

All right, family drama, seductive dancing, and chopped heads. Welcome back to the book of Matthew. We left off in this gospel last summer, and we're going to keep coming back to it each year, section by section, until we get through the whole book.

And since it's been a minute, I want to reorient us for a second about the gospels in general, and Matthew in particular. The first four books of the New Testament—the gospels—they give us four accounts of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And because each author wrote for a specific community, they had a specific purpose in mind for that community, and they present Jesus to that community through their book from a certain perspective.

So, for example, Mark, he's writing about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus from this perspective. And when he looks at Jesus from over here, he sees him as the Son of God, the suffering servant who gave his life as a ransom for many. And he presents him that way. Now Luke, Luke... he's looking at Jesus, same Jesus, but he's looking from this perspective. And from this perspective, he sees him as the Savior of the world who laid down his life to be a blessing to all—all peoples, especially the marginalized. Especially the marginalized. And then you have John. And he's looking at Jesus, same Jesus, but looking from over here. And from this perspective, he sees him as the divine Son, the Lamb of God who was slain for the sins of the world. And then Matthew, the book that we're walking through, Matthew is looking from over here. And he's writing to a Jewish—predominantly Jewish—audience. And as such, he presents Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, the long-awaited King who's come to establish his kingdom and set up a—and extend his blessing to the nations.

And so, four perspectives, same Jesus. And the gospel authors then have taken, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and curated the stories and crafted them and organized them in such a way so that we would be shaped and formed by what they are writing and the perspective of Jesus that they're giving us. So these gospel authors, they don't just want to give us information. They're not just giving us historical events in chronological order. They are historical events. But they're not always in chronological order. They're shaping their gospels so that we would be shaped by them. We're being disciplined. So when we sit down and we read Matthew, he wants to disciple us. He wants to shape us. He wants to form us as disciples of Jesus. And in particular for his book, that we would learn to bow at our knees at King Jesus's feet, to follow him, to become like King Jesus, and then to join Jesus as he extends his blessing to all nations. Matthew is wanting to shape us and form us.

And so with that in mind, how in the world is he trying to shape us through a story with lots of details about family drama, a provocative dance, and some guy getting his head chopped off?

Well, let's walk through the story together, and then we'll come back to that question a little later because he has a purpose in this.

All right, the beginning of our story, we're introduced to Herod the Tetrarch. Now he's also known as Herod Antipas, and he's the son of Herod the Great. Herod the Great was the villain of the Christmas story that we learn about in Matthew chapter 2, the one who the wise men came and

visited, and then he goes and gets paranoid and has all the babies under two years old—all the baby boys under two years old—killed in Bethlehem and the surrounding region. That's Herod Antipas's dad.

Now the Herods—because Herod the Great named a lot of his kids Herod—the Herods were descendants of Esau. And they actually were forced to convert to Judaism about 55 years before Herod the Great was born. And so, that's important because that means they weren't part of David's royal bloodline. They were not descendants of David. And so, they were merely placeholders until the true King would arrive. And with that came a sense of paranoia that they were not legitimate, and a fear of what might happen. And so Herod the Great not only passed down his name to his son Herod Antipas—our Herod—but he also passed down that paranoia. He passed down his fear of man to his son as well.

So Herod in our story, he was a ruler under Rome. He ruled over Galilee and Perea as kind of a puppet ruler. And at the time, Jesus was ministering in Galilee. So naturally, the stories of Jesus' miraculous power and his works that he was doing reached the palace and Herod hears about these things. And when he hears about them, he doesn't think, "Oh great, the Messiah has come." No. No, instead, his fear and his guilty conscience about something begins to conjure up a nightmare. He imagines a scene from *The Walking Dead*. He tells his servants, "This is John the Baptist. He has been raised from the dead!"

Now that's a wild conclusion to jump to, right? Like, why would a powerful king think that a zombie prophet is haunting him? Well, to understand that, we have to go back in time. And that's what Matthew gives us. From verse 3 onward, we have a flashback that explains why in the world he's thinking this way.

The text tells us that Herod had seized John because of Herodias. Now, some of you... some of you married into normal families. Right? Everyone's got their issues... be married into normal families. Some of you married into crazy families. And you experience it like on the holidays and stuff. But no matter how dysfunctional and crazy your family is, it's not as wild as Herod's. I have a family tree up here that shows some of the ridiculousness.

