

Living with Fear & Anxiety

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Date: 20 June 2021

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[0 : 00] So our reading today is from Mark 4, verses 35 to 41. I'll be reading from the ESV, just so there's no confusion.

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, let us go across to the other side. And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in a 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. But he was in the stern, asleep on a cushion. And they woke him and said to him, teacher, do you not care that we are perishing? 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. He said to them, why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith? 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?

[1 : 26] Amen. How do we live with fear and anxiety? Both feel like they're on the rise.

Despite ever-increasing technological aids to try and help us, to try and make life easier, it can often feel like life is getting harder, or at the very least, more complex.

Anxiety referrals for teenagers and even children are on the rise. And it can feel like every day, we can or may encounter a new storm in our lives.

Something that shakes our foundations. Something that makes us truly worry, have I got it all wrong? Does the Bible have something to say about this?

You bet. And we find it in this well-trodden story, and one of my favorite gospel stories, Jesus calming the storm.

[2 : 32] And in it, we can find an answer to how we live in a world with storms. Now, just to give some prior context, not to drop, just drop us into nowhere, Jesus prior to this had been teaching by the Sea of Galilee to such a crowd that he went into a boat to teach from.

After teaching all day, we read Jesus say, let us go across to the other side. And this brings us to the first of four points.

That being, Jesus leads his disciples into storms. Now, the first thing we should note is that Jesus suggested to go to the other side of the lake.

The disciples were following his directions. Mark records, Mark records, when evening had come, he said to them, let us go across to the other side. So, just because someone is a disciple of Jesus does not mean you will avoid storms.

Here is evidence that Jesus may go out of his way to lead you through them. Jesus could have known that they will hit this storm. As I said to the kids, it was very common.

[3 : 43] It still is today. It's all because of the geography, because the Sea of Galilee is like 800 meters or something below, 800 feet, 800 meters would be impressive.

800 feet below sea level with mountains on either side, that the wind comes in and just goes straight down. And so, that means that whenever a wind comes in, the storm comes up out of nowhere, and it was given the name shark.

In fact, it was common knowledge then, and it's still common knowledge now. And it either hit in the morning or evening. So, Jesus, knowingly or intentionally, took his disciples into very possible danger.

But Jesus never once promised smooth sailing to any disciple. Rather, as J.C. Ryle, a bishop from the 1800s, said, free pardon and full forgiveness, grace by the way, and glory at the end.

All this our Savior has promised to give. But he has never promised that we shall have no afflictions. He loves us too well to promise that. By afflictions, he teaches us many precious lessons, which without it we should never learn.

[4 : 59] By affliction, he shows us our emptiness and our weakness, draws us to the throne of grace, purifies our affections, weans us from the world, makes us long for heaven.

And in the resurrection morning, we shall all say, it is for good for me that I was afflicted. We shall thank God for every storm. Now, I'm not saying that glibly or blindly.

There's many things in my own life that I truly wish the Lord would never have brought my family through. But I say with clouded vision and not full wisdom, and I trust the Lord that on the final day, he has done it all for his glory and for my good.

But does that mean we need to fear these storms? Because despite the storm, point two, Jesus was a man filled with great peace.

Verse 37 and 38 remind us of these two great things. Firstly, Jesus was a man. He was filled with hunger, pain, and even tiredness. And previously, he had been preaching to a multitude of crowds.

[6 : 11] Now, preaching, surprisingly, takes it out of you. Even though you're speaking for a really short period of time compared to, say, teachers in school, you feel both emotionally and even physically drained.

You can feel like you're pouring yourself out. So that idea of preaching all day with no technological aids in the middle of a begging eastern sun beating down on you must have been so exhausting.

So, of course, when Jesus leaves the crowd, gets into the boat, finds some cushion in the boat, he falls asleep. Now, why is that good news?

Well, the Jesus we worship is as truly a man as he is God. When we pray, we are speaking with one who knows our weaknesses, our pains, our weariness.

He knows them not just in an all-knowing kind of way, but because he experienced them himself.

When you're faced with a problem, a pain, or anxiety, it's so much better to find someone who's been through it, isn't it, than someone who just tries to understand.

[7 : 29] Well, our Lord knows our frames. He knows that the mind is often willing, but the body is weak. He knows that the temptations that we are plagued with, but he himself remained without sin.

He is the very saviour weak mortals need. We don't need a superhero who never faces our temptations or our pains.

Rather, we have someone who's been through them and can relate to us. It's also interesting to note that the only time in all the Gospels that mentions Jesus sleeping is in the midst of a storm.

Jesus is truly the embodiment of the idea of shalom, the peace of God. He is so secure in the good providence of His Father that through a storm that had hardened fishermen screaming in terror, Jesus was at peace.

But can this be true of us? Genuinely, sometimes we put Jesus so far up on the God spectrum that we forget that He is fully man and fully God.

