

Fear

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[0 : 00] Well, hey, good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. As always, you can check us out more by going to FCCGreensburg.com or by going to the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.

But hey, our heart is simply this. We want to get into the Word of God, but mostly we want the Word of God to get into us and transform these hearts daily more and more into the image of Christ.

Now, if you'd like to follow along today, go ahead and grab your Bibles. Go to Matthew chapter 14, Matthew 14. And as you are, I read a story from a pastor as he was kind of taking us back to the days of his childhood where he would walk home from school every day.

And along that route, there was a large, very threatening dog with an equally intimidating bark. And even though it was on a long chain, when they would walk past, he would start barking and running after them.

And of course, the chain would eventually stop him. But that didn't stop the kids from being afraid that at some point that that chain was going to break and they were going to be in a world of hurt. So one day, the owner of the dog was outside and he watched the typical scene play out.

[1 : 14] So the next day, as a few of these anxious students are walking by that crazy dog again, the man was outside waiting for them. But this time, he had the beast on a leash, okay?

And when he saw the kids coming, he began to motion for them to come over. But they didn't know if they were in trouble, if he was going to let the dog bite them. But either way, they weren't going close to that dog or that man.

So he starts walking toward them with the dog. And as he's getting closer, he's saying, listen, you don't need to be afraid of my dog. You don't need to be afraid.

And then he knelt down. Get this. He knelt down, pulled back the dog's upper lip, showing them that the dog had no teeth, not a single tooth in his mouth.

The pastor said they couldn't help it. They all just busted out laughing because it was the craziest sight. And that's when the man said, hey, even if this dog got loose and tried to bite you, it wouldn't hurt.

[2 : 17] And from that day forward, those kids walked by that dog with no fear and a lot more confidence. They might have even teased him a little bit. And today, as we're back in week five of our series called Greater Than, walking through some certain passages in the book of Matthew, I want you to know that when you are in Christ, you don't have to be overcome by fear.

Because Satan's a lot like that toothless dog, where his bark is much worse than his bite when you are walking in Jesus Christ. And while he's going to keep charging at you, barking out his lies, you can keep your eyes on the prize and realize that you walk in victory as a child of God.

But even in believing that with my whole heart, let's take off the mask for the next 30 minutes. And let's talk about this topic of fear. Because every one of us that are listening to this audio message, every one of us struggle with fear in one way or another.

That's true even when you're a household name. Did you know that Jennifer Aniston and Cher both are aviaphobes? They're afraid of flying? Michael Jackson was haunted by the fear of contamination, infection, and diseases known as misophobia.

Even people from the past. George Washington was terrified of being buried alive. Richard Nixon was horrified by hospitals. Napoleon Bonaparte, the military warrior, was deathly afraid of cats.

[3 : 50] And yet, we're not here to focus on famous people's weird phobias. But instead, we're going to talk about those fears that we battle every day that stand in the way of us trusting the Lord and walking in His power and freedom.

And guys, I really like how John Ortberg put this in his book. He says, Fear disrupts faith and becomes the biggest obstacle to trusting and obeying God.

Many of us have probably heard these powerful words from Scripture that come from 2 Timothy 1.7 as well. And I hope these words will echo through your mind every time Satan comes trying to paralyze you with fear.

Here's what the Apostle Paul said through the Holy Spirit. He said, For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but instead of power, love, and self-discipline.

So let's get a little reflective today. What are you afraid of? And I'm not talking about spiders or feet or those most terrifying words for a parent like me, assembly required, okay?

[5 : 00] No, I'm talking about that constant worry about something happening to your spouse or to your child. Maybe it's the concern that no one will ever love me and I'll be lonely my whole life.

Maybe it's the fear of how others will see you. Maybe it's the unknown of going all in with Jesus. What if he calls me outside my comfort zone? Maybe it's the fear of losing control in your life, giving things over to God.

Maybe it's the sacrifice you're going to have to make to do what God is calling you to do. Maybe it's the fear of tithing back to him in a very expensive society, knowing that I'm not able to have that car or that boat or that fancy camper or whatever.

