

Introduction:

- A. Illus.: One day this week, in one of the big corporate buildings around here, in one department, some on the team were surfing the web for a few minutes. Others were laughing over their office pool picks for the Oscars. And some were chatting, leaning on the tops of their cubical walls. Their manager got an angry email from the boss. Did he know that other departments had walked through the department, jotting this behavior down—ammo when it came down to deciding who is dispensable? Did he know that on Friday 75 people in that building would be walked out of the building and out of their jobs? Did they know that this was no time to be goofing around?

That manager, a Christian, is sad and anxious. There are no “routine meetings” with a boss any more. You always wonder if there will be bad news on the other side of that door. He hates going to work. And if he does manage to keep his job, he has survivor’s guilt. He told his son he couldn’t help him out with a spring break trip; better save every penny. Oh, and his wife has been asked to write up a paper justifying her position at work.

- B. Standing in these tough times is like standing in the surf when a storm is out at sea. The sky is darkening, and the breakers come pounding in on us, nearly knocking us off our feet. But the real danger is the undertow—the surge beneath the surface that catches your feet and pulls you out to sea. The undertow of these days is a leaden sense of anxiety, a kind of brittleness in our relationships, a nervous restlessness, a national ‘down’. Laughing, spending, planning, relaxing—they all seem somehow out of place when people are being walked out of their office buildings, when those who do have jobs are working twice as hard and maybe for less pay, and when there are foreclosures right on our streets.
- C. I’d like you to open your Bibles to 1 Peter 3. Peter was writing to Christians who were being persecuted—that is why *they* were afraid. That is not why *we’re* afraid, but the godly counsel he gave them is perfect for us today. I pick it up in the middle of **v.14**: *“Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.” But in your hearts set apart 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...* **In frightening times, God intends Christians to enjoy a hope so fearless that it inevitably attracts attention.**

I. THE ANTIDOTE TO FEAR IS TO “SET APART CHRIST AS LORD IN OUR HEARTS”

- A. Fear is a disease of the soul. It takes away your spiritual health like an infection. Fear comes in many forms. Sometimes it is vividly clear: *“If I lose my job I won’t be able to support my family.”* And sometimes it is nebulous—dark and looming, like a sinister fog at night. It is the inward accumulation of all kinds of anxieties that lurk in our subconscious and come out in our dreams—or our insomnia. Illus.: I was reading the paper the other morning when I remembered a fragment of a dream from the night before. I was frantically trying to call 911 but the phone was broken. I don’t know why I was calling but it surely wasn’t good. Fear is like that sometimes, especially in these anxious days.
- B. But there is a spiritual antibiotic for fear. A spiritual medicine. You may have to take several applications, like those antibiotic packs the doctor gives us—but it is a wonder drug for fear. Peter tells us what it is here in **v.15**: *“Do not be frightened. But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.”* That’s the medicine. He got this remedy from old Dr. Isaiah, in **Isaiah 8:11-14a**... Isaiah said, *“The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy.”* Peter restates that in **v.15**: *“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.”* The Greek word Peter chose here could be translated, *“make holy”*—*“make Christ holy in your hearts.”* The word *holy* means *set apart*.

Fear displaces Jesus Christ as the Lord in our hearts. The thing we fear becomes bigger and stronger than Jesus in our hearts, even when we don’t want that to happen. So this verse is saying, *“To heal*

your fear, build a sacred altar to Christ in the center of your life where you lay all your fears, one by one, beneath his scepter.”

- C. So whether our fear is vivid or vague, how do we go about taking this medicine? How do we set apart Christ as Lord in our hearts? In the verses right around this verse, I notice three evidences that Christ is Lord. Simply meditating on these three great truths about Christ is medicine, whether our fears are vivid or vague.
1. Christ is Lord because he brought us to God by dying on the cross – v.18a... When I focus on that, I remember that I'm really good with God. He loves me as his son or daughter; he is on my side; I'm forgiven. I think of Rom. 8:31, *“If God is for us, who can be against us?”* If God gave up his own Son for us *“will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”*
 2. Christ is Lord because he rose from the dead and reigns over all – v.18b-22... (I don't have time to explain this difficult section, but I did address it another sermon which I'd be happy to send you upon request. 8-7-05) For now, the thing that stands out here is that Jesus is Lord because he lives and reigns forever. It says he was *“made alive by the Spirit.”* He gave that Spirit-life to us when we were born again, so death cannot hurt me, no matter what form death takes. He has carried me, like Noah in the ark, across the dark waters of death and set me safe, even now, on the other side of death. So whatever dying experience I have now, this I know: **Jesus has given me life that no one and nothing can take from me.**
 3. For the third evidence that Christ is Lord, go up to **v.12**, a quote from Psalm 34... Christ is Lord because he promises to watch over us and to hear our prayers. Jesus is Lord because he can meet all your needs out of his riches in glory, and doesn't need your company or your pension plan to do it. You are not a statistic in the unemployment rate. God knows your name. He is looking at you, listening to you, loving you.
- D. Working those realities into our hearts may take some time in prayer, Bible study, Christian fellowship and encouragement, but those are the things we focus on till the swelling of our fears goes down. And now what do we have? Hope! When Christ is set apart as Lord in our hearts, even when fearful things are happening, we have hope. Understand that I don't mean optimism. I don't mean we become “glass-half-full” people. I don't mean we just look on the bright side. We have hope because we have set apart Jesus as Lord, and we trust him, even if life hurts.
- E. For most of us, for most of our lives, our Christian hope has been like a second car in the family. We had our health, our jobs, our savings, insurance and Social Security on one side of the garage and that was the vehicle we depended on. Our Christian hope was the back-up car—older, a little rusty and needing a little work, but serviceable in a pinch, for short trips. Fact is, we didn't really know just how far our Christian hope would actually get us if we *had* to depend on it. Illus.: The first Sunday after Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, the pastor in one church there said, *“We used to sing Jesus was all we need, now he's all we've got.”* [Chicago Tribune, 9/19/05] Now God may be forcing us to depend on him alone, as we should've all along.

