

Fear vs. Faith: Part 1
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What would you do and how would you respond if you saw something superhuman? I love the various responses of this little guy from the movie *The Incredibles* (VID). You've got shock and dread, you've got a desire for more and you've got an explosion of amazement! If there's anything missing, it's probably a greater sense of paralyzing fear, but who knows, maybe a young boy would think that's normal.

We make a pivot today in Luke 8. Now that the disciples know what true hearing and faith look like, that faith is put to the test. Will God's people have faith in God, will they obey his voice in the face of competing forces and powers? Will they believe in Jesus when their fears are standing in the way? The rest of Luke 8 is comprised of stories and events of Jesus' unique and unparalleled power over the powers in this world.

It's like a good movie script. Some of the most popular movies deal with people confronting something fearfully powerful just like in Luke 8. Today, we'll see fear over the natural world. Movies like *Twister* and *Armageddon* make the movie goers confront the damaging and unstoppable power of the world just like our passage today. It may not be our favorite movie, but *The Exorcist* will be watched for decades because it taps into our fears of the demonic. Guess what? The next story reveals Jesus being fronted with the power of the Evil One in the land of the Gerasenes. The final story in Luke 8 shows Jesus' power over sickness and disease. Movies like *Steel Magnolias* and *My Life* had huge turnouts because we can relate to the power and fear of death. Why do we even go to these movies if they tap into our fears? Author Stephen King once said, "I like to scare people and people like to be scared." Having a little fear makes us feel alive, but too much fear makes us want to die.

We can't escape being confronted by the fearful; it is a part of life. It's only our delusional pride and overestimation of our own selves that keeps us relatively blind to our fears, worries and anxieties. But sooner or later for all of us, we are confronted with power; power that's too great for us to handle on our own. And Satan loves to use these opportunities to lock us in a prison of fear and worry. Satan wants to shrink your vision of reality into a tiny little box with only two things in it. You and something harmful too powerful for you to manage.

That's probably our biggest mistake when we are overwhelmed by fear; we fail to look beyond our own resources to see that there's something more... someone else. We wrongly think it's just me and what's against me. That it's just me and cancer or me and the storm or me and the demonic in the ring, just *mano e mano*. If that's all there is then we are in big trouble. But that's not all there is; there's someone more powerful than sickness, more powerful than the storm, more powerful than the demonic forces of evil in this world.

For the next three sermons in Luke we are going to see various people confronted by power, power that tempts them to be afraid. And of course, we can relate to that. But hopefully through the journey, rather than our fears going up, up, up our faith in God will go deeper and deeper (READ Luke 8:22-25).

The events and circumstances of this story are pretty straightforward; let's just make some observations. Preaching from village to village must have been exhausting. That's what 8:1 told us Jesus is doing at this time. He decided to travel across the lake and in doing so he fell asleep. Not only did he fall asleep, but he stayed asleep even when a windstorm started making their voyage a precarious. According to the author, this wasn't a little storm. Look what vs. 23 says of the storm; it says the boat was "filling with water" and they were "in danger." If you in the middle of a lake (remember, there are no inflatables or lifejackets in the 1st century) and your boat starts filling up with water in the middle of a storm, you've got a problem.

So, don't think little of the disciples and their fear; this is a fearful situation. All of us would have responded the same way; we're no different than the disciples. And this really is the first lesson for us as we encounter a powerful world that threatens us and tempts us to dread. One tactic to overcome the fears is to try and convince ourselves that there's nothing to be afraid of. It almost feels noble; to look down upon that which is terrifying.

There are two problems with this approach. #1 it's not true. Some things are terrifying. Some things do have the power to take almost everything away. Don't make the problem bigger by pretending; stay rooted in reality. #2 This strategy elevates me as my own savior. I can rescue myself if I'm able to prove to myself that this isn't a big deal. I'm my own savior. That is not a good thing.

Now, as the story goes, Jesus is woken from his sleep and informed about the situation. Just to reinforce the last point, Jesus doesn't ignore their request or correct them. He doesn't say, "Storm? You call this a storm?" Jesus rebukes the wind and the raging waves (see, they are raging). And everything fell silent; everything was calm.

The text says he rebuked the storm; it doesn't say he rebuked his disciples, does it? I think we might be tempted to think of Jesus like an annoyed coach who has players who keep making the same mistake over and over again. Yes, God's children need to be rebuked from time to time, but the text doesn't say that's what he's doing with his disciples. That phrase that begins vs. 25, "He said to them, 'Where is your faith?'" uses the most generic word for communication in the NT. It can mean a host of things, but basically it's about communicating; "He said to them; He replied to them;" even "He taught them saying," but that word is never used for "rebuke." The word for rebuke word was just used in vs. 24 when Jesus rebukes back the wind and waves. But it's not used of the disciples.

