

Fear vs. Faith: Part 2
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(READ Luke 8:26-39)

We're talking about faith and fear. Two weeks ago we read how a raging windstorm was the menacing force that was making the disciples afraid. Their boat was filling with water and they were in danger. But then Jesus acts and he silences the wind and the waves by merely speaking to them. But that didn't take the disciples' fear away; it just redirected it. After Jesus calms the storm vs. 25 says, "And they were afraid." The disciples are now afraid of Jesus; yet, that's exactly where we all need to start. Fearing God is the beginning of wisdom and faith; knowing that nobody or nothing is more fearful than Jesus is the first thing we need to know to get over our fears. When you fear God, you won't fear other people, you won't fear rejection, you won't fear sickness or death. Big fears swallow up smaller fears. That's the first step you need to have faith in God in the face of fear.

In our passage today, which we just read together, the menacing, fearful force isn't a natural force that we can see, touch and measure, but a supernatural force in the form of the demonic. Look at vs. 27, "When Jesus had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons." Throughout this passage, that's how he's known. Vs. 35 he's the man "from whom the demons had gone." In vs. 36 he is the "demon-possessed man" (I'm not sure if that's the best way to translate that; the word is most literally translated "demonized;" the "demonized man." What does that mean; to be demonized? It looks like this man; it looks like to be tormented and inhabited by demons). And finally, again, in vs. 38, he's "the man from whom the demons had gone." Luke wants to make sure you know the problem: demonic power.

So, before we dig into fear and faith, let's talk about the demonic. The first thing you should know is that the Bible clearly teaches us that supernatural forces and powers are real - supernatural powers of good, which of course are all attributed to God and supernatural powers of evil, which originate from the Evil One. The Bible doesn't say there's a third source. Some people talk about ghosts or other kinds of spirits or angels. But the scriptures make clear, All good supernatural forces are from God; all evil supernatural forces come from the Evil One.

I'm a science kind of guy; as you know I have a degree in Engineering. I have a high degree of confidence in science. But the discipline of science only measures and studies forces in the natural world; but there are more. There's more going on than what we can see and perceive with our natural faculties and those forces make a difference in our world. Underneath the injustices, the pain, the war, the sickness and the crimes that we see on the news or read about online is a battle raging between the forces of Good and Evil. And the glorious news we know from God's word is that God has already won the battle over Evil. When God the Father sent his Son, Jesus, to live, die and be resurrected from the dead, he destroyed the stranglehold Satan had on this world. Revelation 12 puts it this way (READ vs. 7-11).

Satan was defeated in heaven by the armies of God. And even here on earth, Satan is defeated by the conquering death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and by a grace-given, death-defying faith the people of God have in Jesus the Son. But look what vs. 12 says (READ). So, yes, let's rejoice! Satan has been defeated! But be warned, too, FBC. Why? "For the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because his time is short!" Spend some time reading the rest of chapter 12; John reveals how Satan looked to kill Jesus (but failed) and how he is now trying to destroy all who follow Jesus. What's the point? The point is the Bible never stops talking about the work of Satan behind the scenes.

Don't take your eye off the ball, FBC. When you have cancer, don't think cancer is your biggest problem. When you have kids making bad decisions, don't think the biggest problems are friends, music or even drugs and alcohol. When you're struggling financially, your biggest problem is not the bill collectors or the landlord. When you're depressed, your biggest problem isn't your biochemistry or if you're lonely, your biggest problem isn't a small pond of suitors in the Taylor County area. (Eph. 6:12) We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. That's the real battle and he's the real enemy.

