

Fearless Faith

Matthew 8:23-27 (ESV)

And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. ²⁴ And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. ²⁵ And they went and woke him, saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing." ²⁶ And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. ²⁷ And the men marveled, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?"

Mark 4:35-41 (ESV)

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." ³⁶ And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. ³⁸ But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" ³⁹ And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. ⁴⁰ He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" ⁴¹ And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Fear never wrote a symphony or poem, negotiated a peace treaty, or cure a disease. Fear never pulled a family out of poverty or country out of bigotry. Fear never saved a marriage or a business. Courage did that. Faith did that! Fear herds us into a prison and slams the door. Wouldn't it be great to walk out?

What if faith, not fear, was your default reaction to threats? If you could hover a fear magnet over your heart and extract every last shaving of dread, insecurities, and doubt, what would remain? Envision a day, just one day, without the dread of failure, rejection and calamity. Can you imagine a life with no fear? This is the possibility behind Jesus' question.

Matthew 8:26a (ESV)

And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?"

Matthew 8:23-24 (ESV)

And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. ²⁴ And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep.

Matthew used a very specific Greek word here to describe this storm "Seismos" - a quake, a trembling eruption of sea and sky. The term still occupies a spot in our vocabulary. A seismologist studies earthquakes, a seismograph measures them and Matthew, along with a crew of recent recruits, felt a seismos that shook them to their core. Matthew used the word on only two other occasions: once at Jesus's death when Calvary shook (27:51-54) and again at Jesus's resurrection when the grave yard tremored (28:2). Apparently, this storm shares equal billing in the trilogy of Jesus's great shake-ups: defeating sin on the cross, defeating death at the tomb, and here silencing fear on the sea.

Matthew 8:24 (ESV)

And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep.

John 16:33 (ESV)

I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

Believers contract Covid, bury loved ones, and battle addictions, and as a result face fears. It's not the absence of storms that sets us apart. It's whom we discover in the storm: the unstirred Jesus.

Matthew 8:24 (ESV)

And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep.

Matthew 7:24-27 (ESV)

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. ²⁶ And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

Mark 4:38 (ESV)

But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”

This was a premeditated slumber. He didn't accidentally nod off. In full knowledge of the coming storm, Jesus decided it was siesta time, so He put His head on the pillow and fell asleep in the storm.

Matthew 8:25 (ESV)

And they went and woke him, saying, “Save us, Lord; we are perishing.”

Mark 4:38b (ESV)

And they woke him and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”

Fear does this. Fear corrodes our confidence in God's goodness. We begin to wonder if love lives in heaven. If God can sleep in our storms, if His eyes stay shut when our eyes grow wide, if He permits storms after we get on His boat, does He really care?

Martin Niemoller documents an extreme example of this. He was a German Pastor who took a heroic stand against Adolf Hitler. When he first met the dictator in 1933, he stood at the back of the room and listened. Later when his wife asked him what he learned, he said "I discovered that Herr Hitler is it a terribly frightened man." Fear releases the tyrant within.

Fear also deadens our recollection. The disciples had reason to trust Jesus. By now they had seen him heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease. They had witnessed him heal a leper with a touch and a servant with a command. Peter saw his sick mother-in-law recover and they all saw demons scatter like bats out of a cave.

Matthew 8:16 (ESV)

That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick.

Fear creates a form of spiritual amnesia. It dulls our miracle memory. It makes us forget what Jesus has done and how good God is.

And fear feels dreadful. It sucks the life out of the soul, curls us into an embryonic state, and drains us dry of contentment.

When fear shapes our lives safety becomes our god. When safety becomes our god, we worship the risk-free life. Can the safety lover do anything great? Can the risk avoider accomplish noble deeds for God's glory? No. The fear filled cannot love deeply. Love is risky. They cannot give to the poor. Benevolence has no guarantee of return. The fear filled cannot dream wildly. The worship of safety emasculates greatness. No wonder Jesus wages such a war against fear.

Matthew 8:26 (ESV)

And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm

To be clear, fear serves a healthy function. It is the warning of potential danger. A dose of fright can keep a child from running across a busy road. Fear is the appropriate reaction to a burning building or a growling dog. Fear itself is not a sin but it sure can lead to sin.

If we medicate fear with angry outbursts, drinking binges, sullen withdrawals, self-starvation, or viselike control, we exclude God from the solution and promote the problem. We subject ourselves to a posture of fear, allowing anxiety to dominate and define our lives. Joy sucking worries. Day numbing dread. Repeated bouts of insecurity that petrify and paralyze us. Hysteria is not from God.

2 Timothy 1:7 (ESV)

for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

Fear may fill our world, but it doesn't have to fill our hearts. It will always knock on the door. Just don't invited in and definitely don't offer it a bed for the night. Let's remember Jesus command to do not fear.

Matthew 8:26-27 (ESV)

And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. ²⁷And the men marveled, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?"

theme - Fearless Faith

Theme Verse - Jeremiah 17:7-8 (ESV)

"Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. ⁸He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit."

January memory verse - Joshua 1:9 (ESV)

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

Closing Prayer