Herod the Great, he's up top. He's the one tried to kill baby Jesus. He had lots of wives. And one of his sons, Herod Philip married Herodias. These names get confusing. She was the daughter of his own brother Aristobulus. So Philip married his niece. Together they had a daughter named Salome. Well, the main character in our story, Herod Antipas, he went to visit his brother Philip in Rome. And while he was there, he got to know Herodias, he seduced her, and they came up with a plan like, "Hey, we're both going to leave our spouses and we're going to get together." So Antipas left his wife, Herodias leaves Philip, the private citizen, to marry Herod Antipas, the ruler—which is probably a power grab there. And this means that Antipas not only stole his brother's wife, but he also stole his own niece. And then Salome, the girl who dances at the party, she is technically Antipas's step-daughter and niece. This is a family that's full of pride and power and incest. It's a dysfunctional web, and it's much crazier than your family. And that's what's going on here.

And Matthew, as he's recounting this story for us, he alludes to this drama and throws some shade. He says in verse 3 that Herodias is "his brother Philip's wife." He says this is his brother Philip's wife. That's pretty cold. Now technically at this point in the story, Herod Antipas was married to Herodias. But in the eyes of God, that divorce was not legitimate. His brother Philip was still alive, so he can't marry this woman. And so he calls her out. He says, "This is his brother Philip's wife." That's pretty cold.

Now, everyone at the time would have known this, would have whispered about it, but only John was bold enough to say something. And so John the Baptist, ever the bold one, he looks at the most powerful couple in the region and he says, "This is not lawful. It's not right for you to have her." And he puts him on blast.

So Herod and Herodias, they don't like this. They're feeling convicted. They don't want to hear this. And so they throw John in prison to silence the noise. And this outcome would have been predictable, right? Back in Matthew 10, we heard that Jesus, as he was telling his disciples about the mission, he said, "Hey, listen, I'm sending you out as sheep amongst wolves. It's going to be dangerous out there. When you reflect my kingdom and you preach my kingdom, expect that the darkness is not going to like it. They're going to reject the light. And sometimes they're going to try to snuff out the light." And that's what's happening here. They tried to snuff out the light and they put John in prison. They throw him in for the sake of Herodias. She was angry. She couldn't handle the conviction that the law brought through John, and so she tried to silence it.

And Herod, the text says, he actually wanted to, at this point, put John to death. He wanted him dead because the easiest way to stop feeling guilty about your sin is to kill the voice of conviction. But he didn't do it. Why? The text says that he feared the people. He was terrified of the crowds in verse 5. You see, the people believed that John was a prophet, that he was a holy man who spoke on behalf of God. And so Herod was paralyzed by the thought: "If I kill him... I need to get rid of this guy, but what will the people think of me? Will they turn on me? They won't like me anymore. They won't respect me anymore as ruler."

And so you have this ironic picture: Herod is the King. He's the most powerful man in the region. He has the sword. Yet he is completely controlled by the opinions of a crowd that has no weapons and no power at all. And so he thinks, "Well, I can manage the situation." He listens to Herodias, and he puts her... puts John in jail.

But then in verse 6, he walks right into a trap of his own making. We find ourselves in verse 6 at Herod's birthday party. You can imagine a large crowd with VIP guests and music and dancing and an abundance of food and alcohol. History tells us that Herod's birthday parties were extravagant. They were lavish. They were known for their wild indulgence. And for a man who feared the people, this type of party was calculated. You see, the best way to control the opinions of others and maintain their approval is to impress them. To show off his wealth and his extravagance. And so this party was calculated.

And then the entertainment begins. The daughter of Herodias—Herod's own step-daughter and niece—comes out and begins to dance. Commentators say that she was likely between 12 and 14 years old. And when you mix excessive alcohol, a heavy pour of pride, a dash of the fear of man, and you shake it up, you have a deadly cocktail. And Herod is drinking it down. And it enflamed his lustful heart in a very sick circumstance where his niece is dancing. And so, as she's dancing, he's pleased, the text says. And he looks up and he says, "Ask whatever you wish, and I'll give it to you." He makes this arrogant, foolish promise.

