A Faith that Doesn't Flinch

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[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast, a podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang.! Thank you for joining us. I'm honored to be able to fill in this evening.

I know, Michael, you are even more upset because you are not in the pulpit. This is your last one that you have to suffer through, okay? And then you're back next Sunday morning, but we do get to continue in the Do Not Fear series or the Fear Not series.
And so I'm honored to be able to continue with us in that. And I've been thinking about my title as being a faith that doesn't flinch. And as I've ruminated over that over the past several weeks, I'm reminded, especially in basketball season, of a really iconic moment in sports history.
Many of you will remember this. You've seen clips of this, but Kobe Bryant's playing for the Lakers, and they're playing the Orlando Magic. Matt Barnes is playing for the Magic at the time, and they had just been called double technicals on both of those two players.
It was getting a little bit chippy, and it was starting to get out of control. Matt Barnes, for the Magic, was standing on the baseline, and he was about to do an inbound pass.
[1:23] And if you've seen this clip, it's great. Kobe's standing in front of him playing defense. Matt Barnes, just to be a little bit ornery, fakes a pass right at Kobe's face.

The ball comes right here. He's still holding like that, pulls it back. The ball is right here, and Kobe doesn't even blink. I love it. You can type in Kobe doesn't flinch, and all the videos will come up.
And I've been thinking about that mental picture in my mind as we've thought about and are thinking about not fearing, especially not flinching in the face of incredibly difficult circumstances or even in the face of death.
I remember Joey, when we were in one of our staff meetings, he was mentioning a particular saint who suffered well even to the end. And he said, that man stared death in the face and didn't flinch.
And so that has continued to come back to my mind as we think about a faith that doesn't flinch, a faith that doesn't fear. And so if you haven't found it yet, please turn to the first chapter of Revelation.
[2:31] The Revelation to John, the Apocalypse, is probably considered by many to be the most terrifying book of the Bible if you had to ask.

Truly the Greek word for Revelation, where we get our word apocalypse, has become synonymous in our modern times with total destruction, the catastrophic end of the world, global disaster, societal collapse.
And today when people hear this word, it garners images of nuclear war, asteroid impacts, global pandemics, environmental collapse and even zombie takeovers.
So dramatic are the events that unfold in John's Revelation that even some believers find them to be unsettling at best, terrifying at worst.
So much so that they'd rather just not think about this particular book at all. To be fair, the judgment being poured out on the earth and its inhabitants by a holy and righteous God is severe.
[3:41] You have famine and pestilence, wild animal attacks, hail and fire, and plagues of varying degrees that kill the masses. You add to this the final breaths of Satan and his regime, which manifest themselves in violent outbursts and mass carnage leading to the martyrdom of the tribulation saints.

When all of this is considered, the sight really is more horrific than anything that we can possibly imagine. So one would expect, as John receives this revelation, that he would be overcome with terror, right?
John was already in a dark place. He was riding as an old man at the very end of the first century. All of the disciples by this point were long gone. Paul was dead.

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John was exiled to an island called Patmos that most believe was serving as a Roman prison colony. It was located off the coast of modern-day Turkey, about 30 miles from Ephesus, where John is said to have spent and ministered the latter years of his life.
The emperor Domitian was persecuting the church, and John himself, having been banished on account of the word of God and of the testimony of Jesus, as it says here, was himself experiencing that persecution.
[5:02] He was riding to seven churches that were experiencing this persecution firsthand. These believers were characterized as having lost their first love and compromising, tolerant of sin, powerless.

It had been decades since John had last seen the ascended Christ, and here he is at the end of his life. He's alone on an island. His brother James, long gone.
All of his friends, long gone. So what is John's response to these pretty intense visions?
Would he ask to be removed from the vision? Would he avert his eyes because he cannot bear to see it? And for the most part, what we find is emotionless observation.
He looks at all of these incredible visions of God's judgment, and he doesn't flinch. He simply observed with a calm confidence, with phrases like, Then I looked, and then I saw.
[6:09] After this, I heard. You have a few exceptions. He wept, Revelation 5. Revelation 5, he marveled, Revelation 17, and then he fell down and worshipped, Revelation 22.