Maybe it's FOMO, fear of missing out on things of this world if I say yes to Jesus. All things that we either can't control or they won't fill that God-shaped hole in our hearts anyways.

And yet we see the phrase, do not be afraid. Use 70 times in God's word because we, that includes me, can be people dominated by fear, not living in the purpose and the power of Christ.

[6 : 13] And our God knew that this would be a struggle. And that's why he gives us countless examples like our passage today. So if you've not already turned there, Matthew chapter 14, we're going to start in verse 22.

And just a little bit of context here. Jesus has just taken five loaves of bread, two fish, multiplied it to feed 5,000 men and their families.

A lot of scholars think probably around 20,000 people. And while Matthew doesn't share this, we see in another gospel that the people blown away by this miracle want to make Jesus king.

And while he's no doubt the king of kings, they were trying to act outside of God's perfect timing and will. Their idea of a king was short-sighted and worldly. And it's likely that his disciples would have probably joined in with them.

So listen, Jesus wants to break up this party quick and now, okay? And he wants to get those people out of there especially the 12 that he's trying to shape and mold into these apostles who will carry the message of Jesus on.

[7 : 21] So let's go ahead and start here in Matthew 14, 22. And just stick with me. We're going to read a few verses here. Immediately, Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side while he dismissed the crowd.

After he had dismissed them, he went up on the mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there all alone and the boat was already a considerable distance from land buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

Shortly before dawn, Jesus went out to them walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. It's a ghost, they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them, Take courage, it is I.

Don't be afraid. Now, I want to talk us through three miracles that Jesus performs in this one story and even see three different ways that we could overcome our fear by putting our faith in a powerful and loving God.

Now, if you're a note taker today, you could always go to the YouVersion Bible app. YouVersion Bible app, Y-O-U. Okay? You can go to that. You can click on events.

[8 : 38] You can click on First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana, and you can see our outline. So fear killer number one. Okay? Here's how you overcome fear with faith. Fear killer number one, see Jesus for who he is.

And I love how this passage starts out. Jesus gets the disciples out of there. Away from the group's wishes to make him an earthly king. And next, he dismisses that larger crowd.

Then he went up on the mountainside by himself to pray, to seek the Father's heart. And I love this because I am so guilty sometimes when decisions must be made or life gets hard and stressful or

just for everyday strength.

Too often, I try to solve it all in my own strength. But Jesus, God in the flesh, still made it a priority to step away from the crowd, the noises, the chaos, and pursue the Father's will in quiet.

And when he was done, what the Bible calls the fourth watch of the night, which would have been between what we would call three and six in the morning, right before dawn, still darkish, maybe completely dark, the disciples have been fighting for their lives and the wind and the waves on the sea for about nine hours-ish now.

[10:00] And what normally would have been a very short trip, maybe an hour or two, turns into an exhausting ordeal. And Jesus, here's the miracle, I want you to see this, comes walking to them on the water as calm as can be in the chaotic wind and waves.

As calm as can be as the disciples are in panic mode. Have you noticed that when we're freaking out about stuff that God isn't? I want to tell you about two different statues that are in New York City. Right in front of the Rockefeller Center, you have a statue of Atlas, this huge muscle-bound man that we'd all love to look like, holding the weight of the world upon his shoulders.

And if you look at it, I mean, he is straining. It's everything he has to simply survive that burden. And then if you walk across the street, there's the famous St. Patrick's Cathedral.

And inside of it, kind of behind, I believe, like the altar area, is a statue of Jesus as a boy. And he's carrying the world in his hand, not straining it at all.

[11:08] See, when it comes to our own lives, our own fears, we can be like these statues. Maybe you're like Atlas, trying to hold up the weight of the world with your fears consuming you, living exhausted, stressed, and even become a person you never wanted or thought you would be.

That can be any of us, okay? Or maybe God's already been doing a great work in your life and you've come to realize that you were never meant to carry the world. That's Jesus' job.

