

Change What We Fear

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[0 : 00] Isaiah 8 verse 12 says these words, Do not call conspiracy everything this people calls a conspiracy.

! Nobody is ever sure of whether what they hear is really true.

Whenever anything major happens, the thought at the back of our mind and the conversations on social media is always, Well, what really happened? What's behind it?

You know, right from the 60s with the moon landings, remember that? Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin and all of them, they land on the moon, but then, oh, but did they really?

Or did they all just set it up because of Russia and blah, blah, blah. And then September 11th, terrorist attacks in New York. But was it the terrorists or was it the US government or the CIA?

[1 : 09] Conspiracy theories. COVID, remember that? COVID. Oh, yeah. Was it a lab leak or was it was it a monkey in the marketplace of Wuhan?

Or was it maybe the American government wanting to control the population with vaccines? It's always conspiracy theories. Or what about closer to home?

Really, two springbok red cards in two consecutive weeks? Really? That's a bit suspicious. Are there, is world rugby out to get the springboks?

You know, we never take things at face value, do we? We're always looking for who's really pulling the strings. And that's what a conspiracy theory is, really.

It's a belief that we hold into who's really in control of the events of our world. Who's really in control? Who's really pulling the strings?

[2 : 08] Well, this passage we have in front of us this morning is going to challenge you to think of who you really believe is in control of the events of your life and the world you live in.

And it's going to show us that if we want to live effective lives in this world, we need to start focusing our lives on who's really calling the shots in our world and in the events of our lives.

And that's what I hope we're going to see this morning. In other words, what we need to do is to learn how to change what we fear.

That's the way the passage puts it. To change what we fear. Have a look from verse 12. Do not call conspiracy everything this people calls a conspiracy.

Do not fear what they fear and do not dread it. The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy.

[3 : 13] He is the one you are to fear. He is the one you are to dread. So what does it mean to fear God?

We come across that phrase quite a lot in the Bible, don't we? Fear God. And we often don't quite understand what that means. We think fear means to be scared of something.

And that's how we use it in our world. Fear is being scared. But in the Bible, it has a slightly different meaning. It can mean being scared. But it means more to pay close attention to something that can significantly influence your life.

That's what it means to fear something. It's to focus on it because it has a big bearing on your livelihood and your life. And often that is being scared of something.

When we're scared of something, we generally fear it because it has a bearing on our life. If I'm out at sea and I see a great white shark, and I have once, I've had an experience with a great white shark out in False Bay.

[4 : 22] And let me tell you, when I saw that thing, I didn't just carry on doing what I was doing. I focused my attention, my full attention on that rather large animal because it could have a significant influence on my life.

See, so that's what it means to fear. And in that circumstance, I was pretty scared. But it's not always about being scared. When I'm driving, I am concentrating on the oncoming traffic, especially on those small, narrow roads.

Once we drove down from Namibia, we had a holiday years ago, and it was at night. And some of the roads there, people were driving super fast, and it was super narrow.

And I was concentrating. I was fully focused on the traffic on the road. Now, I wasn't shaking in terror, but I had a healthy fear for the other traffic.

Because if I didn't concentrate on it, if I didn't focus on it, it could have a huge effect on my life. That's what fear here in this passage means. It means to pay attention to what you believe has influence on your life and on your situation.

[5 : 29] Now, in Isaiah's day, the big thing people were paying attention to in their life was the political situation that was going on.

If you read back in Isaiah 6 and 7, you read all about the political situation of the time. I'll give you a little summary, though. This was sort of 700 B.C. around.

And there were a number of major powers at play. So if you look at this map, this gives you the situation in Isaiah's time. And Isaiah is writing there in Jerusalem to the people of Judah.

But north of them is the northern tribes. They had split in a civil war. They were called Israel. And they had made an alliance with Aram. That was a kingdom to the north.

And Aram and Israel were planning. The tribe of Judah learned that they were planning to invade Judah. And so the king of Judah went to Assyria.

[6 : 33] And he got into secret talks with the king of Assyria to attack Aram and Israel to save Judah. And so all of these things were going on.

This was a very tense political time. And there were all of these conspiracies about the northern alliance and their plans. And the king of Judah and his secret talks with Assyria.

And whether Assyria is going to come bail them out. And this was on everyone's mind. This was the news of the day. These are the conspiracies that were going on that Isaiah talks about in Isaiah 8.

And everyone's attention was on these events because what happened here, the outcome of this political situation, had a huge influence on their lives and their future, right?

