

“Fear Factor”
Exodus 1:8-22
Mercy Hill Church | January 28, 2024

Big Idea: We follow what we fear. The Christian is a journey of growing faith & fear in God – above and beyond our other fears.

Opening Question:

- What are some of your fears, if not your biggest fears – whether irrational, silly or serious? Why?

1. Pharaoh’s Fears(vv.8-14)

- The Fear of the Unknown (v.8)
 - The new king (Pharaoh – a title like “President,” not a name), “did not know Joseph”
 - Joseph was second-in-command and the previous Pharaoh’s most trusted adviser. Advised and led Egypt through famine and brought much prosperity to Egypt (cf. Genesis 41:37-46, 50:3)
 - No relational connection (like the previous Pharaoh had)
 - In essence, Joseph and the people of Israel were “unknown.” And what we don’t know often times can be a source of fear.
 - Specifically, this fear of the unknown leads to ethnic division, racial tensions – even though they had been peacefully living together in the same land, in the same kingdom, flourishing together for decades.
 - Interestingly enough, Pharaoh portrays his own people as the “minority” – us-against-them mentality – to garner sympathy and to rally people together.
 - Douglas Stuart Quote: “All oppressive regimes use the threat of some great danger, real or imagined, to justify violations of human rights.” – fear of the unknown
 - Coincidentally enough, yesterday, January 27th, was International Holocaust Remembrance Day (79th anniversary) – as people all around the world remember the victims of the Holocaust
 - The fear of the unknown – fear of people different than us, you or I...
 - What are they planning? What are their intentions? What kind of people are they?
 - Also coincidentally enough, we’ll be turning the calendar to February, which is also Black History Month.
- **The Fear of Losing Power (Control) (vv.9-10)**
 - As the people of Israel are “many” and “mighty” – Pharaoh feels and fears the growing threat of losing power (and control)
 - Fear of (of the thought of) Israel joining forces with Egypt’s enemies – an unfounded fear
 - “Escape from the land” (v.10b) -- literally translated is, “go up from the land.”
 - At this point, Israelites haven’t been enslaved by Egypt – so why would they “escape”?
 - Cf. Hosea 1:10-11 has the same phrase: metaphor of a plant rising (going up) from the ground (land) and covering it – filling the land (re: taking over the field).
 - Pharaohs’ fear of losing power, losing control + fear of the unknown leads him down a very dark path...
- **The Result(s) of Pharaoh’s Fears: Fear, Division & Cruelty -- Sin (vv.9, 11, 13-14, 16, 22)**

- Yoda Quote: “Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering.”
 - In Pharaoh’s situation, his fear(s) of the unknown and losing power leads to anger & suffering – anger towards the Israelites and great suffering and injustice for the Israelites...but ultimately suffering for Pharaoh and his people.
- Pharaoh’s fears lead to widespread fear: “...And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel (v.12b) – very different than when Joseph the Israelite passed away and the Egyptians mourned, grieved and wept for 7 days (cf. Genesis 50:3)
- Pharaoh’s fears lead to division in the land: Egyptian vs. Israelite, “us” against “them” – “his people” (v.9) – in reality, Egyptians AND Israelites were, “his people.”
- Pharaoh’s fears lead to cruelty upon cruelty, oppression upon oppression (vv.11-14):
 - First, given heavy burdens (duties/obligations) – building “store cities” (warehouses) (v.11)
 - Second, forced them to work as slaves, “made their lives bitter” with “hard service”...”ruthlessly made them work as slaves.”
 - On top of their regular duties of tending to their own crops, animals, etc. to sustain themselves
 - And it leads to things much worse, dark and grim...
- Pharaoh’s fears ultimately lead him to sin – against people and against God!
 - Doing what is wrong, clearly evil, oppressing others -- not commanded by God, against the purposes and heart of who God is!
- Our fears, if unchecked, can lead us down a crazy, dark path, esp. coupled with power, resources, authority and ability (like Pharaoh)...which leads to harm towards others, ourselves and ultimately sin against God!

2. The Fear Decision (vv.15-22)

- In v.15, as Pharaoh continues to be driven by fear, he increases the cruelty as he realizes that what he’s done has *not diminished* the people of Israel – but only *increased* them...along with Pharaoh’s fears!
 - So he calls two Hebrew midwives (Shiphrah = “beautiful one” and Puah = “splendid one”), essentially nurses who helped pregnant moms deliver babies...
 - Side note: For an outsider - “Hebrew” = “American” (more general) || “Israelite” = “California” (more specific)
 - ...to murder every Hebrew baby boy secretly in an unsuspecting manner (v.16)
 - Why?
 - These boys would grow up to become men who could fight
 - Girls could be sold off as domestic slaves...and Israelites would be no more
 - Do it quietly (secretive)
 - Mass murder, genocide, eugenics
 - “birthstool” – literally “two stones”: possibly blocks or stones which were used by women to deliver babies (re: footrest), but another interpretation is it’s a euphemism for the baby’s “private parts”
- Fear Others (Pharaoh) or Fear God? (vv.16, 17, 21)
 - These two midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, are faced with an immense decision – who will they follow – who (or what) do they fear more?
 - Fear Pharaoh -- follow Pharaoh’s commands – what is evil, cruel and sin?
 - Pharaoh was not only king but treated as a god

