

You of Little Faith, Why Are You So Afraid?

Matthew 8:18-34

Key Verse: 8:26

“He replied, ‘You of little faith, why are you so afraid?’ Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.”

Last week, we learned how Jesus took up our infirmities and bore our diseases to help us live happy and healthy lives. Jesus heals us through his deep love so that we also may be blessings to others. Jesus has compassion on us and all kinds of people. He was willing to touch and heal the man with leprosy. Jesus blessed the centurion’s faith and healed his servant just at his word. He also healed all the sick, as well as Peter’s mother in law. Jesus is ready to help those who come to him by faith. But in today’s passage, we learn the opposite of faith is fear. Fear is a very serious problem. In fact, there are over 500 known phobias that affect millions of people everyday. Fear can paralyze us and make us useless. Where does this fear come from? How can we overcome it? Let’s learn what the Lord wants to teach us today.

First, Follow Jesus. Look at verse 18. **“When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake”**. Because of his healing ministry, Jesus had gained much popularity. As word had spread around Israel, more and more people began flocking to him. Sometimes it seemed like he was running a medical clinic that was open 24/7. Jesus had a tremendous shepherd heart on the crowds of people. However, his main focus was always on his disciples. He needed to spend personal time with them. He also needed rest from an exhaustive schedule. It was at this time that Jesus distanced himself from the crowd. He gave orders to take a boat to the other side of the lake.

Jesus’ disciples were ready to go with him. Surprisingly, there was the most unlikely candidate who came to Jesus expressing his willingness to go also. Verse 19 says, **“Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, ‘Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.’”**. This was such a bold statement coming from a teacher of the law, who was otherwise a known opponent of Jesus. But seemingly this man was intrigued by him. The crowds had been amazed at Jesus’ teachings because he taught as one with authority, not as their teachers of the law. With this observation, this religious leader was very impressed by Jesus. He didn’t want to be rated poorly as the other teachers of the law. He wanted to be like Jesus and to follow him. However, Jesus wanted this man to know what it truly meant to follow him. Look at verse 20. **“Jesus replied, ‘Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head’”**. Here Jesus uses a metaphor

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to reveal the cost involved in following him. A fox has its den. A bird has its nest. What did the Son of Man have? He had no place to lay his head. Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah of God. As the heavenly king, he deserved to reside in a great palace and to have a red carpet rolled out for him while he walked in this world. But in reality, Jesus had no such treatment. Jesus lived a life of rejection, seclusion, and loneliness. Jesus gave up the throne of his kingdom so that he might serve dirty and lost sinners like us. Mark 10:45 says, **“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”**

Perhaps this teacher of the law had in mind to gain something from following Jesus. He may have expected to maintain his current lifestyle, his teacher of the law benefits, lavish amenities, and just add his Jesus’ discipleship certification. But there was no material blessing or personal achievement in following Jesus. He would have to give up his dependence on the things of the world. Instead, like Jesus, he would have to learn about self sacrifice, perseverance, and live with a deep dependence on God. It meant giving up, not getting. But Jesus did not live a life of poverty so that we may live poorly. 2 Corinthians 8:9 says, **“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”** Jesus came to this earth and gave up everything, even submitting himself to the cross to die in our places. Through his death and resurrection, we have a living hope in the kingdom of God and an eternal inheritance in heaven that can never perish, spoil, or fade. In this world, there may be times where we don't have any place to lay our heads, but there is nothing in this world more valuable than knowing Jesus. May God help us to know Jesus, the Son of Man, is our true hope and security.

Someone else approached Jesus next. According to verse 21, **“Another disciple said to him, ‘Lord, first let me go and bury my father.’”** This disciple’s request seemed quite reasonable and sincere. We don’t know if his father had just died or if he needed some time to care for him. He probably expected Jesus to agree with him on the basis of the commandment, ‘Honor your father and mother’. Instead, Jesus didn’t answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’. He used this opportunity to teach this disciple more about the cost of following him. Jesus said, **“Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.”** Jesus did not mean this man should ignore taking care of his father. He was not being insensitive. But Jesus needed to teach his disciples about priority. Jesus was the Messiah that had come from heaven to earth. He would not be there for a long time. He had called this specific man to be his disciple and to follow him. This meant participating in Jesus’ sufferings and taking

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on the mission of world salvation. Jesus was not going to hold the boat and wait for him. It was this man's one and only chance to make a decision.