And he didn't have to do this. He didn't have to pay her. He was king. Why did he say that? Why did he make this type of promise? He's showing off. Now he's practically shouting to the room like, "Look, look how great I am! Look how wealthy I am! I can give away up to half my kingdom," Mark's account says. "And it doesn't even impact me. I don't feel it." He's trying to impress them. He wants to look good. But he doesn't realize the mistake that he is making.

Proverbs 29:25 says that the fear of man lays a snare. And that's exactly what's happening here. He fears his VIP guests. He needs to be seen as great in their eyes. And so he makes this foolish pronouncement. He's backed himself into a corner and is about to be forced to make a decision that will haunt him for the rest of his life. He's trapped by his fear of man.

Salome, the girl that was dancing, she goes runs to her mother with the news about this offer from the king. And Herodias, she's already exploited her own daughter, and now she's about to collect the payment. She says... the king said we can get whatever we want. Think about the opportunity here. Herodias, she had basically a blank check from the king. She could have asked for jewels, for she could have asked for a palace, she could have asked for anything. But instead, she asks for a head. She is so bitter, so consumed by the need for revenge, that she wastes a blank check on a grudge. And she sends her daughter back to the party to make the gruesome request.

The girl runs in and stands before Herod and says, "I talked to my mom and we decided that we want the head of John the Baptist. Give us his head." The music stops. The silence fills the room. And all eyes turn to Herod. What's he going to do now? How is he going to respond to this request?

Verse 9 tells us that he was sorry. He was sorry. His conscience kicks in. He knew that John was a holy man. And his internal spirit starts screaming, "This is not right! Don't do this! Don't listen to her request. You don't have to do this." But then he looks at his guests. He weighed the life of a prophet against the opinions of the people. And they would mock him if he went back on his word. They would think that he was weak. Now he could have broken his vow. Like, two wrongs don't make a right. He was king after all, he could have done what he wanted. I mean, aren't aren't politicians required to make promises that they don't deliver on? That's just like part of the job description. But verse 9 says "because of his oaths and his guests." Because of his oaths and his guests. Because of his pride and the fear of man, he suppressed his grief to save his reputation. He chose the guests over the prophet, and he gave the command.

He sent the executioner to the prison. And then the story makes this gruesome turn. They brought the head of John the Baptist on a platter and gave it to the girl, and she carried it to her mother. We live in a world filled with violence and evil, and so we can be desensitized to evil when we see it or read it. But don't miss how horrific this really is. Like Paul... or Paul... John just had his head chopped off. He he he this would have still been like warm. And there would have been blood. And it was put on a platter and given to this young girl to carry as a reward for her provocative dance to her mom. And she would have been pleased by this. Like this is pure evil. This is not normal. This is not the way things should be. But this is what happens when a society, when a community does not fear God. Evil is normalized, wickedness is rewarded, and the next generation pays the price.

And then the story ends with a funeral. John's disciples come and they collect the body and they take it and bury it. John lost his head, but he did not lose his soul. His voice was silenced, but his message survived. And his disciples did exactly what he would have wanted them to do. They follow the path that the forerunner laid out and they walk and find the Messiah. And then the story ends. Curtains close.

So what in the world do we do with that? How is Matthew trying to disciple us through through this story? Like you read this in your quiet time and you finish, you close it and you're like, "Well, there's that." What in the world do we do with this?

Well, I think if we grabbed coffee with Matthew and asked him like, "Hey Matt, you know, like... that's kind of a weird story. Why why did you include this? Why did you give us so much details about Herod and everything that was going on there? How are you trying to shape us through this?" I think he would say something like this: "In in a broader section in the gospel that he's been writing and crafting... a broader section about the reception and rejection of Jesus, about those who believe in him and those who are against him... we have in this story like two concrete examples of both. We have John who believed Jesus's message, and we have Herod who rejected Jesus's message. And what set them apart? What made them different? Well John feared God. And though he was a prisoner, he was actually free. But Herod, he feared man. And though he was technically free, he was actually a slave. And and and my intention in giving you this story is that you would see the dangers of fearing man like Herod, and you would grow in fearing God like John so that you too would be truly free." I think he would say something like that. That or don't chop people's heads off.