That's helpful for me. I feel so guilty when I get things wrong. Do you ever feel that way? Guilty for messing up? For being fearful rather than faithful? Remembering that Jesus is looking to teach me, he's looking to guide me as a patient, loving father even in my mistakes and unfaithfulness invites me out of the shadows of shame. I don't have to cower in embarrassment. Jesus knows I need

to learn faithfulness; he knows I'm not done growing in my faith. And so he leads you and I to these fearful, dreadful situations so we can learn from him; to lead us well Jesus needs to show us the truth about our true allegiances and his true power through sufferings. We're going to have failures along the way. Brothers and sisters, if you're ashamed of your fearfulness I want to remind you of God's forgiveness and grace. He wants to help you and not hurt you; he's looking to teach you and not rebuke you.

The question Jesus asks his disciples in this teachable moment is, "Where is your faith?" He doesn't say, "How come you don't have any faith?" They have faith. The problem Jesus is trying to illuminate is that their faith is misplaced.

That's a key question for you and me today. Where is our faith? What do we have it in? Where have we placed it? We've placed it somewhere; it's not like we are faithless. We might not have faith in God, but we have faith in something. The only question is: what has our faith; where have we placed it?

We all have faith; everybody. The most antagonistic atheist, the most committed scientist has faith. The reason I can say that is because none of us has the power, the ability, the wisdom to secure life for ourselves. Control is always out of reach. And because of that, we must have faith. And Jesus is asking his disciples and I think he's also asking us, "Where have you placed yours?" For the rest of chapter 8 we are going to analyze this question with the hope and prayer that we can see that God is completely trustworthy for us to put our faith in Him.

Look at vs. 25 and consider both the reaction and response to what they just have seen (READ). When Jesus commanded and rebuked the winds and everything went still and silent notice that the disciples were all still afraid. Why is that? The storm stopped; Luke says everything was calm. Why weren't they giving each other high fives? When things are calm, I like to relax. Or even relief. Why didn't it say, "And they were relieved and they marveled?" Why were the disciples still afraid?

It's because they have encountered something even more terrifying. Put yourself in their shoes: the disciples couldn't tame the wind and the waves; they couldn't control nature. But Jesus can. With merely his words, Jesus commands the wind and the waves like Cesar Millan commands Pit Bulls and German Shepherds and they obey. So, what are we going to do with him? If we had our hands full with the winds and waves, we've got a bigger problem with Jesus! No, fear is exactly the right response.

And remarkably enough, this is where faith begins. It begins with a right fear of the Lord. If you want to find victory over the things that terrify you, that cause you to worry and be anxious, pray that the fear of the Lord would grow in your mind and heart more and more. Fear is dislodged when we encounter a greater fear. Ed Welch illustrates it this way (pg. 191). And there's no one greater than the Lord. This is what Jesus was getting at when he said in Matthew 10:28, "And do not fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell."

Notice how this intuition is present in Psalm 27 (READ Ps. 27:1-5). You can see from the first few verses that David is confronted with a fearful situation. Three times in three verses his fear is highlighted. David had enemies and these enemies make him afraid. So, what does he need? He needs a grander, more splendid picture to see. (vs 4) "One thing I have asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple." When he compares the greatness of God to fears that are staring him in the face the greater fear wins. So instead of being captured by his fears of enemies he's concealed under the cover of God's protection. His enemies are still present; in vs. 11 and 12 he talks about them again, but do you know how? His enemies are completely controlled by the Lord; they can't do anything without the Lord's permission and approval.

Replace your fear of death, your fear of rejection, your fear of failure, your fear of loss with a greater fear; the fear of the Lord. That's the beginning of faith. Do you know why? Because even though God is great and fearful, he's good. Listen to these verses

- Prov. 14:27 ~ The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death.
- Ps. 31:19 ~ Oh, how abundant is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you and worked for those who take refuge in your, in the sight of the children of mankind!
- Ps. 33:18 ~ Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love.
- Ps. 34:7 ~ The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.

Look at all the good that comes to us when we fear the Lord! We're rescued from the snares of death; we get the Lord's abundant goodness. The Lord watches us with a loving, careful eye and he provides us with protection. So much good comes our way when we fear the Lord because God is good.

We all have fears; we all have anxieties. And it's not in our head. Like the disciples, our boat is filling with water and we are in danger. We don't have the capacity to control that which is dreadful. So, FBC, where is your faith? Right now; today. What are you trusting in? What are you looking to for help? Kids, you've got a few days of school under your belt. But maybe you're still nervous and afraid. Where is your faith? Brother, you're trying to act tough and together, but inside you're afraid for the future. Where's your faith? It's somewhere. Sister, you're being crushed by the burdens of life. And focusing more on yourself isn't helping (like so many say), it's actually hurting. Where's your faith? Friends, look to the one who is even more fearful and dreadful. Pray that as you see the One who is of greatest consequence your faith in him grows and your fear of other things diminishes. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.

Key verse ~ Luke 8:24 "And they went and woke him, saying, 'Master, Master, we are perishing!' And he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm."

Questions for the week

- How aware are you of your fears? Is it a good or bad sign if you can't think of any? Why?
- What are you tempted to do in moments of dread? What are your typical responses?
- How would you put the fear of the Lord and how that's supposed to help us with our fears in your words?