When Jesus said **“let the dead bury their own dead”**, he was referring to those spiritually dead in their sins. This disciple could have chosen to remain with his father and mourn at his time of death. There of course was no joy in death and mourning at all. On the other hand, Jesus is the joy of living. He is the giver of life. He came to give life to sinners. John 10:10b says, **“...I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”** It was time for this disciple to make a commitment. Before him was Jesus the light of the world that was shining out of the darkness. But in his heart, there was a “Let me first” excuse. We all have a “Let me first” list that hinders us to make an absolute commitment to Jesus. Usually these things distract us and can take precedence in our lives. But when Jesus calls us there is nothing more important than serving our Lord and Savior who gave everything for us. Of course we have responsibilities and obligations to take care of, but a personal invitation from Jesus should take priority over everything else. May God help us to follow Jesus, make him our first priority, and live the life that is truly worth living.

Second, “You of little faith, why are you so afraid?” The time had come for Jesus and his disciples to set sail. As they said bon voyage to the crowd, the disciples must have reclined on deck and put on some sun glasses to take in some rays. But the clouds abruptly rolled in. Look at verse 24. **“Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping.”** A number of the disciples were skilled fisherman. They had experienced storms on the lake before. But this must have been the ‘storm of all storms’. Waves came crashing over the bow flooding the boat. They must have raced to pump the water out. If there were not enough buckets they used their shoes. The disciples were frantic. How about Jesus? Being tired as he was, he was peacefully sleeping despite the tsunami like event. The disciples had thought all hope was lost. They thought this could be the end and that they all would sink to the bottom and become fish food. What did they do next? Verse 25 tells us, **“The disciples went and woke him, saying, ‘Lord, save us! We're going to drown!’”**. In a desperate situation, the disciples were gripped with terrible fear.

Where does fear come from? It is Satan who is the source of all fear. When anyone lets down their guard, the devil pounces right in on his prey. 1 Peter 5:8-9a says, **“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith...”**. When fear creeps into our hearts it is a very serious matter. The devil is

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not playing games. He is trying to destroy us. The disciples had this problem. Their problem was not that the boat was filling with water or the possibility of drowning. Their problem was fear, which was a lack of faith. They were vulnerable to Satan's attack.

What did Jesus do at this moment? As he awoke, he could have said, 'Oh sorry fellas, I was a little tired. Don't worry, you'll be ok'. But Jesus rebuked them harshly. Look at verse 26. **"He replied, 'You of little faith, why are you so afraid?' Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm"**. Even though Jesus was in their boat, they failed to put their faith in him. The disciples had seen him perform numerous miracles among difficult circumstances before, and yet they were blind to the hope that Jesus could solve a great storm like this. They did not believe he held the power and authority to do so. In their lack of faith, they could only be destined to be useless, fearful men. Hebrews 11:6 says, **"And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him"**. Jesus wanted to teach his disciples about faith and so he rebuked them, **"Why are you so afraid?"** They would need to grow as men of faith in order to serve God's mission courageously in their lives. They would encounter many more storms of different natures and they would need the faith to overcome. How did Jesus choose to teach them this lesson? He revealed who he was to the disciples. He got up, rebuked the winds and the waves. Then, it grew completely calm. According to verse 27, they were amazed and asked, **"What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"** When Jesus calmed the storm through his authoritative word, the disciples recognized him as the Almighty Creator God. When faith in Jesus came to their hearts, they were afraid no more.

Sometimes storms will come and the odds seem against us, but through faith we can win the victory. One time the giant Goliath was picking a fight with Israel. He challenged they may send their best champion to combat him. The young boy David had the faith to go and face him. It looked a ridiculous mismatch. But with a slingshot and single stone, David took down the giant with a big crash. By faith, anything is possible. There is also the story, Soul Surfer, about the life of a teenage surfer Bethany Hamilton. At 13, she had won many competitions and showed a promising future in the sport. But suddenly she lost her arm in a horrific shark attack. After this tragic event, there was little hope of her living her life as it once was, let alone of her ever getting back in the water. It was not easy for her or her parents. But they did not give up. She and her family could overcome this storm when they put their faith in God. They found inspiration through Philippians 4:13,

