

## The Fear That Drives Out Fear

**Mark 4:35-41** <sup>35</sup> On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side."  
<sup>36</sup> And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him.  
<sup>37</sup> And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. <sup>38</sup> 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?" <sup>39</sup> 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. <sup>40</sup> He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" <sup>41</sup> And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?"

The most common psychological problems, or mental illness as some psychologists call it, are so-called anxiety disorders. As these are classified, they identify six major groups of anxiety problems: Generalized Anxiety Disorder (characterized by six months of excessive worry/anxiety, muscle tension, sleep problems, fatigue), Social Anxiety Disorder (fear of social/performance situations, such as going to crowded places, etc), Panic Disorder (panic attacks and worry about these attacks for over one month), Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (characterized by obsessions that cause anxiety and compulsions used to alleviate it), specific phobias, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

I don't agree with calling all of those things illnesses or disorders, but regardless of what you call them, when you step back and look at that, we are a very fearful society. Fear, anxiety, worry literally destroy our bodies, our careers and our relationships. For all the technologies, devices and safety-features we have built into our society, we are probably a more nervous, jittery, worried and frightened culture than any that have gone before us.

Fear, like anger reveals a lot about us. It reveals what we love. It reveals what we want to keep and what we would hate to lose. It reveals what we would hate to have and don't want to have come to us. It reveals what is important to us, and what is not. But most of all, it reveals our beliefs about who or what controls life.

For a Christian, our fears reveal many of our beliefs about God – how He is involved in our lives, if He is good, and if His promises can be trusted. For a Christian, this is no side-issue. We are told repeatedly not to fear. We are commanded to believe. When fear controls us, we cannot be used as effectively by God. When we fear, we announce to the world what we think of the person and promises of God.

For that reason, God is never satisfied to allow our faith to remain simply an idea. He puts us into situations that tempt us to fear or to trust. He arranges circumstances so that our view of Him is put to the test.

We think that what we really need is smooth circumstances. God should prevent storms altogether. Panic is understandable. And what God needs to do to prove to us that He is loving, is fix my problem, take away the thing that threatens, or bring the thing I think I need. But apparently, God doesn't think that way.

In fact, God wants there to be only one fear in our lives that calms all others. God wants us to have the fear that drives out all fear.

The Lord taught that very lesson to His disciples in this incident. This account exposed what these men believed about Christ, and revealed what they should have believed about Christ. It shows how we may react during crises and problems, and it shows us how we ought to react.

Here we learn some profound truths about overcoming fear, anxiety and worry, for God's glory.

As we follow this account, we'll set three markers to work our way through it, focusing on the Lord Himself and how the disciples responded to Him. We'll see a fearlessness before the storm, which is like us when life seems problem-free. We'll see the fear during the storm, which may be like us during problems, and we'll see the fear after the storm, which should be us, when we see God working in our lives.

## I. The Fearlessness Before the Storm

**Mark 4:35-37** <sup>35</sup> *On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side."*  
<sup>36</sup> *And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him.*

We find our Lord in one of His favourite pulpits – a boat. Back in 4:1, He had entered this boat, partly to avoid the crush of the crowd, partly to use the water behind Him to transport His voice. He has been teaching from this boat for hours – Mark just gives us the briefest summary of what He had taught. But after, no doubt, hours of instruction, Jesus knows that what the indifferent, impulsive or infested hearts needed to hear, they have already heard. It is time to move on, get a brief rest and do ministry on the other side of the Lake of Galilee.