One of the reasons we forget the reality and presence of the demonic is that we are looking for the wrong thing. We're looking spooky scenes from the movies or Halloween stunts taken too far; we're looking for people with spinning heads like from the *The Exorcist*. But when you look at the NT teaching, especially in the epistles, the scripture writers don't warn us about those kinds of things. The scripture writers warn us about devilish false teachers looking to lead astray the people of God with teaching that sounds right. The writers warn the church about Satan's use of wealth, power and comfort to seduce us away from a devoted faith in Jesus. Satan is doing the same thing he did in the garden. He's lying to us; "Did God really say you can't eat from the tree in the middle of the garden?" He's making accusations; "God doesn't want you to eat from this tree because he knows it's good! God must not love you."

These tactics, brothers and sisters, are attacks against your faith; not primarily about your circumstances. Do you know what I mean when I say that? That's Satan's goal. He wants you hate God; he wants you to lose confidence and go it alone. And he'll use whatever means necessary to get that done. For some of you, it is suffering. The cancer, the depression, the lack of money. The fighting at home. And in those moments when life is really hard he's saying, "See, God doesn't love you. He doesn't have a plan; if he does, it's a terrible plan!" For others of you it's abundance. He's like a slot machine that you win all the time. More money, more fun, more vacations. And the whole time he's saying, "See, you don't need God. Look how great things are. In fact, God wants to keep you from enjoying all this stuff."

These are the demonic powers at work against us. Get familiar with your enemy, FBC. Prepare for the struggle and the battle; it's not going to be easy.

The good news, friends, is that Jesus is more powerful. That's one of the main things Luke wants us to see. Look at vs. 28 (READ). The demonic man has been terrorizing the land of the Gerasenes, but now he is being tormented because Jesus is the Son of the Most High God. Look how Jesus is in control, how he is the one in charge and the one with power. The demons need Jesus' permission to do anything. They beg Jesus because he's the one in charge. Friends, you should be hearing and reading this passage thinking, "Jesus is stronger than the powers of evil in this world. He is more powerful than the demonic." Be very much aware, my good brothers and sisters, about the powers of evil around us, but don't lose heart, Jesus is more powerful.

Now, let's look at the issue of fear and faith. The issue of fear comes up in vs. 34-35 (READ). Notice how the townspeople find the demonized man. It says he was sitting at Jesus' feet, clothed and in his right mind. That's the exact opposite of how he is described earlier. Look at vs. 27; it says the demonized man wore no clothes, lived in the tombs of dead people (that doesn't sound sane) and throwing himself down at the feet of Jesus. And when they see that difference, the difference that Jesus made in this man, they were afraid.

Again, it's not an accident that Luke says the people were afraid after Jesus' work and power is seen. Just like the disciples in the boat after the storm was calmed, these people afraid of the demonized man have just encountered someone more terrifying, more powerful, more consequential than the demonized man. They saw the power of Jesus and they are afraid.

That's not their mistake; they are right to be afraid. But look what the next verses say the people do (READ vs. 36-37). So, in their fear they ask Jesus to leave. Notice how Luke connects their behavior to fear; they asked Jesus to leave, *for they were seized with great fear*. Have you ever been seized with fear? Do you know what I mean? Where it's like fear has hands the size of Andre the Giant's and it grabbed your heart and won't let go? Maybe when your teenager was 2 hours late for curfew and your mind was spinning and you couldn't shake the thought they were in a ditch somewhere? Maybe when your spouse was in surgery the fear of living without them wouldn't let go? It can seize us, can't it?

And have you noticed, we usually don't make good decisions seized with fear, do we? Get this: the people ask the most loving man who ever lived to leave their land! Does that sound like a rational decision? I don't think so. We almost never make good decisions being seized with fear. In those moments of fear we don't look to learn more information (what if they were willing to wait, to ask Jesus' questions to learn who this man really was) and we desperately try to regain some sort of control (in their case, the people regain "control" by telling Jesus to leave). We might run away looking to get away from a fearful situation (like the people did); we might fight to regain a feeling of power. But most of the time, we make bad decisions in fear.