He wants to shape us. And so for the rest of the time, I want to talk about the fear of man. What it is, why it's dangerous, and then what we can do about it if you happen to struggle with it like I do.

All right, so what is it? What what is the fear of man? Well in scripture, we find a lot of contrasting pairs. A lot of concepts like light and darkness, old and new, wisdom and foolishness, faith, unbelief, and so on. A lot of contrasting pairs that that when you take them and hold them up next to each other, we better understand both. They shed light on one another. And so to understand the fear of man, it helps to hold up next to it its contrasting pair, the fear of God.

And if I can make it as simple as possible... I spent a lot of time thinking about this... if I can make it as simple as possible, to fear God is to take Him seriously and respond accordingly. To fear God is to take God seriously and respond accordingly. We must take his character seriously. That that he is a holy and just God, a consuming fire. And then we respond accordingly with fear and trembling before him as sinful people deserving of judgment. We take it seriously that he is the sovereign, all-powerful Creator who can destroy both body and soul. And we respond accordingly to that by bowing before him in reverent, wholehearted devotion as weak, finite, dependent creatures. But we take it seriously as well though that that he is loving, gracious, and merciful, abounding in steadfast love. And so we respond accordingly to that by drawing near to him through Jesus Christ by faith in humble adoration of him, knowing that the safest place to be is right next to him and not away from him. And we fear leaving him. Knowing that with him there is kindness, but apart from him there is severity, as Romans 11:22 says. We draw near to him. And we fear ever leaving him. We take his character seriously. But we also take his commands seriously. That what he says is good is actually good, and what he says is evil is actually evil. That as our wise, faithful, and righteous Maker, he recreated us to flourish according to his designs. And that to go against his designs is actually to live to our own detriment and destruction and deserving of punishment. We take that seriously. That as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:10, that one day we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, and our lives will be judged comprehensively. And we take seriously what James says that faith without works is dead. We take it seriously that his commands are not a burden, but a blessing for us and for our good, as Deuteronomy 10:12 and 13 says. "And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? But to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord, which I am commanding you today for your good." We take that seriously.

To fear God is to take him seriously, his character and his commands, and then respond accordingly. To know who he is, to know that he is present, and then to live like it. That is to fear God.

So then, if we take that, the fear of God, and we hold it up next to the fear of man, we could say that to fear man is to take God lightly. It's to make people more important than God. To replace God with with people and take them more seriously than God. Author Ed Welch says it's it's when people become big and God becomes small. We replace God with people.

And so it looks like misplaced trust. When people are big and God is small, we trust in man for safety and security and significance. Notice what Proverbs 29:25 says. I think we have this up there. "The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe." See the contrast between the fear of man and trusting in the Lord and finding security in him? When when we fear man, we're misplacing trust. We're trusting in in people for security and safety and significance. The fear of man is misplaced trust. It's also misplaced reverence. When people are big and God is small, we tremble before men. What do they think? What do they say? What can they possibly do to me? Rather than revering the sovereign God of the universe to whom we are accountable. Matthew 10, "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both body and soul in hell." Misplaced reverence. It's also

misplaced obedience. When people are big and God is small, we are easily swayed by others' opinions and do what they want and obey their voice, not God. 1 Samuel 15, Saul speaking here, "I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, and I feared the people and obeyed their voice." Rather than obeying God, I'm obeying the voice of men and their opinions and what they think. The fear of man is misplaced glory. When people are big and God is small, we we compromise on our convictions in order to maintain a reputation before others and earn their praise so we can be popular. John 12:42 and 43. This is speaking about people who leaders who who learned about Jesus, believed him, but ended up rejecting him. "Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in Jesus, but for the fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God." And lastly, it's misplaced approval. When people are big and God is small, we live for the approval of others. We need their affirmation. We need to to please people and not God. Galatians 1:10, "For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ."