- Already seen the power, evil and cruelty of Pharaoh
 - Have themselves and also seen family and friends suffer already under Pharaoh's decrees
 - Fear God – follow His commands – what is right, true and good?
 - Many points in our lives we will have to make a choice about who (or what) are we going to fear (more) – who (or what) will have (more) power over us?
 - **We Follow What We Fear (vv.17, 21)**
 - cf. Genesis 22:12, Exodus 14:31, 20:20, Joshua 1:9, Proverbs 1:7, Galatians 1:10, Matthew 10:28, Acts 5:5, 10
 - These midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, “feared God” (vv.17, 21)
 - Quote from Ed Welch’s *When People Are Big & God is Small*: “Fear” in the biblical sense...includes being afraid of someone, but it extends to holding someone in awe, being controlled or mastered by people, worshipping other people, putting your trust in people, or needing people.”
 - What we fear has power (control) over us – we follow what we fear
 - Shiphrah and Puah walk and live in fear – and faith – of the Lord – that is what empowers them to make the choice they made – to disobey Pharaoh
 - On one hand the reality and shadow of Pharaoh’s presence & power was as close, real, imminent and threatening like nothing else – yet for these midwives, God’s presence & power was even closer, more real, more powerful than Pharaoh’s!
 - Their eyes and hearts were fixed on the light of God, even as the dark shadow of Pharaoh hovered over them!
 - Years pass between Pharaoh’s command to the midwives to kill all the baby boys to when Pharaoh realizes their disobedience
 - As one commentator note, “In ancient Israelite society...boys and girls dressed similarly, had similar hair length...would take years until Pharaoh got wind that the midwives were not obeying him...”
 - Midwives response to Pharaoh’s accusation (v.19):
 - Honest answer? Possibly, told women not to call them until the baby was born...
 - Dishonest answer? Outright lie
 - Example of Corrie ten Boom who long with her father and other family members helped many Jews escape the Nazi Holocaust during WW2 by hiding them in a closet.
 - Example of Rahab (Joshua 2)
 - “Lesser of two evils (sins)” in a sinful, fallen world --not “ends justify the means” or “relativism”
 - Spunky answer? “Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous...” – a subtle shot at Pharaoh and the Egyptians
- 3. God’s Faithfulness in the Midst of Our Fears & Faith (vv.12-20)**
- (cf. Matthew 6:24-25, 33, 10:22; Luke 14:25-27, Genesis 12:1, 1 Kings 2:24)
 - Ultimately this passage is about God’s faithfulness (to His promises and His Word)
 - To the people of Israel (vv.12, 20): “the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied...And the people multiplied” (cf. Genesis 12:1)
 - To the midwives, Shiphrah & Puah (v.21): ..“he gave them families” – literally, “he established/set their houses.”

- Typically understood that God provided these women with children (families) – some speculate that midwives typically didn't have children – and in this case these women were barren
 - However, usually the Bible tends to be specific about barren women (re: Sarah, Hannah, etc.)
- The more probable meaning here is God established them as a family in honor (cf. 1 Kings 2:24). Interesting to note that in Exodus 1-2, besides Moses, only the midwives, Shiphrah and Puah are explicitly named – not Pharaoh, not Pharaoh's daughter, not even Moses' father or mother!
- Exodus is the story of God's faithfulness to His people and His promises (His Word): In the midst of fear, suffering, difficulties, tragedies, injustice and oppression, God has not abandoned or forgotten His people – God is faithful even in the midst of our fears – and will deliver and rescue them!
 - We are reminded of God's faithfulness to us in and through Jesus – and His birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension!
 - His promise that He would make a way for us to know Him, to know and experience forgiveness, freedom from our guilt, freedom from our shame, freedom from our sin, freedom from our fears so that we might faithfully follow Him!
 - His promises that He will never leave us or forsake us no matter how crazy our circumstances are...follow Jesus, not your fears!

Big Idea: We follow what we fear. The Christian is a journey of growing faith & fear in God – above and beyond our other fears.

Reflection/Application Questions

- What are some of your fears in life? How have your fears (or worries) affected you -- and those around you? How do you typically deal with your fears?
- [Faith] In what areas of your life are you struggling to trust/follow God in? How might fear be a factor? How does remembering who Jesus is and what He has done encourage and strengthen your faith?
- [Community] Who can you encourage (or pray for) this week to remember God's faithfulness -- and to not live in fear (anxiety) but in greater fear (faith) in Jesus?
- [Mission] Is there someone at work/school that has been living in fear? How can you encourage them with the Gospel message this week?
- Parent Corner: What fears drive your child(ren)? How might this passage encourage or strengthen your child(ren) in their faith and trust in Jesus?