

Week 5 – 03/13/2022



INTRODUCTION

Recently I attended the high school youth group at my church. It's a small youth group, but the students are awesome. They were in a series where, instead of the student pastor speaking, different high schoolers were sharing each week. My nephew, who's a freshman in high school, was speaking this particular Sunday. He did a great job. He was prepared and even had teaching slides. It was impressive!

One of the things he said near the beginning of his talk stuck with me. He said, "Did you know that God says 'Fear not' more than 100 times in the Bible?"

Now, I don't know the exact number of times that phrase shows up in the Bible. And I didn't go home and do a bunch of research to see if what he said was true. I do know, however, that God says "Fear not" a lot in the Bible. It was one of His most consistent messages, which is why we're going to talk about today.

TENSION

Fear is such a beast to deal with, isn't it? It's a tough emotion to combat. Maybe that's why Jesus said "Fear not," so often. I know I battle fear a lot. You probably do as well. For example:

We have fear about our family. I have three daughters, ranging from age three to twelve. At young ages, I feared them choking or drowning. Now that my oldest is almost 13, I'm already feeling fear around her driving. I fear that one of my kids will become addicted to something, get into trouble, or run with the wrong crowd. I fear that one of them will marry a terrible person. I fear that I won't be a good dad. There are a lot of fears wrapped up in being a parent. If you're a parent, you can probably relate to what I'm saying.

We feel fear concerning our health. Let's say that you feel a pain in your side or in your head. If you're anything like me, you'll immediately go to the worst-case scenarios in your mind. Maybe you'll Google your symptoms, which makes things even worse! Maybe you had a parent, grandparent, aunt, or uncle who died of something at a young age. So whenever things feel off in your body, you worry that you'll end up with the same fate.

We have fear about money and our job. Maybe you got laid off or lost work during the pandemic, and you fear that your income will never come back up. Or maybe you're afraid that you'll lose work in the future. Maybe money stresses you out to no end, whether your job is great or terrible. Your parents never seemed to have enough when you were a kid, and now it's a major source of fear in your life.

We have global fear. We watch the news and our hearts are struck with fear. We read articles that say things are falling apart, which makes us feel anxious. We have friends and relatives who tell us how bad things are in our country or around the world, and immediately our blood pressure goes up.

And these fears are just the tip of the iceberg, right? There's a lot of bad news in this world!

But there's also good news. In this series, we've been talking about questions that Jesus asked. And the question we're going to look at today—and the context in which Jesus asked it—can give us a new, powerful tool when it comes to facing our fears.

TRUTH

In the gospel of Mark, we see an interaction between Jesus and His disciples. They were in a boat, crossing over from the west to the east side of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus had been busy ministering to people, and He was ready to get some rest. And then Mark records this:

As evening came, Jesus said to his disciples, "Let's cross to the other side of the lake." So they took Jesus in the boat and started out, leaving the crowds behind (although other boats followed). But soon a fierce storm came up. High waves were breaking into the boat, and it began to fill with water (Mark 4:35-37 NLT).

Because of its geography, the Sea of Galilee was particularly susceptible to violent weather. Big, crazy storms were notorious in that region. But Jesus was so exhausted that He slept right through it. So before Jesus asked His question, the disciples had a question of their own:

Jesus was sleeping at the back of the boat with his head on a cushion. The disciples woke him up, shouting, "Teacher, don't you care that we're going to drown?" (Mark 4:38 NLT).

This is an interesting question, because the disciples were asking Jesus if He was concerned about their well-being. Instead of asking Jesus if He could help them, the disciples questioned Jesus' character. That's how fear works: **fear corrodes our confidence in God's goodness.**

The disciples had seen Jesus show compassionate love to people that no one in the culture even noticed. They had witnessed Him healing sick people. The disciples were His friends—*of course* He cared about their well-being! But fear unleashes all kinds of doubts. **Even when we have every reason to trust the goodness of God based on what we've seen and experienced, our faith suffers from amnesia.**

I've experienced this, and you probably have as well. I've seen God do incredible things in my life and the lives of people around me. But then I face overwhelming situations or get overcome with fear. That's when doubt creeps in and I ask, "God, do You even care about what's going on in my life?"

This is how Jesus responded to their question.

When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Silence! Be still!" Suddenly the wind stopped, and there was a great calm (Mark 4:39 NLT).

