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SERMON TITLE: The Answer for Fear
SCRIPTURE: Acts 17:1-15
DATE October 9, 2022
Online service at www.fpcd.org/live

Read also Isaiah 55:8-13

What if you had the secret to success; the way to a happy life. Would you share it with others? Apparently, many people do. Online there are hundreds, even thousands of people who share with others their secrets to happiness. Some embraced; sometimes they are refuted.

There's always resistance to good news.

But let's say you have discovered a great secret which has changed your life. You know how a plant unattended gets spindly and sparse? Or the lawn gets full of weeds and very little grass grows because it has not received lawn food? Sometimes our lives become spindly and sparse when our faith becomes distant to us, and we find ourselves doing things that we never thought we would do—indiscretions, addictions, foolish decisions.

To return to health, you have to find something that reinvigorates your life, just like fertilizers and weed control invigorates your lawn.

Perhaps you got sick of being emotionally bankrupt and so you sought something better. And you discovered love, peace, hope, reconciliation, better relationships, and a sense of purpose so you want to share your story. Even if people resist, you stick to your message because you discovered something that produces spiritual health; joy and peace; healing of relationships that have gone awry.

You have a "before" and "after" story.

Sometimes people do not believe you because they simply do not want to change (or they think you can't change!).

Paul thought he had faith but it had become distant. It devolved into anger, judgment, and rage as he resisted the message of Christ. He was a resister. Then he met Jesus Christ in person. And, he changed—"I've found the secret of life!" That spiritual "feeding" or "renewal" or "awakening" brought so much hope that he was compelled to tell others. Let's read about it.

READ Acts 17:1-15

Paul began telling his story with people he understood—the Jews. Do you share your faith with your friends or people who have some background in the church? He began with what they valued—the Scriptures. He knew the power of the Word.

God's message from Isaiah:

"I send [my Word] out, and it always produces fruit. It will accomplish all I want it to, and it will prosper everywhere I send it. You will live in joy and peace. The mountains and hills will burst into song, and the trees of the field will clap their hands! Where once there were thorns, cypress trees will grow. Where nettles grew, myrtles will sprout up. (55:11b-13)

The metaphor of rain producing food to feed us is to encourage you to think the same. When you share your testimony about Jesus, think of it as feeding someone spiritually who feels joyless or fearful or depressed or bankrupt giving them "the secret to a happy life."

Do you think of your faith as "the answer for fear or discouragement or spiritual bankruptcy?" **Life in Christ is to be abundant.**

I watched Queen Elizabeth's funeral. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, said that the Queen's number one wish was for people to leave her service with joy. She said, *Every funeral should end in happiness—and it shouldn't be long or boring either!* 😊 She wanted a service that lifted you to glory.

Archbishop Welby testified to the power of faith through the Queen's life. He talked to her before she died:

- ~ "I came away thinking there is someone who has no fear of death, has hope in the future, knows the rock on which she stands and that gives her strength."
- ~ Her attitude was "it's not about me, it's about what I have been called ... by God to do."¹

Anytime you stand up for God, you are going to have resistance. It's not about you! It's God's enemy!

Queen Elizabeth lived out her commitment that her whole life would be spent serving the British Commonwealth in the power of following Jesus first.²

¹ "Queen Had No Fear of Death, says archbishop of Canterbury," [https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/sep/09/queen-had-no-fear-of-death-](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/sep/09/queen-had-no-fear-of-death)

² See full sermon by Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby for Queen Elizabeth here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g1AqR9rCQ0M>, accessed

October 6, 2022. [says-archbishop-of-canterbury-justin-welby](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/sep/09/queen-had-no-fear-of-death-), accessed October 6, 2022.

The Archbishop pointed out that Jesus doesn't say how to follow but who to follow, and that is Him. In this case for Paul, it resulted in controversy.

Some were persuaded and followed. Others resisted.

Not only did they resist, but they chased him down. They chased down others who were even newly associated with him.

Paul's life was threatened.

Putting Jesus first is pretty hard.

Sharing our secret to happiness is costly.

You might be thinking, 'the Bible does not say anything about happiness!' But I assure you it does! It even says,

"God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven" (Matthew 5:11-12a).

Paul, Silas, Jason, and Timothy faced reversals when they talked about their secret to success. Before he embarked to Thessalonica, he had been in Philippi, where he had been arrested, beaten, and thrown in jail for his setting the girl with the spirit of divination free.

He and Silas were asked to leave the city.

Now here they were once again, with riots, turmoil, threats of treason, until they had to flee that city, too.

Was it worth it?

Is it not easier to keep our mouths shut?

There are many pressures that come against faith in Jesus Christ. Do you feel them? Do you stand up for what is righteous? Do you proclaim the success story you have found through Christ in you?

Here's what made it doable for Paul. He did not go alone. He had Silas and Luke who was writing this story; he had Timothy and Jason; he had some of the Jews from Thessalonica, and many God-fearing Greek men and quite a few prominent women, all of whom helped him to escape.

Then God worked in the hearts of the people of Berea who were more open-minded. They listened to the Word because

God sends it out, and it always produces fruit. We must remember that when we share it.

God promises: "It will accomplish all I want it to, and it will prosper everywhere I send it. *You will live in joy and peace.*"

"These events will bring great honor to the LORD's name; they will be an everlasting sign of his power and love."

Are you putting Jesus first and sharing your secret to happiness? Happiness is not necessarily ease or lack of fear; it is committing yourself to following Jesus first. Loving service is very rare, but by doing so, you will be remembered; you will live in joy and peace.

AMEN