He tells His disciples to push out and sail to the other side of the Lake. Maybe because they were anxious to go, maybe because they saw a possible storm brewing, they take Him as is, without any further preparations. Some of Jesus' other disciples are in some other small boats, following Him to the other side. Archaeologists have discovered a boat in the Lake of Galilee dating from the time of Christ, and it was around 24 feet long, by about 7 feet wide, capable of carrying 10 to 15 men easily enough. From the gospel of Luke we know that they *set sail*. A wind was blowing, and with the sun setting, you can imagine the sweetness of the scene. Little waves lapping the boat, the sweet smell of the lake breeze, the sails billowing out as the boat gently skips its way across the Lake of Galilee. The men no doubt felt freedom from fear. Those times in our lives are sweet, when for a brief period, there seem to be no pressing problems, nothing to vex us, nothing to alarm us. As someone said, if you're a Christian, you're either in a trial, coming out of a trial, or about to enter one. Those periods of problem-free living are usually brief, but they are sweet.

Small wonder that the Lord takes this opportunity for some rest from His punishing schedule of teaching. But this calm was not to last, because the Sea of Galilee is a trial waiting to happen.

It's a very interesting lake. It's 13 miles long, and 8 miles wide, and entirely freshwater, unlike the Dead Sea. It still supplies modern Israel with 50% of its drinking water. It's the lowest fresh-water lake on earth – 682 feet below sea-level, and rich in fish. In Christ's time Josephus reports there would have been around 230 boats working the lake for its fish.

What makes this lake prone to storms is that it is surrounded by mountains. On the east and north-east – the Golan Heights – rising to 3000 feet. On the west and north-west, they rise to 1500 feet. So imagine a lake nearly 700 feet below sea level, surrounded by mountains up to 3000 feet right around it. What you have is a natural cauldron, a huge pot. So what happens when winds begin to blow from these high mountains? They have nowhere to go. Instead they circle through this cauldron, gaining speed with no outlet. Meanwhile, the lake, being below sea level, is going to have warm, humid air around it. When that warm air rises, and you have high cold winds picking up speed around it, you have a recipe for a huge storm – a hurricane-like storm, where waves of ten feet can be whipped up. And since the lake is relatively small, those huge waves just bounce right back, like waves in a bathtub, and add to the chaotic storm.

And it can happen with alarming unpredictability. Even seasoned fisherman and sailors would not have a way of knowing how violent a storm like that might be. Here these boats had made off when evening was coming, expecting to sail across in an hour or so. But as the night brought more cool air and as the warm air evaporated, literally pulling down those high speed mountain winds, a sailor's worst nightmare began.

## II. The Fear During the Storm

<sup>37</sup> *And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling.* <sup>38</sup> *But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"*

That gentle breeze began to whip this way and that. The cold air told the sailors this wind had come down from the mountains. In the dimming light they could see the waves foaming at their tops, while the boat began to surge and dip more violently. The spray and the overflow began to soak their clothes, as their boat slid down into one wave, only to be slammed by another.

For a while, these commercial fishermen no doubt used their know-how to navigate another storm. But I wonder at what point the eyes of Peter began to nervously meet the eyes of John and James and the others, signalling that they knew this was not just another storm. The words in the original language say that this was not a simple wind-storm, but it uses the Greek adverb *megale*. In Matthew, it is called a *seismos* – an earthquake like storm. The waves were suddenly the height of a house, and the water the disciples were throwing out the boat was being poured back in faster than they could cope. The darkness made it all the more disorienting. They no doubt shouted at each other above the roar of the wind and the crashing waves, trying to respond, but there was less and less they could do. The enormous winds would blow them off the ship unless they hung on with all their might. By this time, the boat was brimful of water, and they could feel the weight of it beginning to sink. To be thrown out of a boat into these waves was near certain death.

You can imagine the progression – from concern about the growing winds, to a nervousness as things got rougher, into a real anxiety that this storm was serious and dangerous, into alarm as matters seem to get of control into naked terror and raw panic.

I don't know if you have ever been in danger of sinking aboard a ship, but this passage is not meant to teach about sailing. It's meant to be a mirror, so that as we look into the disciples panicked eyes, we see ourselves.