Jesus approached the wind and waves like they were His children. Just like parents would tell their young kids to calm down and stop being so loud, Jesus rebuked His creation. With just a few words from His mouth, everything became peaceful and still.

And then comes the two-part question that Jesus asked:

Then he asked them, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?" (Mark 4:40 NLT).

Jesus seems to imply that their level of fear reflected their level of faith. Many of the disciples were seasoned fishermen—they understood just how dangerous storms could be. Plus, the boat was nearly swamped. Yet despite of all of this, Jesus wanted His presence to cancel out their terror.

See, the presence of Jesus doesn't mean the absence of bad things happening. Years later, after Jesus went back to Heaven to be with the Father, the disciples established the early church and were led by the Spirit of God. But according to tradition, eventually all of them except for John, lost their lives at the hands of persecutors. Much of the early church spent time in danger of being imprisoned or killed for their belief in Jesus. If their faith was dependent on bad things not happening—or no threats of terror—their faith would've been non-existent. **It was the presence of Jesus and His Spirit that carried them through their storms.**

Now it was the disciples turn to ask another question.

The disciples were absolutely terrified. "Who is this man?" they asked each other. "Even the wind and waves obey him!" (Mark 4:41 NLT).

Even though they had seen Jesus perform miracle after miracle, perhaps they had never seen Him do a miracle that showed His authority over nature. They responded with a respectful awe for Him.

"Who is this Man?" should've been the first question they asked. They should've started there. And that's where you and I should start when we face real fears. We can stay afraid, or we can remember who God is. In this way, the storms of our lives will help solidify our faith and help us see God in a clearer light. Because:

Faith is about remembering and reminding yourself who God is.

The original readers of Mark's gospel faced all kinds of persecution for their faith. So the account of this incident on the Sea of Galilee was surely a comfort to them. Through the Person of Jesus, they learned that God can control the natural circumstances of life—including nature and storms. They could either focus on their fear, challenges, and storms, or they could remind themselves of the character of God and how powerful He is.

APPLICATION

In order for you and I to focus on who God is, I think a good place for us to start is by planting who He is in our hearts. And a great way to do that is by focusing on some of the truths God tells us through Scripture. Think about verses like this:

- *God is love (1 John 4:8b NIV).*
- *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (Hebrews 13:8 NIV).*
- *Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26 NIV).*
- *Yours, LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all (1 Chronicles 29:11 NIV).*
- *Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think (Ephesians 3:20 NLT).*
- *Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand (Isaiah 41:10 NLT).*
- *"So be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid and do not panic before them. For the LORD your God will personally go ahead of you. He will neither fail you nor abandon you" (Deuteronomy 31:6 NLT).*
- *"I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid" (John 14:27 NLT).*

Find a few truths from Scripture like this that really resonate with you. Write them down, print them out, or put them in the notes app of your phone. Read them out loud as often as you can. Pray through them. Thank God for them. The whole goal is to allow them to sink into your spirit.

On days when life feels really stormy, my mom has a personal prayer that she says out loud.

"God, I draw near to You right now. I don't understand a lot of things, but You say that when I draw near to You, You will draw near to me. Help me to rest in Your presence."

We can all do something like this. We can find truths and promises in God's Word and make them personal in our prayers with God. Over time, as we memorize our prayer and a couple of truths from Scripture about who God is, truth will start to permeate our spirits and eventually become stronger than our emotions.

LANDING

What if, when our fears came rushing in, instead of focusing on everything that could go wrong, we focused on how powerful our God is? What if we trusted that He is at work in the present moment to accomplish His purposes? He is our peace. He is our hope. He is the One we can trust to always be there for us.

When the disciples faced the storm, they forgot how powerful the Man in the boat was. That's why Jesus asked, "*Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?*" (*Mark 4:40 NLT*). The power of Jesus was on display in front of them daily. And you know what? It's on display in front of you and me too. **Faith is about remembering and reminding ourselves who God is.** So let's plant what's true about God deep in our spirits.

Small Group Discussion



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some common fears people have?
2. Why do you think people feel fearful?
3. Read **Mark 4:35-41**. Why do you think Jesus asked about the disciples' faith?
Why was their fear an issue of faith?
4. When we are afraid, what are we focusing on?
5. We become afraid when we feel small, when something in life is too big for us to handle. Take a moment and think about your biggest fears. Are those areas where you feel small?
6. Name anything you can think of that is bigger than God?
7. When you are afraid, how can you put your focus on who God is?