[8 : 52] And we sort of go, oh, well that's fine for Jesus. He's God. But can this be true of us? Well, yes, if we truly believe. And let me give you one example from the life of Stonewall Jackson, a general during the American Civil War.

Jackson gave a rare explanation of his performance under fire to John M. Bowden who asked him in frank astonishment, how is it that you keep so cool and appear so utterly insensible to danger in such a storm of shell and bullets as rained about you?

Jackson gazed at the young officer of artillery and replied, Captain, my religious beliefs teach me to feel as safe in battle as in bed.

God has fixed the time for my death. I do not concern myself about that, but to be always ready no matter when it may overtake me. This is the way all men should live and then all would be equally brave.

But how can we live like this? Well, Jesus as a man lived dependent on the mercy of his Father. As it says in John 5, the Son can do nothing by himself.

[10 : 12] He can do only what he sees his Father doing because whatever the Father does, the Son also does. But Jesus, having perfect fellowship in the Trinity with his Father since before time even began, could see the reality of how things truly worked.

That this world is held together by his power as Colossians tells us. That nothing happens unless God has first decreed it. that life is not random and unpredictable, but ordered with good purpose by our Heavenly Father.

That's one of the ideologies we need to reject from the world. That is random and unpredictable.

Dear goodness, it's not. The chair you're sitting on is only held together because Christ holds it

together as Colossians tells us.

what you're sitting on is mostly space between atoms. Christ holds that together. Christ holds the air you breathe together.

God is in complete control. As one of the old German catechisms said, not a hair can fall from my head unless the Father has willed it.

[11 : 28] Now the more time we are with Jesus and in his word having our outlook, our worldview changed, the more we'll become like him. I don't know if you've ever experienced being around a really charismatic person.

What happens is you start to pick up their attitudes, their way of thinking, their way of life. If you're like me and you end up binge watching a series on TV or Netflix, you can start to even pick up mannerisms of characters on it.

That's a bad sign that I watch too much TV. But the same very much can be said of when we spend so much time with Jesus. We see the world the way he sees it.

That's the point. Having our mind renewed to Christ. because we will see the reality that our Father in heaven is in charge.

Our side of the world will be more conformed to how things actually are run. However, it's not just that he's in control. He is in control because, thirdly, he has almighty power to calm storms.

[12 : 43] Now here we get to the climax of our storm and the story. Jesus rudely awoken by the disciples with shouts that he doesn't care. Then calms the storm but with a word.

There's a few things to note here. First is that Jesus calms the storm by speaking. Now this could make us immediately think back to Genesis 1 where order is made from chaos.

God speaks the world into existence. But the idea here is slightly different. Something you may find interesting that the word Jesus used can be translated as strictly charged or ordered.

It's been previously used in Mark in the rebuking of evil spirits. But the word is actually used in Jewish exorcisms.

For, I quote, the commanding word uttered by God or his spokesman by which evil powers are brought into submission and the way is thereby prepared for the establishment of God's righteous rule in the world.

[13 : 51] Now it's weird to think about commanding something as inanimate as the wind in such a personal manner.

But in the Old Testament wind and waters are often portrayed as hostile forces over which God prevails. Think of Psalm 89.9 You rule over the surging sea when its waves mount up you still them. In the Old Testament the sea is and in that world the sea was seen as mysterious and dangerous uncontrollable. That's why you had the Leviathan the monsters in the sea from Norse mythology to eastern deities.

It's uncontrollable. There's powers there's mystery in it you can't see it. But in the Bible it's just a servant. You still them.

Jesus here is portrayed as the strong man the warrior who vanquishes any foe that prevents him from his mission of entering Gentile lands. Think of Jesus here in this passage as attacking enemy territory as he moves from Jewish lands into pagan lands.

[15 : 08] But the author is doing more than just saying Jesus is the strong man. Rather this story is showing that Jesus is doing only what God can do. And we see this in the comparison with the psalm we read Psalm 107.

Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble and he brought them out of their distress. He stilled a storm to a whisper. The waves of the sea were hushed. Now we like the disciples can be in many storms.

This year has presented us with many new things to fear. COVID has truly terrified some. I know of one fellow who hasn't left his house in a year no year and a half now.

Authoritarian measures have truly terrified others to the points where I know other people who will be emigrating to somewhere else. But this story teaches us that Jesus can lead us to this storm and no matter what the storm may be no matter how terrifying no matter how all encompassing no matter if we think our little boat is filling with water and we're about to drown Jesus is with his people and he has the power to calm storms.

Listen to Jesus' words. Calm be still. Those words have been important to me in my life. As I'm faced with fear or anxiety or trouble or uncertainty and I can feel in my own heart a storm raging up

against me to take away any peace that I have I'm reminded of Jesus' words peace be still.

[16:58] Jesse Ryle again said it so much better with the Lord Jesus Christ nothing is impossible. No stormy passions are so strong but he can tame them.