Other than those three incidents, for the most part, he's just reporting what he sees. So the question worth asking is, why?
Why was John such a calm observer? Because I feel that if we can answer this, it will help us to know and give us what we need to live a life that honors the command to fear not.
So what I hope to show is that a proper view of God in general, and a rich Christology in particular, fortifies our souls to not fear nor flinch.
So let's read in Revelation 1. I want to read verses 9 through 20. And provide us just a couple of headings for us to consider in our remaining time.
[7:12] I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

I was in spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.
Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands. And in the midst of the lampstands, one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest.
The hairs of his head were white like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace.
And his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars. From his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword. And his face was like the sun shining in full strength.
[8:26] When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me saying, Fear not, I am the first and the last and the living one.

I died and behold, I am alive forevermore. And I have the keys of death and Hades. Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.
As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.
So as we think about a faith that doesn't flinch, we're going to think under two headings. The first of which, a faith that doesn't flinch first trembles before a holy God.
A faith that doesn't flinch first trembles before a holy God. I believe that the most fearful human experience is to stand as sinners before a holy God.
[9:38] The overwhelming experience of John falling down as though one dead is really striking. Since he was the disciple most loved by Jesus, he was the one described as having a most intimate friendship with the Lord that leaned back on him during the Lord's Supper.

The one whom the Lord loved, he repeatedly refers to himself in his own gospel. And it was this Jesus that was now revealed to him in divine splendor.

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So what was different about the Jesus that John leaned against at the last supper versus the one that caused him to fall as though dead at his feet? What John describes in Revelation is a full revelation of the Christ that John got a glimpse of on the Mount of Transfiguration.
The accounts of which also describe Peter, James, and John as absolutely terrified. It is Jesus in these instances no longer veiled in flesh.
But not only that, he's describing the divine Son of God in all of his glory with very symbolic imagery. As he's about to fulfill his role as judge of the earth.
[10:53] It's a very purposeful description and depiction of Christ. Later you'll find John describing not in this way, but as a lamb standing as though it had been slain with seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

But in this instance, John sees Christ in all his holiness and as a judge. What we don't see here is John describing a mere resurrected rabbi, as one of commentaries I read mentioned.
No longer was his hair probably dark like the average Jewish man, but it was whitest wool. It was showing his purity, wisdom, and eternal existence. No longer are his eyes probably dark brown, but instead blazing like fire, symbolically representing his penetrating insight.
A sharp gaze that judges the churches with all omniscience and authority. No longer are his feet dirty from walking the streets of Galilee and Jerusalem, but are now burnished bronze, showing his complete strength and stability.
No longer is his hands wielding simple carpenter's tools, but they're holding seven stars that represent his sovereign control over the churches. No longer is his mouth parched from walking long distances in an arid countryside, but now spewing forth a double-edged sword symbolizing his divine judgment.
[12:22] And it's this vision of Christ that completely undoes John and destroys him. These descriptions are also rooted in rich biblical history.

They're not plucked from nowhere. So I want you to keep your finger here, but I want you to turn for just a moment to Daniel, and I want to show you just a couple of passages that would have been influencing John.
If you turn to Daniel chapter 7, you'll find that it sounds very similar to the description that John gives in Revelation chapter 1.
As you're finding that, I'll go ahead and start reading in verse 9. It says, As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. Ancient of Days being God the Father in this instance.
His clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool. His throne was fiery flames. Its wheels were burning fire. Verse 10, A stream of fire issued and came out from before him.
[13:32] A thousand of thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him, and the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened. Look at verse 13 and 14 of chapter 7.

I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven, there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him, and to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom, one that shall not be destroyed. Turn just a couple of pages over to chapter 10. And make note, beginning in verse 5, of these descriptions.
I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude.
And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, for the men who were with me did not see it, but a great trembling fell upon them, and they fled to hide themselves. So I was left alone.
[14:51] I saw this great vision, and no strength was left in me. My radiant appearance was fearfully changed, and I retained no strength. Then I heard the sound of his words, and as I heard the sound of his words, I fell on my face in a deep sleep with my face to the ground.

And behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. He said to me, O Daniel, man greatly loved, understand the words I speak to you and stand upright, for now I've been sent to you.

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And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling, and he said to me, Fear not, Daniel. From the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words.
These descriptions that John gives us in Revelation 1 should hearken the reader back to the descriptions of Daniel's vision. He was heavenly influenced by these.
Daniel's visions revealed that one like a son of man would have an everlasting kingdom, so it's no coincidence that the title Jesus most often used in reference to himself in the Gospels was Son of Man.
[15:59] Revelation describes how this Son of Man is revealed, how he judges, how he returns to establish his kingdom, on earth. And John's dramatic response as he falls down as one dead was not merely an obligatory cultural act of respect.