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“I can do all things through him who gives me strength.” This enabled Bethany to fight the odds, courageously return to the water, and become a champion again. There are many kinds of storms that we will inevitably encounter in our lives. We have to deal with storms of diseases, death, finances, and relationships, just to name a few. We can grow so afraid at these times. Jesus rebukes us, **“You of little faith, why are you so afraid?”** We have to know that Jesus is in our boat. With faith in Jesus, he can solve any storm of life and drive out all of our fear. We should not look at the storms, but rather look at Jesus with our spiritual eyes. One storm we all know of well is our current economic crisis. It has gripped America and driven us into great fear as a nation. We all are affected in some way. I have even struggled in great fear. When I discovered our home in Evanston lost great market value that we had just purchased as our prayer to serve Northwestern ministry, I began to doubt God’s love and guidance. Next, another wave came in the form of an unexpected and outrageous property tax bill. I feared we might lose our house completely. I started complaining to God, ‘why did you bring us here?’ I became a burden to my family. I became stagnant in my mission. I was drowning in my doubt and unbelief. After months of struggling, I then heard Jesus’ voice, **“You of little faith, why are you so afraid?”** When I turned and received Jesus rebuke, I remembered who he was and who he called me to be. At that moment, I repented and came back to him. I restored my hope and mission on the campus. I began praying with my family for God’s blessing over our ministry and house church. I saw who Jesus truly was and put my trust in him. I regained the confidence that I can overcome all storms with Jesus by me.

During the Great Depression in his first inaugural address President Franklin Roosevelt said, **“The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”** FDR’s ‘New Deal’ plan helped spark recovery and restoration in that difficult time. But what strikes me most is in that same address speaking to the American people he concluded, “In this dedication of a Nation we humbly ask the blessing of God. May He protect each and every one of us. May He guide me in the days to come.” Placing our faith in God is indeed the answer even in the worst of times. We have to fix our eyes on Jesus. When we look to Jesus by faith, he will drive out all our fears and give us victory in the storms of life.

Third, Jesus says, “Go!” After Jesus quelled the storm, they all drifted safely to the other side of the lake. They arrived in the region of the Gadarenes. This was Gentile territory. There they were immediately met by an unwelcome surprise. Two demon possessed men who were coming from the tombs met Jesus there. It tells us they were so violent that no one would even go through that area. Everyone stayed out of their way. These men were very scary and dangerous. What happens

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when we see something like a demon possessed man in a train here in Chicago? We usually avoid eye contact, or move away quickly to the other side of the train. But Jesus was different. Despite their conditions, Jesus valued these two men's lives. He was ready to take on these demons. Jesus had the power and authority to drive them out. These demons knew exactly who Jesus was and of his power. They were scared to death of him. **“What do you want with us, Son of God?”, they shouted. ‘Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?’”** The demons thought it was time for judgment. Being the Gentile region that it was, there was a large herd of pigs feeding nearby. The demons required to possess some kind of being and inflict some damage. They begged Jesus that if he drove them out to send them into the pigs. Jesus did not negotiate with them. He only said one word, **“Go!”** When he did so, the demons came out and went into the pigs. Suddenly, the herd rushed into the lake. It appeared like a kamikaze mission as the pigs crashed and drowned in the water.

When the pig owners witnessed all this they were horrified. They suddenly saw all their ham, bacon, and pork chop sales floating in the lake. They rushed into the town to tell what Jesus had done. The whole town agreed to go out and meet Jesus. They should have come to say thank you or bring others for healing, but rather they asked Jesus to leave. They recognized his power, so they didn't force him out. Instead, they pleaded with him to go. They feared Jesus would bring more damage to their economy. They didn't want Jesus the healer to help anyone else. They had no room for him in their hearts. They only worried about money and their pig industry. Even though Jesus had healed two demon possessed men and given them a new chance of life, these people didn't care. Fear made them useless and heartless people.

Jesus doesn't want us to turn a blind eye to the needy like the townspeople of the Gadarenes. These days demons are consuming many. They are leading young people into death and destruction. The Internet, lust, alcohol, and many other tools of Satan are easily taking them captive. Recently, there was one young man that was so addicted by a video game that he died after playing it 12 hours a day. Satan's clutch is so tight that students cannot overcome and help themselves. But Jesus can help them. He has the power and authority to heal the needy on our campuses. He has the power and authority through his word to say, **“Go!”**, and restore them completely in the image of God. Jesus wants us to have a shepherd heart for them. We should not be thinking about ourselves and our problems while ignoring God's flock and Jesus' mission. May God help us all to come out of our fear and self centeredness to see those in need. May we bring those afflicted by Satan to Jesus so they may be set free and healed through the love of Christ.

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In today's passage, Jesus says, "**You of little faith, why are you so afraid?**" We learn through Jesus' rebuke how we can overcome any and every kind of fear in any kind of storm. We learn how we can fight against Satan and his schemes and win the victory. It is when we choose to follow Jesus and put our absolute faith in him. Let's bring Jesus into our boat. Let's repent our lack of faith. Let's work with Jesus to help save the lost students on our campuses. May God bless us to place our trust and hope in Jesus who is the Almighty God!