The people of Judah. You can understand why they were focusing on the political situation. Now, you might not be into politics yourself, but imagine for a second that Donald Trump decided he doesn't like South Africa anymore.

[7 : 38] I mean, he's already decided that. But he decides to now send the U.S. military to invade us. But then President Cyril Ramaphosa is in secret talks with Xi Jinping, the Chinese president, to come and fight America.

And if that happens, South Africa becomes a battleground between two major superpowers. And there could be fighting in the streets. There could be Chinese and American tanks rolling through Plumstead, Main Road.

Now, imagine that was the situation. That's what would be on our mind, right? That's what we would be talking about. That's what we would be worried about. That we would be every morning looking at social media, looking at the political situation.

That was kind of what was going on in the time Isaiah was writing to these people. They were all fully taken up by what was going on around them with these powers. Now, I don't think America is planning to invade South Africa.

You'll be pleased to know. And so we aren't thinking too much about international politics at the moment. And yet, our minds and our conversations are still taken up by the things we think affect our lives the most.

[8 : 52] The things that we think have the most influence on our lives are the things we'll think about and things we'll talk about. So maybe it's the exchange rate. Maybe it's the job market. I don't know.

Maybe it's the price of avocados that you're going to talk about to someone else. Because it affects what you eat. It affects your life in a small way.

Other things affect our lives in bigger ways. You know, whether medical aid is going to pay for your meds this month. Maybe that's what you're thinking about. Maybe what's happening at school with the other students in your class.

Maybe what's happening at work. Who's carrying favor with the boss? Who's in line for that next promotion? That's the topic of conversation in the break room.

That's the thing you're thinking about. You see, these things and many others are our versions of what takes up our headspace in our daily life.

[9 : 55] The things that we perceive most affect our lives and our comfort and our future. These are the things we think about. These are the things we pay attention to. In Isaiah's words, these are the things we fear.

Now, we're not scared of them necessarily. But we do have a healthy sort of respect for the things that are going to affect our lives. And so we focus our minds on those things.

But now it's right into that situation here in Isaiah where everyone's fretting about what's going on around them. It's into that situation that God speaks to Isaiah.

Look at verse 11. This is what the Lord says to me as Isaiah's talking here. This is what the Lord says to me with his strong hand upon me.

Warning me not to follow the way of this people. That's a very striking image. The Lord's strong hand upon me.

[10 : 58] You know, it reminded me when I read it of a parent calming down a child that's fretting about something. You know, maybe a child is stressing over the situation.

The parent comes in there. You actually have to put your hand on them and say, Hey, hey, it's okay. Calm down. That's kind of what God is doing with Isaiah here. He's putting his strong hand on him and saying, Hey, Isaiah, look at me.

Calm down. That's the situation. And so God says to him, Do not call conspiracy everything this people calls a conspiracy. Do not fear what they fear.

Do not dread it. The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy. He is the one you are to fear. He is the one you are to dread. So you see what God is saying to Isaiah here.

It's not just to Isaiah. God is saying this to all of us. God has inspired this to be written down and preserved for us to read it today. Because God wants to say this to us today. He wants to say it to his people in every age.

[11 : 59] In a turbulent world that we live in. With all the kind of things going on around us that we think about. We worry about. God wants to say in this passage, Hey, hey, look at me.

I'm in control. I determine what happens to you. Not the things out there. I'm in control of the circumstances of your life. Not the things you think are.

I decide whether you get that deal in your business. I decide whether you get that job you want.

Whether you're successful at that interview. I decide whether medical aid pays out this month.

I decide what your future holds. So stop fearing all those other things. Stop focusing so much on all those things. And start focusing on me.

That's what God is saying to us through this passage this morning. Because you see, when we really believe that. When our minds are renewed by this doctrine.

[13 : 03] This truth. That God is actually in control of the intricate circumstances of the lives of his people. It changes everything.

It changes how we see the world. When we really start to believe there is a God who is in control of the specific circumstances of his people's lives.

We start to find peace in all the turbulence around us. Look at verse 14. It says, and this is, actually I'm going to read it from the CSB which I think translates this verse slightly better.

What happens to those people who believe that about God. Who obey this and start focusing on him rather than the things around it.

That fear him rather than those things. Verse 14 says, he will become a sanctuary for them. He will be a sanctuary. That word sanctuary in verse 14 is the same word for tabernacle in the Old Testament.

[14 : 11] Tabernacle was where God's presence dwelt in Israel with his people. And so it's saying, when God is present in your life. When he dwells in your life.