Our fears are not typically waves and sinking boats. We fear things like possible job loss or the collapse of a business. We fear something tragic happening to our child or loved one. We fear a dread disease, or a crippling accident. We fear reaching old age and having nothing to fall back on. We fear the breakdown of our bodies. We fear plenty of "What ifs" – what if I never reach my business goals, what if my child never trusts Christ, or abandons the faith, what if I never get married, what if my marriage breaks up, what if my spouse cheats on me, what if I am a victim of violent crime, what if I cannot pay back my debts, what if I lose everything.

Like the disciples, depending on how far the situation seems to get out of our control, often, just like them, our concerns turn into anxieties, which turn into obsessive worry and fear, which turns into panic and terror.

And terrified people are usually also angry people. That teaching of Christ's that they so gladly

transported is one they now find fault with. Again, look at verse 38

*But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"*

Jesus had gone down to the stern of the ship. Here was a low bench where the steersman would sometimes rest. With a pillow, he had gone to sleep. Behold the humanity of Jesus here. He has taught for hours and given up sleep and walked miles, and healed and borne sorrows and faced conflict. He is exhausted. You may have been this tired – where once you put your head down, you are almost immediately asleep and sound asleep. Yes, sound enough to keep sleeping as the boat's gentle rocking became a rough dipping and bucking, sound enough that the pooling lake water soaking His clothes still did not rouse Him.

How do these disciples interpret the sleep of Jesus? Do they look at His calm and reason that if He is calm, they should be also? Do they look at His sleep and conclude that if Messiah is asleep in the boat, God will not allow Him to perish, so they not worry? Do they interpret His sleep as the beautiful peace of the Son of God resting in His Father's will?

No, in their panic, and their hurt anger, they interpret His sleep as indifference. They wake Him and say to Him, "Don't you care that we are about to be destroyed? Do you not mind that we are destroyed? Are you so hard to us, so calloused, so cruel, that you would take your sleep while we suffer and die?"

Think of it. Here is the One who has healed the afflicted, delivered the demon-possessed, lifted crushing Pharisaic burdens, shown them that He loves them and does them nothing but good. He has come to die for their sins, so that they may fellowship with Him and His Father forever. And yet, in the grip of fear, Jesus is neglecting them, failing them, forgetting them, leaving them.

It's not the first time godly people have reacted like that. David would say things in his psalms like:

***Psalm 10:1*** *Why do You stand afar off, O LORD? Why do You hide in times of trouble? "*  
*Job would say Job 13:24* <sup>24</sup> *Why do You hide Your face, And regard me as Your enemy?*

And I think the reason God placed words like David's, Job's or that of the disciples in Scripture is because they tend to come out of our hearts too.

When the thing we wish would happen does not happen, when the thing we wish would not happen does happen, when the trouble increases instead of subsides, when the problem multiplies, when the answer does not come, when the pain goes on, if we allow it, a concern has become a fear, and the fear has changed our very attitude towards the Lord.

"Don't you see what I'm going through? Why don't you change it? If you loved me, you would have answered this? Why do my prayers seem to bounce? Have you lost interest in me? Are you taking revenge on me for my sins? Are you taking pleasure in my suffering? And with such thoughts and words we repay the One who became a lightning rod for the anger of God, took it, satisfied it, so that we may know only His pleasure for an eternity.

But fear does that to you. It controls you. It twists your judgement. It perverts your reason. It takes you to places and actions you deeply regret later on.

In their panic, they've woken Him up, presumably because they want Him to do something. I'm not

sure they knew what they wanted Him to do, because when He did do something, it completely overwhelmed them. As John MacArthur put it, 'It's a dark day, you know, when the sailors call on the carpenter to get them out of the storm ' But perhaps they wanted Him to pray. Maybe they wanted Him to share their angst. But He did not do that. What He did next took them to an entirely new level of understanding of Him.

### III. The Fear After the Storm

**Mark 4:39-41** <sup>39</sup> 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. <sup>40</sup> He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" <sup>41</sup> And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?"