He immediately falls down. And this type of respect is not uncommon in Scripture for those who encounter the holiness of God. We see it in various places throughout the Old and New Testaments. But what typically accompanies these responses is an awareness of personal sinfulness.
You hear it many times, Depart from me, Lord. I'm a man of unclean lips. When Jesus was calling the disciples and they encountered his divinity for the first time, they said, Depart from me.
Right? I'm not worthy to be in your presence. Spurgeon says, The most spiritual and sanctified minds, when they fully perceive the majesty and holiness of God, are so greatly conscious of the great disproportion between themselves and the Lord, that they are humbled and filled with holy awe, even with dread and alarm.
I wonder how many Christians could be described as greatly conscious of the great disproportion between themselves and the Lord, or to be humbled and filled with awe. And I think that the problem is that many churches and believers in general have lost sight of God's majesty and His holiness.
[17:22] In doing so, they've made Him so much like us that we're almost indistinguishable. Christ is considered to be our bro, or He is a revolutionary worth admiring, or a model human for how to live life, or a good teacher.

But I feel like some are more concerned about making worship look like a pep rally and less like reverent worship. Don't hear me wrong.
Reverent worship should be appropriately joyful and celebratory. It should also, however, be solemn and somber at times as well. Unfortunately, churches like to throw around the name of Jesus, rejoice in who He is, yet have completely lost sight that He is the creator of the universe, that He was in the beginning with God, that He is God, that He is the first and the last, the beginning and the end, the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world, the one through whom the Father will judge the earth.
An accurate view of God must be recovered. When we see God accurately, we will have a more accurate view of ourselves, including our sinfulness, before a holy God.
So if we ever hope to have a faith that does not flinch in this life, we must first reckon with our greatest problem. our greatest problem is that apart from Christ, our sin has made us an enemy of God and Christ will judge the living and the dead.
[18:57] The proverbial storms of life, though real and though hard and difficult, are not our greatest problem. Our greatest problem is sin and sin destroys and it leads us to destruction and most importantly, it sets us in direct opposition with our Creator.

Romans 5.10 describes us in our fallen, unregenerate state as enemies of God. And here's what the Bible says about God's enemies. Psalm 68, verse 1, James 4.4 says, You adulterous people, do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?
Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 1 Corinthians 15.24 and 25 says, Then comes the end when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power for he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.
Hebrews 10.12 and 13. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.
So mankind's most fearful condition truly is to stand as a sinner before the Holy God and reckoned as an enemy of God.

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[20:38] Without a solution to this problem, we would have no hope in this lifetime or the next. So the question for us tonight is have you ever truly trembled before the Holy God?

It's one thing to enjoy the Bible on an intellectual level, but have you ever really considered your sin? It's entirely possible that there are some in this room who have never understood that their sin has made them an enemy of God.
They've never known a need of repentance or his forgiveness. For the believers in the room, do you have such a view of God's holiness that you take sin seriously in your life, that you seek to put it to death, that you fight it daily?
I feel that many churches today are hesitant to talk about sin because they're afraid to make people feel bad, but I would submit that without a deep biblical view of our sin, we can never appropriately rejoice and revel in the glorious work of Christ on the cross on our behalf.
If sin is viewed flippantly or it's altogether ignored, Christ's sacrifice loses all significance and meaning. So if you want to feel more in your worship, if you want to feel more gratitude, if you want to feel more joy or more peace or more anything, come to terms with how sinful you are and how much grace has been extended to you through Jesus Christ.
[22:07] Without it, there is no biblical Christian worship taking place without a consideration of sin. So that's our first heading.

Our greatest problem is sin and a faith that doesn't flinch first, must tremble before this holy God.
Secondly, a faith that doesn't flinch is made confident by grace.
A faith that doesn't flinch is made confident by grace. It says in our passage here, when I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead, but he laid his right hand on me, saying, fear not, for I am the first and the last.
The Lord Jesus extending his hand to comfort John is a picture of God's grace toward John in that moment. John had no fear or no need to fear the righteous judgment of Christ because he belongs to Christ.
In other words, John would have every reason to remain in his perpetual fearful state if he were not known by Christ nor had his sins forgiven by him.
[23:15] But because he was Christ, Christ told him he need not fear. Romans 5, 1, since we've been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

It goes on to say in verse 10 and 11, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his son, much more that now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.
John tells us in his gospel, whoever hears my word, this is Jesus speaking, and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.
First John, that we have, may have confidence for the day of judgment. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. So God's hand of grace extended toward John caused him to not fear the judgment to come.
However, I think it's also, I want to contend that this act of grace is what would cause him to be this stoic reporter that we would see in the rest of the book. The one who was able to truly not fear everything that was about to be revealed to him.
[24:20] He had already appropriately shown the amount of fear. The only time that he was needing to be fearful was standing before the holy righteous judge of the universe. And when Jesus extended grace to him in that moment, he was able to look at everything that was about to come down the path of history and not flinch and not fear because of Christ's authority.