And that God's presence comes to us through Jesus Christ. Who came to this world to bring God to us. To die for our sins that separate us from God.

So we can know our creator. That God's presence can come into our lives. And when that happens. And we know that that God is now in control of our circumstances. He becomes a sanctuary for us.

He becomes a shelter. He becomes a source of real peace. As Philippians 4 verse 7 says. You know the verse, do not be anxious about anything. It's the same kind of sentiment. Don't fear. Don't be anxious about anything. But in everything with prayer and petition. Present your requests to God. And what will happen? The peace of God. Which transcends all understanding. [15:11] Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. That's the result. It's exactly what Isaiah says. He will become a sanctuary for those who truly believe that he is in control of the circumstances of their lives.

Do you believe that? Because if you don't. If you don't really think that God's in control. Maybe you think it's just a myth.

Maybe you think it's just, you know, something that people used to believe. But we're more awakened now because of science or whatever. If you don't fear God as in control of this world. This is the result.

Verse 14 goes on. I'm going to read again from the CSB. But for the two houses of Israel who didn't believe that about God at this time.

He will be a stone to stumble over. A rock to trip over. A trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

[16:11] That's what will happen for those who don't give focus to their God. But rather are focusing on the things of the world. He becomes a stone to stumble over.

An obstacle. Now why? Why is that? Why does God become an obstacle for someone who doesn't fear Him? Someone who doesn't see Him as in charge?

Why does He become an obstacle for them? That's a strange thing. Well the reason is because He is still in charge. He is in charge of their circumstances.

He is in charge of your circumstances in your life. But if you don't realize that. If you don't acknowledge that. You will keep bumping up against Him. If you don't acknowledge and realize that there is a God in control of your world.

He will become an obstacle to you. You will keep bumping up against Him. If you don't realize that God is calling the shots. If He is just in the background of your life.

[17:13] Maybe to you He doesn't even exist. Or maybe even He is in the background. Maybe you even come to church. But you know Sunday you think about Him a little bit. But then Monday to Saturday you are thinking about other things.

He is in the background. Well if that's the case. All you are doing is you are trying to live in His world. Monday to Friday. But without factoring Him into your plans.

And that will never ultimately work. You will always find yourself stumbling. Tripping. Things won't work out. As one other author that I was reading this week puts it.

I quote. He says those who do not make a place for God will keep tripping over Him. Because He is a fact of which their hypothesis does not take account.

Their experiment will keep failing. And He will be the cause of it. Not because of some vindictive streak in Him. But simply because He is. And they are trying to live.

[18:16] As if He were not. Are you trying to live your life. As if God were not. If you are.

Or if God is just in the background. If you are not focused on Him. In your life. You don't have a healthy fear for Him. You will trip over Him.

Things won't work out. Not because He is vindictive. But simply because He is. And you are trying to live your life as if He is not. And so stop giving so much focus to the things around you.

This is what we have got to learn. This is what this passage is challenging all of us to do. To stop giving so much focus on what is going on around us. And start focusing on the one who is really in charge of your world.

Give Him. Give Him your fear. Give Him your attention. Because when you do that. Not only do you find sanctuary.

[19:22] But we also see. You begin to live. An effective life. I want us to see next. The key to an effective life. That is in this passage.

We see it in the next verse. In Isaiah chapter 8. Now Isaiah is speaking. And he says this. Here I am. Verse 18. Here I am. And the children the Lord has given me.

We are signs and symbols in Israel. From the Lord Almighty who dwells on Mount Zion. Here I am. And the children the Lord has given me.

We are signs and symbols. Who is he talking about? He is talking about the people who listen to him. Who take on this warning. And who change their fear from what is going on around them to God. They become what are called the children of God.

And they become signs and symbols. Who point others around them to God. Now this verse.

[20 : 27] Isaiah 8 verse 18. You don't have to turn there. But in Hebrews chapter 2. In the New Testament. It applies this verse to Christians today. It says this verse.

The children the signs and symbols. They are the Christians today. They are the people. Who believe who Jesus really is. Not just that he died for our sins.

But that he rose from the dead. Conquered death. And ascended to the right hand of the Father.

And is now. As he said at the end of Matthew. He has all authority in heaven and on earth.

People who truly believe that. And live their lives. As if that is true. Those people become signs and symbols in the world. To point the right way.

For a lost and confused world and society. People who really believe that about Jesus. That he is Lord. That he reigns. That he is growing his kingdom.

[21 : 23] That all authority in heaven and on earth. Has been given to him. He is the true power in this world. When we realize that.

