



## EYES ON HIM

By Rev. Will Nelken

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Fear is a word we use to describe "painful agitation in the presence or anticipation of danger." Some common synonyms of fear are alarm, dread, fright, panic, terror, and trepidation. Fear is the most general term and implies anxiety and *usually* loss of courage.

Students of human behavior first identified categories of natural reaction to fear as "fight or flight." Then, a third reaction was noted: freeze. Later, a fourth response was recognized: fawn. To "fawn" is to try and please whoever is triggering the fear, in order to prevent them from causing harm.

Today, I'd like to suggest a fifth response—the response of a follower of Jesus, who trusts in the power of resurrection—faith.

If I can teach you to take your eyes off of whatever the enemy of our souls may be doing and look, instead, at what the God of our salvation is doing, it will transform your life!

Let's first look at a chronicle of war that took place 850 years before the birth of Jesus. A coalition of forces from nations east of the Dead Sea gathered a "vast horde" of soldiers to conquer Judah (the southern tribes of God's people). This was the greatest threat of the reign of King Jehoshaphat. He was understandably afraid. But before any of the natural reactions set in, Jehoshaphat did something supernatural. Listen to his story and see if you recognize his alternate response...

2 Chronicles 20:1-13

<sup>1</sup> *Now it came about after this that the sons of Moab and the sons of Ammon, together with some of the Meunites, came to make war against Jehoshaphat.*

<sup>2</sup> *Then some came and reported to Jehoshaphat, saying, "**A great multitude (vast horde) is coming against you** from beyond the sea, out of Aram and behold, they are in Hazazon-tamar (that is Engedi)."*

<sup>3</sup> ***Jehoshaphat was afraid and turned his attention to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.*** <sup>4</sup> *So Judah gathered together to seek help from the Lord; they even came from all the cities of Judah to seek the Lord.*

<sup>5</sup> Then Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the Lord before the new court, <sup>6</sup> and he said, “O Lord, the God of our fathers, are You not God in the heavens? And are You not ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations? Power and might are in Your hand so that no one can stand against You.

<sup>7</sup> “Did You not, O our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel and give it to the descendants of Abraham Your friend forever? <sup>8</sup> “They have lived in it, and have built You a sanctuary there for Your name, saying (quoting the prayer of a former king, Solomon, at the dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem), <sup>9</sup> ‘Should evil come upon us, the sword, or judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we will stand before this house and before You (for Your name is in this house) and cry to You in our distress, and You will hear and deliver us.’

<sup>10</sup> “Now behold, the sons of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir, whom You did not let Israel invade when they came out of the land of Egypt (they turned aside from them and did not destroy them), <sup>11</sup> see how they are rewarding us by coming to drive us out from Your possession which You have given us as an inheritance.

<sup>12</sup> “O our God, will You not judge them? **For we are powerless before this great multitude who are coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are on You.**”

<sup>13</sup> All Judah was standing before the Lord, with their infants, their wives and their children.

What was the supernatural response that Jehoshaphat made in the face of frightening news?

*(NET) We don't know what we should do; we look to You for help.*

The king was not ignorant of the enemy's plans. Nor did he ignore his own vulnerability. Keenly aware of both, he chose an alternate response: to look to God for help.

He did not flee. He did not freeze. He did not fawn. He set his eyes on the Lord—the God of promise and might—with whom he had made a covenant.

A covenant is more than a contract. It generates a relationship, not just a business deal. As such, the parties become connected by a personal bond of trust, and are mutually, personally responsible for maintaining their agreement.

*“I will be their God and they will be My people.”*

Do you have such a covenant with God? Something more than a contract, more than a business arrangement? Have you entered into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, trusting Him to be with you and work in you, for now and for eternity?

If so, you can demonstrate a similar faith as the King of Judah. “God, you said You would hear my voice when I pray. You promised to answer, and not to ignore me. My eyes are on You. Be my help.”

Today, we are again faced by a vast horde of enemy combatants, mostly invisible, who have come “only to steal, to kill, and to destroy.”

And, again, we are afraid, we are concerned, we are perplexed—what to do?! I pray we will recall and heed the example of King Jehoshaphat to stop and pray, “We don’t know the answer, but our eyes are on You.”

It was the successful way of an ancient king, and it is also the way of our triumphant King Jesus.

## The Way of the Resurrection

The four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—describe the marvelous birth, life, and death of Jesus the Christ. In them, we begin to discover what Christ has done, and what Christ can do—His power over all of nature, even death itself. His sacrifice as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world was only upstaged by His resurrection from the dead—something none of His followers expected, nor understood.

But as Luke continued the story of “all that Jesus began to do and teach” in his second volume, the Book of Acts, we begin to see the amazing impact of Jesus’ resurrection—first, upon His own followers, as the Holy Spirit came upon them at Pentecost, and then, through their empowered ministries, to “the ends of the earth.”

This book chronicles the apostolic ministries of Peter and Paul, along with numerous other disciples, revealing how the Church—God’s Kingdom in the earth—spread like yeast in a batch of dough “*in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*” (Acts 1:8)

Luke’s book ends like this:

*<sup>30</sup> And [Paul] stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, <sup>31</sup> preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, **unhindered.***

“Unhindered,” from the Greek *akōlutōs*.

