

# Fear 2

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Numbers 14<sup>1-4</sup>/ Psalm 23

I wonder if you have any idea who this man is? A clue... he is Japanese. He is, in fact a Japanese soldier by the name of Shoichi Yokoi. Yokoi fought with his countrymen in Guam and then fled to a cave in 1944 when the tides of war began to change. Fearing for his life Shoichi went into hiding with 10 other men. Seven of the original ten eventually moved away. Only three remained in the region. Later these last three separated, but they visited each other until about 1964, when Yokoi found his two friends dead, apparently of starvation. Yokoi however remained hidden for a further 8 years until he was found in 1972. This last eight years he lived entirely alone living on frogs, rats, snails, shrimp, nuts, and mangoes. He had carried a pair of trousers and a jacket from a burlap like cloth made from tree bark. Yokoi said that he knew the war was over because of leaflets that were scattered throughout the jungles of Guam. But he was afraid that if he came out of hiding, he would be executed. Finally, two hunters came upon him and captured him and led him out of the jungle. On his return to Japan his first words were, "It is with much embarrassment that I have returned alive." The remark would become a popular saying in Japanese.

What made this man hide for 28 years? Why would someone do this? There are probably several answers but the major factor in this incredible story is one very powerful emotion – **fear!** Fear drove him to live, day after day for 28 years, by himself largely, hidden in a jungle. Fear robbed him of a future for 28 years and fear denied him almost any human company for that same time. I wonder what you fear?

What is your greatest fear? Fear of pain? Fear of being left alone? Fear of shame perhaps. Perhaps it is of losing your job, or of heights or of flying and how about confined spaces? How about fear of public speaking? This, in fact, turns out to be the most common and greatest fears according to one large survey. In order of terror the worst fears turn out to be

- 1.) Public Speaking or Humiliation
- 2.) Peer Rejection and
- 3.) Untimely Death.

Fascinating, isn't it? Death turns out only to be third in the list! What's going on there? Well if you're familiar with the Bible you probably wouldn't be surprised at this since it seems that fear of other humans has always been more of an issue for humans than fear of death which seems rather odd since other humans are do often the cause of death!

But let's go back quickly to what we said two weeks ago about fear. As we looked at the events around the first time the Israelites were led by God to enter the Promised Land we noted how much fear had to do with their bad choices. Encouraged by a bad report from 10 of the 12 spies sent to check out the land the people simply couldn't bring themselves to follow God's command and enter the land. They refused and dug their heels in. God threatens to do away with them but Moses intervenes and so the generation of adults who

refuse to follow God are left to walk in the desert for 40 years until a new group of adults are ready to have another go. We noted 3 things about fear.

1. Fear acts on our self-image, destroying it and ruining our relationship with God.
2. Fear shrinks our world to that of the known. Our futures become small, the possibilities and potential minimised.
3. Fear causes us to react disproportionately and irrationally and to turn one small mistake into an even great and more costly mistake.

Last time we noted that the first thing fear did was to reduce the Israelites view of themselves to something very small and insignificant. No longer did they see themselves as a people loved and protected by God or as a nation whom God Himself was leading and going before. Rather, they saw themselves as small and powerless and incapable.

**<sup>32</sup>“The land that we have gone through as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people that we saw in it are of great size.**

**<sup>33</sup>There we saw the Nephilim (the Anakites come from the Nephilim); and to ourselves we seemed like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.” (Num 13)**

Grasshoppers. This is what they became in their own sight. This is what fear does to us. It distorts a correct view of who we are. It robs us of confidence in God’s love and in what God can do in us and through us and it blinds us to the desire of God to lead us where we cannot go under our own steam.

And then fear robs us of our future – a future determined by God; a future desired by God. But if we will not enter that future God will not force us into it and fear acts to prevent us from choosing that future. This is what happened to Shoichi Yokoi. Fear prevented him from entering a peaceful and productive future once the war ended. So he hid for 28 years from a better future. He refused to even dip his toes into the pristine lake of world peace and he lived as though he were a wanted man; as though all around him was still hostile and still against him. We can do that to ourselves. We can create the very world we’re running from if we succumb to fear. As someone once said, **“Fear is that little darkroom where negatives are developed.”**

The question is, of course, what can we do about it? Most of us will have experienced that sinking feeling of knowing our inadequacy in the face of certain circumstances and of feeling terrified at the courses of action which appear open to us. How can we, in these situations, find a balanced and God honouring response?

The scriptures offer us a number of solutions and the first one begins with thanks giving. We are called to be a thanking people. Thanksgiving is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. We are they who thank God. The whole basis of praise and worship is, largely thanksgiving...

**<sup>1</sup>We give thanks to thee, O God; we give thanks; we call on thy name and recount thy wondrous deeds. (Ps 75)**

And from that praise extends not only a reminder of how good God is and how much God loves us but the basis for our involvement in God’s mission to the world.

**<sup>3</sup>With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. <sup>4</sup>And you will say in that day: Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known his deeds among the nations; proclaim that his name is exalted. (Is 12)**

So, as we give thanks we are reminded again of how much we are loved and we lead naturally to share that joy with the world. And this brings us back to the Bible. The Bible is a record of thanksgiving; it is a record of those who have given their lives to thanksgiving and it is full of thanksgiving. As we read it we too are led to give thanks and to join with all the saints who, down through the ages, have given their lives over to thanksgiving and who, in doing so, have resisted fear.

Something that naturally follows thanksgiving is confession and by confession I don't mean confessing our sins. The word 'confession' in the Bible has a much wider meaning. Rather it means 'saying the same thing as God says.' As we thank God we confess that He is who He is – the One who guides us truly and surely along paths of safety and surety. And in doing so we confirm our relationships with God again; we make God our Shepherd again – we gain sure footedness in our ways and we have confidence again in life.

When we say what God says we deny fear a voice – we fill up the space fear would normally take and we refuse to give fear an opportunity in our life.

This is exactly what the Psalmist expresses in that most wonderful Psalm which we are going to read together to finish with...

### **Psalm 23**

#### **The Divine Shepherd**

A Psalm of David.

- <sup>1</sup> The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
- <sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
he leads me beside still waters;
- <sup>3</sup> he restores my soul.  
He leads me in right paths  
for his name's sake.
- <sup>4</sup> Even though I walk through the darkest valley,  
I fear no evil;  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff—  
they comfort me.
- <sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies;  
you anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.
- <sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD  
my whole life long.