The humanity of Jesus is seen clearly by the exhausted Jesus sleeping. But what He does next shows that while Jesus was fully human, but He was and is not only human.

He gets up, and speaks to the creation. He *rebukes* it, a strong word used when Jesus would cast out demons. He speaks to the water, and to the waves, as if they are intelligences. His words literally translated would be "Silence! Be muzzled!"

Now if you have ever seen a swimming pool full of waves from people diving or swimming, how long does it take to come to a perfect calm, if everyone stops moving in it? In a largish pool, perhaps several minutes. If all that would happen here was that the wind would die down, how long would it take for the sea to calm down? A good while. But that is not what happens here. In a display of the Creator's power over creation, the very energy of the water is sucked out, the shock waves are removed, the churning is halted. As if a massive hand bigger than the lake itself cups the whole thing and absorbs all the chaos. Round that little boat, those waves bow down like submissive, frightened dogs at the Master's feet. The winds come to attention and halt like soldiers at the voice of the drill sergeant. Jesus has spoken, and the sea is like glass. Jesus has used His human tongue and vocal cords to verbalise into the wind, and violent, deadly weather has frozen in its tracks and lies at His feet, waiting to obey again if there is another command.

Who in Scripture has conversations with waves, and they reply with "Yes sir!"?

**Job 38:11** <sup>11</sup> When I said, 'This far you may come, but no farther, And here your proud waves must stop!' **Psalms 89:9** <sup>9</sup> You rule the raging of the sea; When its waves rise, You still them. **Psalms 107:27-29** <sup>27</sup> They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, And are at their wits' end. <sup>28</sup> Then they cry out to the LORD in their trouble, And He brings them out of their distresses. <sup>29</sup> He calms the storm, So that its waves are still.

Who spoke to light and it came, who spoke to the land, to the skies, to the waters, to the cosmos for six days had atoms obey Him, animals leap into existence, galaxies burst into dazzling view, and clouds on undiscovered planets begin blowing?

That's who was in the boat. The One who had just been sleeping, was the one who 'rested' in a very different way on the seventh day.

What would we expect Jesus to say to these disciples after calming the storm? "There, there, it's all right." "That was a violent one, good thing you woke me." Instead of acting like the panicked fear of the disciples was understandable and normal, Jesus gently rebukes them. Not the angry rebuke of a bitter coach. Instead, like a shepherd looking at His shivering sheep. Like a parent taking His

wide-eyed and trembling children by the shoulders. He expects better from them. And He says to them, “Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?” The word here for *fearful* is the word that literally means cowardly. And notice how He ties that to faith. They are timid because of their unbelief.

How could Jesus expect this of them? Well, think of what they had already seen and heard. They had already seen great miracles over disease and demons and fish and water. They had already heard Jesus teach who He was, and they knew that He was the Son of God. He Himself had said, “Let us go over to the other side.” Since He had given that command, and since He was with them, they could have concluded they were still safe, in spite of the storm. He was not alarmed, and they could have looked at that and said, if the Son of God is sleeping, then the Father will certainly not let this boat go down.

In other words, they had enough experience and truth and knowledge that they could have come to the right conclusion. It was the 'Ye of little faith' principle. You have seen and heard – can you not make the right conclusion to this new situation?

The disciples' problem was not that their circumstances were so big; it was that their view of Jesus was so small. Their biggest problem was not around them, it was inside them. Their problem was not that they had too much fear, it's that they didn't have the right kind of fear – the fear of the Lord Jesus.

Only now, that Jesus had used His sovereign authority did they see it.

*<sup>41</sup> And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!"*

Here the word for *fear* in the original is different from verse 40. This is not the fear of being cowardly. They are now in awe. It literally reads 'they feared a great fear'. Their awe of Jesus had just left them whispering to each other, “Who then is this? Who is this, that the winds and waves submit to Him?”