Paul, forcibly confined to his lodgings and “*preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered.*” Unhindered? It doesn’t seem like a promising strategy for accomplishing the salvation of the world that Jesus had predicted at the beginning of the same book. Yet, there it was.

In the geography of the first century, Rome was the whole world. Rome encompassed “the end of the earth,” in the popular imagination. And that was where the Jesus community’s leading preacher and teacher had been placed.

The community of Jesus, represented in the person of Paul under house arrest in Rome, was on its way to becoming a worldwide community, even though no one was able to guess it at the time.

The church was never intended to be confined to a neighborhood or an institution or bounded by issues of race or culture or politics. It had already reached Rome, the center of culture and power, unsupported by outward evidence, yet poised to receive all who were willing to come.

Unhindered? Paul couldn't leave his house. He had just had a disappointing conversation with the leaders of the local Jewish community, who had never so much as heard of him and who, after they did hear him, walked away arguing over what he had said. Paul was no more successful with the Jewish leadership in Rome than he had been in Jerusalem. Meanwhile, with Nero on the rampage, Christians were being martyred wholesale in the city. Paul would soon be included in the killings. Unhindered?

Eugene Peterson commented:

“Paul, and Luke who is writing the story of the Jesus community, are by now well-schooled in the means of grace, the way in which the Spirit works salvation and forms the community. Conversant with and well-practiced in this way, the way of Jesus, the way of the Spirit, the way of the cross, the way of resurrection, they know how these things are done. They have lived these narratives, these Gospel and Acts narratives, lived them from the inside, engaged them in prayer and obedience, and know that ‘unhindered’ is exactly the right word to end on. The judicial foot-dragging that has Paul mired in prison, the religious obduracy that has isolated the Jewish leadership from the Jesus community, the massacres that are sickening the city with Christian corpses, do not qualify as hindrances. ‘Unhindered’ stands as the last word.”

God's last word.

The means God uses for the formation of the church are unconventional, countercultural, and alien to any person who knows nothing of the resurrection power of Jesus.

We have become willing participants not only in what God does, but in the *way* He does it. We have all grown up and been immersed in an anti-resurrection world of means in which power and money, information and technology, lust and avarice, pride and anger are the usual and approved ways for accomplishing the work of the world. They work, as a matter of fact, very well. They work efficiently.

“Unhindered” is just the right word. It tells us that all the difficulties or obstacles that loom large in the natural imagination are simply of no account in the agenda of the Kingdom, where the resurrection, the Spirit's action in bringing Jesus to life—not only in the past, but also in

each present moment—defines the Kingdom means. “Unhindered” connotes a kind of effortlessness, at least of human effort.

Paul was no longer competing with the world’s means. His being there was enough: he was available; accessible to others without raising his voice, without fighting his way free of imprisoning chains, without being diminished by the unlistening, unseeing, unbelieving Jewish leadership; he was free to offer up through intercession the sufferings of his fellow Christians on the altar of the cross of Jesus. It wasn’t exactly doing nothing.

This kind of “unforced presentness” is not easily acquired, but it can be acquired. Both temperamentally and circumstantially Paul was the last person in the world who should exemplify this resurrection composure. He was by nature impetuous, emotional, and capable of bursts of anger, and in the course of his work and travels he got knocked around considerably.

### **Learn to be Content**

When Paul told the Philippians that he had “*learned to be content*” (Philippians 4:11) regardless of circumstances, it was in great measure because he had learned to live by the means of the Spirit in contrast to the means of the world.

Eugene Peterson wrote:

“Learning how to live as the community of Christ is largely a matter of becoming familiar with and disciplined to the means by which the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work formationally among us: namely, by the Holy Spirit from God’s side and prayerful obedience from ours, by hospitably including the unwanted outsiders of the world into the community, and by cultivating a detachment from the world’s insiders and their ways, especially as these ways are exemplified in the leaders and celebrities.”

The church betrays its Master far more often and damagingly by the *way* it speaks and acts than by anything it ever says or does. Anger and arrogance, violence and manipulation rank far higher than theological error or moral lapses in defiling the holy, resurrection community of Christ’s followers.

So—unhindered. This is a remarkable and memorable last word that Luke used to characterize Paul and, by extension, the whole church. And it is timely for us today, for we are constantly tempted to use the world’s means to do Jesus’ work.

Philippians 4:10-14

*4:10 I have great joy in the Lord because now at last you have again expressed your concern for me. (Now I know you were concerned before but had no opportunity to do anything.) 4:11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for **I have learned to be content in any circumstance.** 4:12 I have experienced times of need and times of abundance. In any and every circumstance I have*

*learned the secret of contentment, whether I go satisfied or hungry, have plenty or nothing. <sup>4:13</sup> I am able to do all things through the One who strengthens me. <sup>4:14</sup> Nevertheless, you did well to share with me in my trouble.*

Church, these are days to keep our eyes on Him—who is the Resurrection and the Life. He said, *“Anyone who believes in Me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in Me and believes in Me will never ever die.”* (John 11:25-26) Do you believe this?

This is the power of Christ’s resurrection. And it is the power and hope of the Church.

You may not know what to do about your circumstances, but God knows your circumstances, and God knows you.

To whom are you looking? In what do you trust?  
*“Where does my help come from?”* the psalmist cried.

Let’s set (and keep) our eyes on Him.