The fear of man is when we take people seriously and not God. When people are big and God is small. And that was Herod's problem. He let his wife pressure him into jailing John. He he let the crowds control him. He feared the people, the text said. He he made this arrogant vow to impress his VIP guests, and then he executed a prophet because he was worried about losing his approval rating. He feared man. And Herod probably didn't fear physical harm, right? He was a ruler with Rome on his side. But he still feared man, as the text says. And this story gives us a glimpse of how what happens when when people are big and God is small and it controlled Herod. And if we're honest, we are like Herod as well in our own unique ways. We all fear man.

It's the student who makes fun of a classmate just to be seen as funny and get the other kids to like her. It's the employee who knows their boss is cutting ethical corners, but won't speak up for fear of losing their job or with the desire to save face. It's the parent who refuses to discipline their child because they want their kid to like them more than they want their kid to be like Jesus. It's the friend that struggles to say no and is constantly overcommitted because they need to be needed by people. It's the person who won't speak up about Jesus because of the fear of a little bit of rejection and embarrassment is worse than that person's eternal damnation. It's the pastor who often worries about what his members think about him and is discouraged. And instead of taking that emptiness to the Lord, he brings a insecurity home and expects his wife to fill his cup. To constantly encourage him, to validate him, to approve of him, to make him feel significant again. And when she doesn't, he pulls away relationally.

In every one of these moments, people are big and God is small. And Proverbs warns us that it is a snare. It's a trap. It's dangerous. Why? Well if we just look at Herod's life, we can see exactly why it's dangerous. How it it destroys a soul.

First, it silences the voice of truth. The fear of man silences the voice of truth. John was a prophet of God. He spoke on behalf of God to the people of God. His words were strong, they were sharp, but they were true. He was bringing the law to bear on the community around him. And when he spoke up about Herod's message, he he was boldly saying, "You know, that's not

lawful. That's not according to God's designs. That's not good." You see, the law is a straight line that exposes just how crooked we are. And for those with ears to hear that voice, it's a call to repentance and faith. To recognize just how messed up we are and how much we need a Savior. But Herod didn't listen to that. He silenced the voice of truth. And when God is big and when people are big and God is small, the voice of truth it gets silenced. It gets drowned out by the voices of others and their opinions. When we need the approval and validation and praise of others, we conform ourselves to the world rather than the word. The fear of man causes us to silence the voice of truth so we don't feel conviction. And it's dangerous.

It also enslaves us to others. The paradox in this story, as I said earlier, is that John was a prisoner, but because he feared God, he was truly free. But Herod was a king and he was free, but he was actually a slave. He was a slave to not only to his sinful passions, the lusts of his flesh where he keeps making foolish decisions and digging a deeper hole for himself. But he's also a slave to other people. He was controlled by their opinions and what they thought about him. The fear of man enslaves us. We're constantly worried about what others think and what they say and what they could possibly do to us. That controls us. I can't say what I should say because they might reject me. You're controlled by them. I can't do what is right because they might make fun of me. I'm controlled by them. I'm not happy because I need their affirmation and approval. I'm enslaved by them. As creatures, we are all serving something or someone. We are all slaves. And the question is, who is your master? Because he who is most free is slave to a good master. The fear of man enslaves us to people and that ends in death. But the fear of God enslaves us to a good Master who can give us life. Who is your master? Choose this day whom you will serve.

And then lastly, fear of man is dangerous because it makes us dangerous. It makes us dangerous. When you fear man, you are unpredictable. If your compass is constantly "What do people think? What might they do? What might they say about me?"—not "What does God think?"—then your direction changes every time the room changes. If the crowd says peace, then you bring peace. But if the crowd says kill, then you kill. Because you have to do what they say. You can't be a faithful parent or a faithful spouse or a faithful friend if you fear man. Because the moment that the pressure is turned up, you're going to sacrifice them to save yourself. Herod sacrificed the life of a prophet just to save his own pride. And we do the same thing. We sacrifice others by cutting them down in order to look good. We sacrifice our kids in the long run to get them to like us in the short run. We use others to fill our empty love cups. We let people run off cliffs towards an eternal hell just so that we can feel good about ourselves in the here and now and avoid embarrassment. The fear of man might present itself as someone is being very nice, but it's dangerous. It leads us to compromising anything and anyone, even the people we love, in order to get their praise and their approval and to keep the applause going. Fear of man makes us dangerous because we use people and exploit them and ultimately will turn on them in order to get the praise that we desire. Fear of man is dangerous, church. So what can we do about it?