And start focusing on him. Rather than the things around us. We become signs and symbols. For those around us. The apostle Peter. Picks this up.

In his letter to a struggling church. First Peter. And Alan read it for us earlier. Let's spend the rest of our time. In 1 Peter. Turn there with me.

Or you can just. Listen and see it on screen. But. 1 Peter 3. And Peter is.

Writing. In the context. Of Christians. Speaking. To others. About Jesus. And. You may not have noticed.

[22 : 24] You may have noticed. Earlier when it was read. That. That Peter actually quotes. From Isaiah 8. Our passage. He quotes from Isaiah 8. In the context of Christians. Sharing.

Their faith. And I think. Before I read it. I think what he is about to say. Is really important for us to hear. Right now. As we approach. The Christmas season.

Why? Because this is probably. One of the best opportunities. That you and I have this year. To talk about Jesus. To those in our lives. Who need to hear about him. Because Christmas.

We are celebrating his birth. Great opportunities to talk about him. Are we going to take those opportunities? How are we going to take those opportunities? Are we going to have the courage. To take those opportunities? Are we going to make Jesus known.

In our lives. In the coming month. Well let's see what Peter says. About how we can do that. 1 Peter 3. From verse 14. But even if you should suffer.

[23 : 21] For what is right. You are blessed. Do not fear their threats. Do not be frightened. But. Verse 15. In your hearts. Revere. Christ. As Lord.

Always be prepared. To give an answer. To everyone who asks you. To give the reason. For the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness. And respect.

Do you see. What is the key. To being effective. In speaking to people about Jesus.

In this verse. Do you see it. What must they do. Before they are ready. To. Give an answer. And talk about him. They must revere. Christ. As.

Lord. Verse 15. In your hearts. Revere Christ as Lord. Then. You will be prepared. To give an answer. To everyone who asks you. Revere. Christ. As Lord.

[24 : 17] What does that mean. To revere Christ as Lord. It means exactly the same thing. As it meant. In Isaiah. See him as the one. Who calls the shots.

In your world. And in your life. So that he takes. Your daily attention. Because if. If you truly believe. That about Jesus. That he is the Lord.

Not only of you. But of the person. You are speaking to. If you believe. His Lordship extends. Over all people. Right. If that is your world view.

And you focus. Every day. On. On. On. The Lord. Jesus Christ. As your ruler. And your king. And that is a reality. In your life. Look what happens.

We see it. In 1 Peter 3. Look what happens. People notice. And start asking questions. You see that in verse 15. It's. Peter assumes. People are going to ask you questions.

[25 : 12] About your faith. That's great. What a great evangelism strategy. Just wait for people. To ask you questions. About Jesus. Why would they do that? Because you're revering him. As Lord in

your heart. When you do that. They can see something.

Is different about you. Right. They see you handle life differently. They see you have a peace. That they don't have. They see you with a completely different attitude.

To this world. And just that different attitude. Just that different focus in your life. That people will pick up on. Will create opportunities. To talk about Jesus. And.

Secondly. What happens when we set Jesus. As Lord in our lives. And we revere him as Lord. As the ultimate authority. Of our circumstances. The second thing that happens. Is we will actually talk about him.

Why? Because we won't be scared. Of people. And what they think. About us. We won't fear. The outcomes. Of those conversations.

[26 : 11] That we have. With other people. Because we know. Who is in control. Of the outcome. Of that conversation. Because. Let's be honest. Isn't that the reason. We don't talk about Jesus.

Is. Actually. Because we're scared. Of what people. Will think about us. We're scared. About what will happen. If we talk about him. To that friendship.

What the outcome. Will be. How people will react. What people will think about us. That's really. The thing that stops us. When those opportunities arise. That's what shuts us down. The fear. Of the outcome. But you see.

When. When a Christian. Truly fears. Christ. They stop. Fearing men. Because they know. Who controls. The outcome.

[27 : 06] Of each of those. Conversations. And that's. Simple conviction. That Christ. Is in control. Of what happens. In this conversation.

And what happens. To this friendship. If I talk about him. He is in authority. He is controlling. He is in control. Of the circumstances. When. That simple conviction. Has.

Released. Christians. For centuries. To speak openly. And boldly. About Jesus. It's probably the reason. That this church. Is here today. And that we have heard. About Jesus.

Because someone. Before us. Was bold enough. To speak about him. Because he trusted. That Jesus. Would control the outcome. Of that conversation. From the apostles.

In Acts. That we are reading about. In our daily devotion. Who. You know. We have been reading about. Peter and Paul. And them. And they were unashamed. To talk about Jesus. Despite the consequences.