II. CHRISTIAN HOPE IN FRIGHTENING TIMES WILL ATTRACT ATTENTION. WHEN IT DOES, BE READY TO EXPLAIN YOURSELF. (3:15)

- A. This is a sermon about sharing our faith. This text is tailor-made for us because it is about explaining our hope when fear is what people expect. Christians, this is our time! When times are scary, this is when we can shine. We must live so that our Christian hope shows! Peter wrote to Christians who were being persecuted for their faith (talk about a reason to be afraid!), but he knew that if they really revered Jesus as Lord, they would have a hope that would puzzle the pagans who watched them. Illus.: Greg Athnos, who will be our guest in a month, told me that church historians believe that for every Christian martyred in ancient Rome, ten more gave their lives to Christ, even with death awaiting them. That is what should happen when Christians lose our jobs or our savings or our health.

- B. Hope behaves differently than fear. This passage talks a lot about good *behavior*. **V.13, 16-17...** (*do good... good behavior... doing good*—all in the face of persecution). **Fear behaves badly.** We're beginning to see it in our culture. Fear is selfish, grasping, insulting, angry. Did you see that TV analyst ranting from the floor of the Chicago Board of Trade this week? If we are going to live out our hope, we need each other to do it well. He describes the good behavior he has in mind back in **3:8-9...** That's what hope looks like in a church. That's how hope behaves. **If we are to be people of shining hope in these dark days, we must do it together.** We need to talk together after church, pray with each other, eat with each other, call each other or email to see how we're all doing with this. **Hope needs help from the Body of Christ.**
- C. V.15 tells us to *"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have."* We don't have to be ready to answer every difficult question a skeptic can throw at us but we do need to be ready to explain at a moment's notice why in the world we have hope. And if you have *"set apart Christ as Lord in your heart,"* then you really are ready.
- Imagine you're talking to someone at the office whose worried about layoffs. You might say, *"You know, that prospect makes me nervous, too, but can I tell you about why I am not afraid—why I have hope?"* And you restate what we talked about a few minutes ago.
1. I have hope because I'm close to God, thanks to Jesus. Jesus died so that I could come to God. I know that God has forgiven my sin. I know that God loves me. I know that he is with me and will never let me go.
 2. I have hope because I'm not afraid of death, no matter how it comes at me. Jesus gave me new life. I know I will go to heaven, but that's not all. I have a new kind of life right now. No pink slip or bank statement or doctor's report can take it away.
 3. I have hope because I know that God watches over me and listens to my prayers. He has promised never to leave me. He has promised to meet all my needs. He has promised to give me peace inside even when things are scary. The Bible tells me that God will meet all my needs, so I am not afraid. That's why I have hope.
- D. You can do this! You can bring your fears to the Lord Jesus and find a deep, living hope. We'll help each other live like hope-filled people. You can go out and put your hope on display among the frightened people around us. And when you get the opportunity, you can tell another person why in this world you have hope. **You can do this!**

Conclusion

Illus.: I heard an interview on NPR the other morning with Alexandra Chauron, a psychic in Washington State. She said business is so good that she's been able to raise her rates from \$2.22 to \$4.95 per minute. She says its because she gives people hope. She never predicts someone will lose their job. She tries to be positive. We can do better than that—much better—and we won't charge five bucks a minute.

The people around us are worried. There's an undertow of fear, and fear often behaves badly. I know this sounds strange, but **by God's grace, it may get worse.** Bad enough to even get the attention of people on the North Shore. And when that happens we must be ready. Jump on every opportunity to tell others about the hope the Lord Jesus Christ has given you.

Illus.: My brother Larry works for a big company in the area where things are pretty dicey. He also writes an occasional column for our hometown paper back in South Dakota, the *Britton Journal*. Yesterday he sent me the column he is submitting for this week. It is about the layoffs at his job, and about the loss of money he has carefully invested. But he also takes the opportunity given him to speak of his hope. Let me read a little of this:

People say the economy will ultimately recover, and I hope it does, but I doubt I will ever recover the belief that money is the best bet for security...

So I come back to my faith. What I know of faith was largely learned during my Britton days while attending Rose Hill Free Church. My parents (training me for a future of commuting) religiously drove out there so that I would be grounded in the greatest fundamental truths. Truths I consistently saw my parents exemplify; living out their faith in the face of every day. And now I read this Bible verse, *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.”* So while every other thing that offers the illusion of security is crumbling around me, I realize anew that this simple set of words with its clear challenge and profound promise is the one true key to ultimate security.