*Who is this* indeed? That's the question they should have asked before the storm. That's the question that Jesus expected them to have already answered, and come to the right conclusions with what they already had. Now they stare at Him like Isaiah in the Temple, like Ezekiel before His vision, like Peter when he asked Jesus to depart from Him. Now they are like Job after God spoke from the whirlwind. The weight of glory presses down upon them. The fear of God has driven out the fear of life. Terror and hurt accusations have been silenced by awe, admiration, wonder, trembling trust, consolation.

**Matthew 10:28** <sup>28</sup> *"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."*

The greater our view of God, the less place for fear. Compare David and King Saul. As Goliath stands there and mocks Israel, Saul's low view of God keeps him and his men trembling in their tents. Along comes the shepherd boy who loves and fears God, and his amazed question is:

**1 Samuel 17:26** *"For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?"*

Compare the ten spies to Joshua and Caleb. The ten spies have a low view of God and come back

dreading the thought of entering a land where they feel like grasshoppers. Joshua and Caleb have a fear of Yahweh, not of man, and they say:

***"Numbers 14:9*** *"Only do not rebel against the LORD, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the LORD is with us. Do not fear them."*

The greater the fear of the Lord, the greater the peace in the life. My view of Jesus is proportionate to my fear of life. Unbelieving fear reflects on the character of God. Fear paralyses us. Fear halts us, slows us, discourages us, instead of the opposite. God expects trust from those he has demonstrated faithfulness to. "Therefore I will fear no evil – *for thou art with me.* "

***Proverbs 29:25*** <sup>25</sup> *The fear of man brings a snare,*

***Proverbs 14:26*** <sup>26</sup> *In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, ..*

Are you in awe of Jesus? Is He more powerful than your problems, wiser than your confusion, more joyful than your discouragement? Do His promises dwarf your problems? Does the thought of belonging to Christ seem to be the sun that comes out after the storm?

How big is your Christ? Is the pale, wispy, effeminate figure of the flea-market pictures? Is He the harmless figure in a choir robe who helps you when you feel down? Or do you see the riding King, on His proud and high-stepping horse, 6000-year-old angels riding behind Him? Have you climbed the mountain that is Christ and felt His permanent security under your feet? Have you eaten the Bread that is Christ and felt His nourishment filling whatever fears were gnawing at your mind? Have you hidden behind the Lion that is Christ and seen all threat cower before His roar? Do you know this Christ?

Or are you a tourist in the knowledge of Jesus? Getting on the tour bus once a week, having a guide pointing out some things, and taking home a brochure of second-hand insights.

I don't mean to suggest that you will have that all at once. I ask you, what are you doing to cultivate the knowledge of the Lord, so that in your trials He need not say to you, "How is it that you still have no faith?"

How do I do that? You saturate yourself with the Word. You worship him with other believers, you speak of Him with other believers, you pray to him and learn to cast your cares on Him, you love his promises and speak to him of His promises. This is not something that only I am saying. Here the Baptist prince of preachers Charles Spurgeon answering how to get a clearer greater view of God:

"If it is so, your quickest way to faith will be to read your Bible more, to study it with greater attention and to hear the Gospel more often. Come out to week-night services and commune more with Christ in private. Spend three, four, five times the amount of time you now do in devotions and so draw nearer to your Lord, entreating the Holy Spirit to lead you into all the Truths of God."

Did you ever think that God not only calmed the storm - He also caused it and ruled over it? The storm was a necessary test for the disciples, just like your trials are.

Why doesn't He just take away my problem? Most times He would prefer to calm His child in the storm, rather than calming the storm for His child. Most times He would prefer that your fear of Him will drive out fears of things less than Him. What He sees as most important is not the

physical, temporal things we worry about, but the eternal view we have of Him, He's going for nothing less than the heart, for the gold of worship, not for the tin of passing relief.

What do I do? Cultivate the knowledge of God. Let the storms drive you to Christ, to find His sufficiency, not away from Him. Let Him grow in you the fear of the Lord, that will drive out all other fears.