[27 : 59] Which were quite difficult. For them. But they didn't. Let that stop them. Because they knew. Who was in command. Of the consequences. Even if that meant.

They go to jail. They knew. They were singing songs. In jail. Why? Because they knew. Who was in control. Of their circumstances. So that. Enabled them. And opened them up. And made them bold. To.

You know. Missionaries. Throughout the ages. Throughout the church age. Who have been imprisoned. And who have suffered worse. And who have. Many have died. For the faith. And yet. Throughout it all.

They trusted in the lordship of Christ. They trusted that Jesus. Was in control of the situation. I could. I could give you story. After story. Of missionaries. Who. Who had this. Trust in the lordship of Christ.

That enabled them. To speak about him. But what I want to do this morning. In closing. Is I. I want to share another story. That I came across. It's not about a brave missionary.

[28 : 53] Out in the mission field. It's about a fairly ordinary student. Named Jeff. And Jeff. Jeff was a student. At. At a college in the states.

He was a Christian. I heard his testimony. The other day. But nobody else. In. In his class. Or in his. Res.

Was a Christian. And so he. He stood out like a sore thumb. He wasn't outgoing. He didn't have any special skills. He wasn't an evangelist. But people knew he was a Christian.

Just because he didn't go to the parties. He didn't get drunk with the rest of them. He went to church on a Sunday. One of the college professors though. Was a particular thorn in his side. Because he was. He was an atheist.

He was particularly opposed to Christianity. He took every opportunity in the lectures to mock Christians. And the rest of the college would laugh when he made jokes. And Jeff would just sit there.

[29 : 48] But one day he assigned a paper. To the class. Where he wanted them to write about the dangers of religious fundamentalism. And then in class Jeff.

Rather nervously. But courageously raised his hand. And the professor looked at him. What is it? And he asked. Could we write about a different perspective? And the professor said.

What do you mean? And he said. Well I don't think all faith is dangerous. Can I write about why belief in God is actually beneficial? And the professor was a bit taken aback.

The class was silent. And eventually he said. Well write what you want. But let me warn you. I'm going to be grading the paper based on academic reasoning.

Not personal beliefs. And so in other words. You're saying to him. Disagree with me. And you'll pay. You'll regret it. Anyway. After the lecture. Apparently one of the classmates came to Jeff.

[30 : 45] And said. Why did you do that man? That you're going to fail the course. We're so close. To passing. Why did you do that? Why didn't you just stay silent man? And he said. Well. It's what I believe.

Anyway. He wrote the paper. He didn't know what was going to happen. He submitted the paper. He got a B plus. It was probably worth an A. But he thought he was going to fail. But more importantly.

A week later. That classmate. That same classmate. Came back to him. And he said to Jeff. I read your paper. I was curious. You were curious. About what you wrote.

And you made some good points. And apparently told him. That now he was on a journey. To discover. And to find out more about God. Because of the paper he wrote. And apparently Jeff didn't know what to say.

So he just smiled. Someone once said. Courage. Is doing the right thing. Without being sure of the outcome.

[31 : 42] Jeff was courageous. He didn't know what would come of this. He didn't know what would come of his stand. For what he believed.

But he did it anyway. Why? Because he revered Christ as his Lord. And so he didn't fear people. In his simple way. He set apart Christ.

As Lord of his life. And that is why all of us can be courageous. In speaking about Jesus this coming month. Not because we know how the situation will turn out.

Not because we know what will happen to the friendship. If we raise the topic of Jesus. But because we know the one in control of all the circumstances of our lives. And the one in control of what happens to that friendship.

And people who know that about Jesus. People who are convicted that he is Lord. And revere him as Lord of this world. Show themselves to be the children of God.

[32 : 38] And become the signs and symbols in the world. Pointing others to Christ. Let's pray that we will be counted among them this month. Lord, we thank you for this word.

Lord, we thank you for taking us with your strong arm. And reminding us that you are in control of the circumstances of our lives.

Lord, help us to believe this. Help us not to keep you in the background. And keep stumbling up against you. But help us to focus fully on you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Our Lord and the King of our world. And the one who is in control of all the circumstances of our lives. Help us to believe this. And help us to go out in the coming weeks.

With that conviction firmly in our hearts. So that we will be unashamed. To speak your name. Out in the world. So that people out there might come to know. Who is the Lord of this place.

[33 : 40] And who they will one day stand before. Help us to be bold. And Lord, may you be glorified through it. In Jesus name. Amen.