No temper is so rough and violent but he can change it. No conscience is so disturbed but he can speak peace to it and make it calm. No man ever need despair if he will only bow down his pride and come as a humble sinner to Christ.

Christ can do miracles upon his heart. No man ever need despair of reaching his journey's end if he has once committed his soul to Christ's keeping. Christ will carry him through every danger.

Christ will make him conqueror over every foe. What though our relations oppose us, what though our neighbors laugh us to scorn, what though our place be hard, what though our temptations be great, it is all nothing if Christ is on our side and we are in the ship with him.

Greater is he that is for us than all those who are against us. The last thing we learn is Jesus is compassionate.

[18:13] Now I absolutely love the disciples because they give me a sense of hope. In Mark, which is meant to be the first and earliest gospel, the response by the disciples is recorded as being politely put, more direct.

You could even call it rude or insulting to Jesus. They say, teacher, don't you care that we're perishing? Now these were sailors. Try to put that into blue-collar language that doesn't translate well over to our modern day language.

Teacher, don't you care? We're drowning. Wake up. Now Matthew softens this to a prayer and Luke records it as a plea but in Mark you have the full terror of the disciples.

They accuse Jesus of not caring. Now if you ever get a bit scared, you can either respond by fleeing or fighting.

In one of my sons, Isaac, he flees. In my other son, Noah, the two-year-old, he fights. He's like his mom. He has got very Scots blood in him.

[19:33] For example, the hair dryer suddenly went on. He stood on the hair dryer by accident and it was still on. He got a fright and he turned around and slapped his mom. That's a two-year-old.

Dear goodness. But men, can you imagine saying that to your wife when you got really worried about something or to your mom or dad?

How insulting would that be? What do you think the response would be? The response by us would be, how dare you say that to me? Do you not think I care about you? The disciples were so caught up in the very terror of that moment that they forgot everything that had happened previously.

And we can be just like that. We forge, we can work so hard to forge in our minds strong beliefs, strong doctrines.

You know, God is sovereign. Nothing happens but from his will. You can pound it like Ian Paisley or someone like that and try and bang it into your head. But then a storm comes and it can be as if we've never believed one word of it, a day in our lives.

[20:46] As a commentator wisely remarked, the real danger to faith comes not from lack of knowledge often, but from doubt and fear. But what of Jesus' response?

This power that just muzzled a storm, commanded it like a general telling a hundred thousand men to about turn, now turns to his disciples. Does he cast them away for their lack of faith?

Does he say, that's it? That's the final straw? No. He asks, why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith? He passes over the fact that the disciples called his very question into character, or his character into question, that their fear made them question who he is, that they thought so little of him in that very moment.

Jesus passes that all over, and how good is that. Jesus does not treat his followers as our sins deserve.

He knows us at our best, and he knows us at our very worst. He knows our every weakness, our failures that only we may know, our striving and feeling, and he doesn't cast them off.

[22:07] As Psalm 103 says, the Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him. If you're in the habit of giving up in yourself, and if you're in the habit of casting yourself out as a waste, as useless, as a failure, know that Jesus never casts one of whom the Father has drawn to him.

Know that Jesus is in the business of transforming hearts, and the end result is worth all the failures along the way, and that the Lord knows your end from the beginning.

Cast your burdens on Jesus, whose compassion has not changed for any who follow him. Now, this story is very similar to another story in the Old Testament.

Jonah chapter one, in it you have a story of someone asleep in a boat who's suddenly awoken. You have sailors who are filled with fear and panic at a sudden storm. When the storm is suddenly calmed by God, the sailors are filled with fear and worshipped God and believed.

The disciples were absolutely terrified. And that fear can either make us do two things. It can make us give up and think, that's it, my world is over, or it can make us throw ourselves at the one who can do something about it.

[23 : 43] The disciples knew only God could tell the storms when to blow or the wind when to crash, but they just witnessed Jesus do those very same things and they were filled with terror.

The disciples responded in even greater fear than to the storm, saying, who is this man? Even the wind and the waves obey him. The storm was rational.

Their impending death and even death itself was rational, but having the presence of the supernatural was truly terrifying. Now, the end of the story doesn't give a conclusion.

It's open ended. It leaves the reader to question, did they believe? Did their fear lead them to put their trust in him? The disciples' question in this story is not just for story's sake.

Mark, the author, is inviting you to ask the same question. Who is this man that even the winds and the waves obey him?

[24 : 46] Where is God asking you to put your trust in him right now? Where do you think your little boat is feeling like it's sinking?

Have we been crying out to God like the disciples, maybe even shouting? Do you care? Do you believe Jesus has power over storms?

Even your storms, your passions, your temptations, your failures? What this story is asking you is, what will you do with your fear?

What will you do before your storm? will you panic? Or will you believe in the one who can calm storms?

Will you have faith? Let's pray. Our heavenly father, we pray that we will recognize you for who you are and who you say you are.

[26 : 04] Please don't let storms take that away. Help us have faith. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.