, you get burned by it. When you go against the grain of wood, it produces splinters. You try to defy gravity by jumping off your roof and gravity defies you. Gravity doesn't get hurt. In the same way, it is insane to think that we can live as we want when we did not make ourselves or the reality in which we live. God has fixed according to His character natural laws that do not change and to ignore them is harmful to us. You reap what you sow, right? When we live without the reality of God, pretending that morals and truth doesn't exist, we become a lot like animals too. I think there's some symbolism here. God only confirms how Nebuchadnezzar was acting.

But here's what I really want to get at and it's that you could also say that **when we are living in fear or an anxious state, we're not living in light of reality either – the reality that God is in control, and we are not.** So much of our fears come from our fear of “losing control” or “fearing the loss of control” that *we never had to begin with*. So much of our fears can be boiled down to us thinking we're in charge and us being afraid of losing our reign somehow – be it my life, my possessions, my house, my job, my health, my reputation, my significance.... If we don't trust God, we become our own little gods and we fear anything that threatens our reign and it is threatened easy because we make poor gods.³ Or we fear losing the false gods in our lives. We've replaced God with something, even if it's ourselves.

That's what happened to Adam and Eve. When they became their own gods, fear entered in. It had a holistic (physiological, emotional, and spiritual) ramification for them. And it does to us. Fear started with the idea that man could be autonomous and do things his own way. It's the mindset that, *“I don't need God. I can rule myself.”* As long as we think that way, we fear what we think we're ruling over. Even if I'm a believer and I refuse to surrender my life to God, I am still the sovereign in my life, and God is only my supporting actor. I can't let Him be Lord because he might threaten my rule and reign. Look at **verses 34-37**.

II. THE “ANTIDOTE” TO FEAR. (VV. 34-37)

34 “But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever;

*For His dominion is an everlasting dominion,
And His kingdom endures from generation to generation.
35 All the inhabitants of the earth are of no account,
But He does according to His will among the army of heaven
And among the inhabitants of earth;
And no one can fend off His hand
Or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’*

36 At that time my reason returned to me. And my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the honor of my kingdom, and my state counselors and my nobles began seeking me out; so I was reestablished in my sovereignty, and surpassing greatness was added to me. 37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt, and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just; and He is able to humble those who walk in pride.”

So in order for Nebuchadnezzar to be restored to health, he had to **humble himself and fear God**. To quit acting like he was in charge and know that **it is Heaven that rules**. How many of us can testify similarly? Before God we were like unthinking animals and God restored our sanity? I can. But what goes on in our hearts when we **fear God** is that the weighty rock that god is, is put in His proper place and everything that was there is displaced. Fear of God drives out all other fears because everything else is now subject to Him who is all-powerful and wise and good and faithful. We can't displace fear with the absence of fear, but fear of something else. Fear of God is the “antidote” when living in a pandemic of fear.

Fear of God displaces fear of everything else.

Living in fear of God is living within the grain of reality. One man wrote that to, *“The extent to which we have lost the fear of God, will increase our fear of everyone and everything else.”*⁴ When you fear God, it puts everything else in perspective. And **the more that we learn about God and trust in Him and obey Him, the less we will experience fear in our lives**. This is why the Bible says over and over, *“Fear God,”* and, *“Do not be afraid.”* This is a good fear. Our often quotable *Berean Fellowship of Churches* president, Scott Mathis, posted something just last week that was perfect for what we're talking about. He said, *“In our world saturated with constant crisis and drama, we have to learn to worship or we will go crazy.”* Worshipping, fixing our gaze upon God, takes our focus from the problems to the problem solver and the one who is in control.

Whenever you feel like you are starting to worry or fear, look up! Thank God for his sovereignty and **entrust it** to him. **Entrust yourself** to Him just like Jesus did (1 Pet. 2:23). Memorize some helpful verses to recall and counsel yourself with God's Word. **Psalm 56:3** says, *“When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You.”* **Philippians 4:6** says, *“Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”*

But I can't end without bringing it back to Christ. The biggest reason we need to fear God is because we are sinners and proper **fear of God leads us to Christ where fear is properly dealt with**. Fear of God is provoked inside of us when we are confronted with the reality of a holy and righteous God and our sinfulness. The fear of a holy god that we can't appease by being good enough or religious enough, is meant to drive us to Christ where we find grace and love – a

perfect love that casts out fear (1 John 4:18). Christ relieves us of the fear of God's wrath so we can enjoy a reverent relationship and friendship with Him because we know He loves us so much that He died for us. There's sublimity in God – the fear of who He is and yet He draws us to Himself. Much like a great waterfall or tornado, we're terrified of them but at the same time want to get a closer look. In Christ, we still fear God, but we don't have to fear God's wrath or fear death (1 Thess. 1:10; Heb. 2:14-15). And we don't have to fear loss or fear man because we have everything we need in Christ: all the security, significance, love and acceptance we need.

¹ Michael Horton, *Recovering Our Sanity: How the Fear of God Conquers the Fears That Divide Us* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2022), 4.

² LaHaye, *Spirit-Controlled Temperament* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994), 138.

³ Horton, *Sanity*, 13.

⁴ *Ibid.*