



## **Standing Tall Against the Fear of Paralyzing “What Ifs”**

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### **Introduction:**

#### *THE “WHAT IFS”*

*We can easily get caught up in worrying when we allow the “what ifs” to dominate our thought life. “What if I try and it doesn't work out? What if I give and it's not appreciated? What if I stop doing this or that? What if I lose my job? What if I get hurt?” Often the “what ifs” are elusive attention distracters bent on drawing away your strength and energy. The time spent worrying about “what ifs” could be used experiencing the grand possibilities of “what can”!*

*Well-meaning people can also plant fear and doubt in your mind. For example, I've been flying a lot lately and it seems I continually hear, “What if the plane crashes?” I cannot let others' fears become mine. To do so, would cancel out the good that awaits me. When you realize and understand that life consists of God-controlled time and moments, you can be assured that your time is in His hand. Choosing to replace the “what ifs” with “what cans” makes your time well spent. – Gloria Thomas-Anderson*

This morning we are going to look at the fear of “what ifs.” Worry and fear are closely related. There are times when it is hard to determine where one stops and the other begins. Worry usually relates to what might happen in the future. What if my car breaks down? What if I get a serious illness? Jesus made a clear contrast between worry and exercising faith in a caring and compassionate God. Don't worry about tomorrow, were his words. There is enough to think about for today.

Three examples of “what ifs” from God's word:

### **I. Abraham's what if – Genesis 18**

- *Fear of what if response of God.* God can be trusted. God is faithful. He does not change.

To give you some background – In this chapter, we have the covenant and promise that God made to Abraham that he and Sarah were going to have a child. Nothing is too hard for God to do. No matter how old, or how barren, or how impossible things may appear in the natural, nothing is too hard for God. God promises Abraham that a year later he and Sarah would have a child. God promised Abraham that through this child, he would become a great and

powerful nation and all nations on the earth would be blessed because of him.

Then the Lord decided that He would not keep from Abraham what it was he was about to do. So He shared His plan about the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah. I find it interesting the conversation that takes place here.

Sodom and Gomorrah were cities where the people who lived there had become sexually perverted. Not really any different from the people today who have pushed the homosexual agenda. I think you heard it from this pulpit last week and I want to underscore that the Bible teaches God loves us all as sinners, but He must punish our sin. Read the Bible and you will

find out that homosexuality is detestable to God. Under Biblical law, if a man had sexual relations with a man, they were both to be put to death. Their blood would be on their own head.

God tells Abraham that because of the perversion and sin in Sodom and Gomorrah, He was about to send judgment on the people who lived in those cities.

It is interesting to note that Lot, who was the nephew of Abraham and his daughters, had settled in Sodom. When Abraham learns of God's plan, he begins to intercede for the people there who were righteous. He begins to ask the WHAT IF QUESTION.

Abraham had been a man of faith for many years, and knew that when God said something, He would follow through. I am sure he was afraid of the outcome of God's judgment on those people.

What if there are only 50 people. Will you destroy the city if there are 50 righteous people there? What if there are 45, then 40, then 30, then 20, then 10. What if?

Some of the fear that Abraham had was for his family members. Some of the fear he had was that he was not sure if God would listen to him. Some of the fear was that if God was listening, He would destroy Sodom and Gomorrah anyway.

God did say for the sake of 10 righteous people He would spare the city, but when God took inventory, there were not that many righteous there, so He provided an angel to escort Lot and his daughters and their husbands out of Sodom. God had listened to Abraham's intercession.

## **II. Abrahams Chief Servant's What if – Genesis 24:5**

- *Fear of the what-if response of an individual.*

The background is that Abraham is now old and the Lord had blessed him in every way. He wanted his chief servant to find him a wife for his son Isaac. How many of you know this is a pretty important step – marriage. Abraham certainly trusted his chief servant with this awesome task. Don't any of you come to me asking me to find your son or daughter a husband or wife!