One, we need to examine our hearts. We need to examine our hearts. I doubt Herod would have said, "I, you know, I really struggle with the fear of man. I should work on that." No, it took Matthew pointing it out and just us having an objective perspective to see the fear of man

controlling his life. And we need to examine our hearts so we don't go on deceiving ourselves and being enslaved to others. Ask the Lord to search your hearts. Psalm 139 says, "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!" Ask God to search your hearts. And then ask yourself some hard questions. How am I looking to others to give me what only God can give me? Uh how do I change my behavior depending on who's in the room? If you go to [fellowshiplouisville.org/notes](http://fellowshiplouisville.org/notes), I threw a PDF up there this morning. Uh has a whole bunch of question diagnostic questions, different areas you can think through as it relates to fear of man. But examine your hearts because we are so easily deceived.

And after you do that, then pray your fears. Pray your fears. Ask God to reveal those areas and then bring them to him. Psalm 56, 3 and 4, "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I shall trust. I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?" Psalm 86, "Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name." God, my heart's all over the place. I'm fearing people left and right. Would you would you unite it to fear you and you alone? Imagine a child running into the room, the parent of his parents at night because she's she's scared. Like we have that kind of access to our Father. He wants us to come to him when we fear man. Pray your fears.

Then behold your God. Behold your God. there aren't many people who loves snakes. Uh if you like snakes, think of another terrifying creature in this example. But imagine you you're standing there and you turn around and the most the biggest, nastiest, scariest snake is at your feet. And you just freeze. You're terrified of that snake, right? But then you look up and it turns out you're actually standing in the middle of 265 during rush hour and traffic is just flying by. At that moment, which is more dangerous? That snake that you scared of or the semi-truck that's coming at you at 70 miles an hour? The truck, right? That gives us some perspective on the fear of man versus the fear of God. People can be scary. Like we want people to like us. Like that that's a constant thing that we're going to struggle with in this life. But if we look up and see the semi-truck of who God is and behold him, it's going to give us perspective on these snakes. We need to behold our God. The reformers had a practice called living *Coram Deo*. Again, one of those Latin things makes you sound smart. Living before the face of God. That I think would be helpful for us. It's the practice of of living your entire life, whether you're changing diapers or taking out the trash or sitting in a boardroom or hanging out with friends, living your whole life conscious of the fact that a holy, righteous, and pure God is present with you right now. Mindful of that. Being mindful of that will help you take God seriously and live accordingly. Practice living in the presence of God. Behold him.

And then finally, trust your Savior. Trust your Savior. We don't cure the fear of man by just trying harder. We must look to Jesus. Isaiah 11 tells us that when the Messiah comes, he he will have the Spirit of the fear of the Lord resting on him. And that's exactly who Jesus was. In the gospels, we see that Jesus didn't care about the opinions of others. That he wasn't swayed by their appearances. In the in the face of Herod and Pilate and the screaming crowds, Jesus never wavered. He feared God perfectly. His delight was in the fear of the Lord. And the good news of the gospel is that by faith in him, his righteousness is credited to our account, including his perfect life lived fearing God. And not only that, but then he gives that same Spirit to us.

Look at the new covenant promise of Jeremiah 32. He says, "I will make with them an everlasting covenant... And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me." Do you hear that promise? "I will put the fear of me in their hearts." We don't have to manufacture this on our own. New covenant promises that he gives us his Spirit and produces in us that which is pleasing to him. And so we can work out our salvation with fear and trembling because he is at work in us, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. He's given us his Spirit. And by his grace, we can walk in the fear of God. As we sing in Amazing Grace, "Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved." Grace teaches us the true fear of God because it draws us near to him and says, "I don't ever want to leave your side." And then grace helps us conquer lesser fears.

So church, do you want to overcome the fear of man? Do do you see the dangers of a life lived fearing man, controlled by man? Do you want to break those chains? I know I do. It's such a struggle. And it will be a lifelong battle, but it's worth the fight. But I believe that if if you regularly examine your hearts, if you pray your fears, if if you behold your God and trust your Savior, you will be truly free. Even if you get your head chopped off.