It tells us here, it says, do not fear. Why? Because Jesus is the first and the last. This was a clear claim to his eternal deity.
And then he says that he was the living one. He died, behold, he is alive forevermore and because of that he holds the keys to death and our eternity.
Keys represent absolute authority. The one who holds the keys determines who comes in and who comes out. As we went to the juvenile detention center, especially when we were visiting on our pre-trip, myself, Olivia, JR, were being let in.
We go wait, they radio in, they're looking on cameras, whoever is behind the camera system is the one that controls the locks. Not even the person that we are with because if keys can be stolen from that person, then that creates problems.
[25:41] And so we go, we wait at a locked door, somebody radios, they say who's here, they look, confirm it on the camera, they unlock, they open that, door shuts, door locks behind them.

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We probably did that process four or five times until we got to our final location. I can guarantee I would not have gotten into that facility without the authorities giving me the approval to do so. And they also, when they're doing their job right, keep people inside the facility who do not need to be out. All authority has been given to whoever that is behind the camera system who's controlling all of the locks.
They have the keys and that is what Jesus is describing in this passage. He has the keys to death and eternity. The authority was given to him from the father by virtue of his resurrection.
So if you ever find yourself fearful of death or what comes after, remember that Jesus holds the keys. When you die, it will be by his decree. If you are his, he will guarantee your entrance to your eternal reward.
[26:46] He will not fail you. All authority is his. And the disciples knew this. Because of the resurrection, the disciples turned the world upside down, giving their lives to share the gospel, no longer hiding in the upper room, but preaching in the open streets.

All after and because they saw the resurrected Christ, they knew that his claim to ultimate authority had been verified and established because of the resurrection.
Revelation goes on in the second chapter, verse 10, it says, do not fear what you are about to suffer. It says, behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation.
Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. Be faithful unto death. Jesus is the one who holds the keys. Paul knew it too.
Romans 8, 34, and 35, who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died, more than that, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.
[27:56] It's that declaration of Jesus dying, who was raised, who's interceding for us, that leads him to say, who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

He goes on to say, no, in all of these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all of creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.
Lord, if we are Christ's, what have we to fear? If he has given us his grace and taken us from enemies to sons and daughters, what could we possibly fear in this life?
Paul says, what then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him, graciously give us all things?
So if you find yourself fearful when you turn on the news, remember the resurrected Christ, the judge of the earth, who died and is alive forevermore, who holds the keys to life and death, sits on his throne.
[29:23] If you find yourself fearful when you think about the uncertainty of your future, remember the resurrected Christ who appeared to John and revealed exactly the how the end will play out in accordance with his sovereign plan, if you find yourself fearful about anything, what then shall we say?

If God is for us, if God has extended his hand of grace to us and laid it upon us and said, fear not, I am the first and the last and the living one, I died, behold, I am alive forevermore and I have the keys of death and Hades.
If he has done that for us, whom shall we fear? Who can be against us? For he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, will he not also with him graciously give us all things?
Let the resurrected Christ fortify all of our hearts to have a faith that does not fear nor flinch no matter what may come.
Lord, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the example of John in his revelation to us that he appropriately fell down before you knowing that you are the only one whom we should fear.
[30:49] Especially as sinful people, we have no business entering into your presence unless we are covered by the perfect sacrifice of your son Jesus on our behalf.

But Lord, if we are yours in Christ, we can face anything that will come. And just as John looked down the hallways of the future to see everything that would unfold, many of which were terrifying sites, he stoically reported exactly what was going to happen because he knew the one that was

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going to carry it out and would bring it to its ultimate completion.
And so Lord, for us, as we look at any circumstance or anything that we face in this life, may we look at it in such a way that we do not fear and we do not flinch because behold, you are alive forevermore and you hold the keys.
You are on your throne. You have all authority and we submit our lives to you. May that fortify us even tonight. May it strengthen us as we go throughout this week.
May we live confident, fearless lives before you. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

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