So the servant has a what-if moment. What if I make the trip and the woman is unwilling to come back with me to this land? I am humiliated by her decision. Isaac would not have a wife and I would have failed in what I was supposed to do. What shall I do then? You see, Abraham trusted this servant to find the woman who would make a good wife for Isaac.

This servant was dealing with a situation in which the final outcome was beyond his control. When there are things that are beyond our control, it often brings out the "what ifs" and the fears of those questions. What if something beyond my control happens and it doesn't work out the way I hoped or thought it would? THEN WHAT?

Abraham was so sure that God would direct in this decision, that he said, if the woman doesn't come back with you, it's OK – you are not responsible. You are off the hook; don't be afraid of that.

We have no control over the responses of other people. We may fear their response to our witness, to our mission, to our faith, but with anything beyond our control, we have to trust God.

### **Luke 12:25-26**

*Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? <sup>26</sup>Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?*

### **Matthew 6:34**

*Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

There are times all of us have thought what if this and what if that. God's word instructs us that we are not to worry. The day has enough evil, and will take care of itself. By worrying we can not add one cubit to our height or add to our life one hour of time.

## **III. MOSES' What if – Exodus 4:1**

- *Fear of the what- if response by a group of people.*

God had spoken to Moses and commissioned him to lead the people of Israel out of bondage. Moses had a "what-if" moment. People can do and say strange things. Moses wanted to know, what if the people don't believe me or listen to me and say, "The Lord did not appear to you."

Along with the fear of what-ifs is the fear of a whole group of people not listening or responding when you feel God has sent you.

Moses knew these people well. He knew what made them act and react the way they did.

For every one of Moses' fears and what-ifs, God reassured him. He empowered him with miraculous power – the same power of the Holy Spirit that is available to us – to turn his staff into a serpent, to cause his hand to become leprous, to turn water to blood. How interesting God gave these signs for him to convince the Israelite people God had sent Him to lead them. But these were also signs that Moses used in front of Pharaoh to convince him that he should free the Israelite people.

### **Conclusion:**

This poem was written by Jonathan – November 13, 1995

IT'S THE FAITH IN THE SHADOWS THAT PLEASES ME,  
NOT THE FAITH THAT SHOUTS, "OH GLORY BE"  
OR THE ONE THAT GLORIES IN FAITH RECEIVED.  
NO, IT'S THE FAITH IN THE SHADOWS THAT PLEASES ME.

IT'S THE FAITH IN THE SHADOWS THAT PLEASES ME,  
IT'S THE FAITH LIVED IN SORROW WHEN YOU STILL BELIEVE,  
IT'S FAITH WHEN YOU DON'T FEEL OR SEE,  
IT'S THE FAITH OF, FAITH IN ME, THAT PLEASES ME.

IT'S THE FAITH IN THE SHADOWS THAT PLEASES ME,  
THE FAITH IN THE VALLEY, THE PIT AND DREAD,  
WHEN THE NIGHT'S EVIL POWERS AND FEARS SEEM REAL,  
WHEN THE "WHAT IF'S" OF DOUBT HAVE ALL BEEN SAID,

WHEN FEAR OF LOSS SEEMS A REALITY  
BUT YOUR FAITH STAYS STRONG AND REAL IN ME.  
THAT'S THE FAITH OF THE SHADOWS, AND IT PLEASES ME.

DOES FAITH SEEM WEAK AND ALL IS LOST?  
STOP AND CONSIDER JESUS' COST  
TO GIVE YOU THE FAITH OF VICTORY.  
IT'S YOUR FAITH IN THE SHADOWS THAT SETS YOU FREE.

God also reassured Moses that He would be with him and would help him speak and would teach him what to say.

### **IV. Standing tall against the fears of what ifs – Philippians 4:6-9**

DO not be anxious about anything. Through prayer and petition, let your requests be known to God. In this way God's peace will guard your hearts and minds in Christ.

Then there is a list of what we should think about instead of worrying about the what-ifs.

1. Remember who God is – unchanging, faithful, and trustworthy.
2. Remember that God is in control. When things are beyond your control – God is in control.
3. Remember that God has promised to be with you and to empower you.