So, what did the people miss? How did their fear blind them? I think the answer is found in vs. 38-39 (READ). So, the demonized man is totally different than the people of the Gerasenes. The people want to get away from Jesus; the demonized man wants to be with

Jesus. I think vs. 39 is a key verse, "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." Look what God has done for you. Look what he's saying, "God is for you." Now, if you're wondering if that's a point of emphasis for Luke, just notice how he repeats that again at the end of vs. 39; "And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him."

We must learn that Jesus is fearful and when we fear the Lord our fear of others, of enemies, of loneliness, of sickness and death will get dislodged. But in addition, we must see and learn that God is for us. He's looking to help; he's looking to serve. He wants to be a blessing. But we need to receive that help in faith and not push it away like the people of the Gerasenes.

I know some of you are afraid to go to the doctor. Honestly, I'm not so excited about doing that myself. I don't like the feeling of being poked and prodded; I don't like having to answer intimate questions. Sometimes when we visit doctors they actually cut our bodies open; they take very sharp knives and take stuff that's supposed to be on the inside and move outside. If I'm honest, I have a some fear about that. This is important stuff.

If you need open heart surgery (this isn't hypothetical for some of you, is it? You've been through this), what do you need to allow a surgeon to go in your chest cavity and tamper with some important organs? Well, first of all, you have to believe they have the ability, the competence, the power to help. If you don't think they have that ability, you won't let them near you no matter how nice they may be. But you also need to believe they are good; that they actually want to help. You need to know that they have good and right intentions; that they're not going to goof around with your ticker or leave you alone when you're asleep. You need to know they are for you.

Friends, Jesus is telling us today from his word that he is for us. He's for the humble; he gives grace to the broken and contrite of heart. Even though Jesus is more powerful than anyone or anything we've ever seen, he's good to his children. We have no cause for fear.

I'm wondering, do you believe God is for you? Do you believe that Jesus is looking to help you? This may sound like a silly question for us right now: of course we believe this! But I think we may be unaware of our lack of faith in this. The people of the Gerasenes were afraid and didn't know and believe Jesus would actually help them and not hurt them. This is exactly how Satan tempted and deceived Eve; "God knows when you eat this fruit your eyes will be opened and you will be like God... he doesn't want that. He's not for you."

Answering the question, "Do you believe God is really for you?" in those moments of fear, not now in church when you know the right answer. Put yourself in a fearful situation and the temptation to disobey God. You're in the hospital about to receive some scary news or treatment and everything in you wants to respond in an anxious, worrisome way, but you hear God say from his word, "Do not be anxious about your life; trust in me, for I know what you need

before you ask.” Are you still worried or have you found peace? When you’re afraid of being alone for the rest of your life or that your boyfriend/girlfriend will leave you, and you have this opportunity or feel the pressure to be intimate, to keep him close or get to be close, do you give in or do you obey God’s word when he say, “My perfect plan for you is intimacy spouse and only a spouse.” Do you believe God is being good to you with that command? When you’re afraid of what our country might become if so-n-so is elected President, do you respond with irrational and unbecoming rants online and debates at work that make Jesus look like another TV talking head (because you represent him, you know!), or do you listen and believe God’s word when he says, “The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.” And do you believe where God turns it is good?

Friends, don’t be too dismissive of this question: do you really believe God is for you? Even with the words that you don’t like to hear so much? God can be trusted, my good friends. Jesus is for all those humble in heart. He proved that when he went to that cross and died for your sins and my sins. He showed us that he does indeed love us. We can listen to his word; we can trust his direction in those fearful situations, when the forces of evil are opposing us. So, humble your heart before him and go to him in faith rather than running from him in fear.

Key Verses ~ Mark 8:39

Questions for the week

- Should Christians fear Jesus? In what ways should they or shouldn’t they?
- Do you believe in demonic power? Where do you think demonic power is at work in our world today?
- What was the big idea from the sermon that helps us have faith in God rather than live in fear? How should that change the way you face fearful situations this week?