And he's really good at it. So you're daily learning how to give those fears over to him. And I love how when Jesus comes near walking on the water, the disciples see something, but they don't know it's him.

Already stressed and fearing for their lives, panic mode reaches some new heights. They think it's a ghost. They cry out in terror. But Jesus speaks into their fear.

And he says to them, take courage. It is I. Don't be afraid. And I can't help but laugh thinking about when the Lord was preparing this part of the message in my office.

[12:12] You have to understand my jacked up psyche a little bit, okay? I love sports, okay? I can be pretty intense. I played the lowest level, so don't be impressed. The lowest level of college basketball for four years, 130 plus games.

And I was always short. I'm about 5'9", 5'10". Not as athletically gifted as a whole lot of people are. So I had to be smart on the court. I had to be fundamental.

I had to be tough. I had to be physical. I had to drive. I had to have drive. I had to have determination. And that fire in my belly didn't go away when I stopped playing sports.

It's carried over into ministry. Where there are times, and you're about to see how weird your preacher is, but there are times where I'm here, let's say 6, 6.30 on a Sunday morning.

I'm preparing for Sunday morning. I'm getting hyped, pounding my chest, saying to all four of us, you know, the Father, Son, Holy Spirit, and me. But I'm saying, all right, Ray, this is what you're trained for, man.

[13:11] If you can't get pumped up for this, then you don't have a pulse because this is kingdom work. This is what you were created for. So yes, pray for me because I'm pretty weird.

But I had a similar experience here where I came to the words Jesus spoke to his panicking disciples when he said, take courage, it is I. Don't be afraid.

And then I turned around in my office and directly behind me, I saw a sign that says Joshua 1.9 on it where God says to Joshua as he's filling some big shoes with Moses just passing away, he's gone from the right-hand man to the main man and even has this God-sized charge to take Israel into the promised land that is full of enemies.

And I read those words again where God says, have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged. For the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.

And then I thought, why do I allow fear to consume me when I belong to a Savior who defied natural law and walked on water? When I belong to a God who cared about sick outcasts and healed them

of leprosy?

[14:26] When I belong to the living water who loved and changed the woman at the well that society saw as promiscuous? Maybe better than all those, I belong to Elohim, the all-powerful creator of the universe who spoke and creation sprang into existence.

He's infinite, immutable, self-sufficient, all-powerful, all-knowing, wise, faithful, good, just, merciful, gracious, loving, holy, glorious, majestic, and so much more.

And when all of this becomes more than just religious jargon and it permeates deep down into my soul, into my heart, and I see Jesus for who He really is, I'll discover there's no place for fear in my life that I can put my faith in Him and I can walk in His power.

It is a daily journey, by the way. Now, fear killer number two, keep your eyes on Jesus. Have you ever noticed that it's easy for Christians to pick up, pick on Simon Peter?

He's one of those big, bold, brassy, loud mouth type of personalities. Some would say that he had foot and mouth disease where you open mouth and you insert foot. And there's a good reason why Peter's talked about this way because we have some examples of it in Scripture because he had some big falls along the way.

[15:52] But look at this story because I want to make the case that he may have been the most sincere among the disciples in his desire to seek the Lord and be close to Him.

So, let's pick up here in Matthew 14, verse 28, where we left off. And it says, Lord, if it's you, Peter replied, tell me to come to you on the water.

Come, he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and beginning to sink, cried out, Lord, save me.

Immediately, Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. You of little faith, he said, why did you doubt? Could you imagine this scene? The waves are high and the wind is vicious.

The boat is being thrown all over the place. Seasoned fishermen are probably saying their final goodbyes. When Jesus shows up, it had to be this huge dose of hope for these guys.

[16:52] But still, I would have never thought to have asked Jesus. I would have never thought to have asked Jesus if I could walk on the water too. I would have been begging him to just get in the boat and calm the waves to get me to the shore.

But Peter, with all his quirks, all his limitations, just like us, was a man who went big in all areas, including his faith. If it's you, Jesus. And guys, you've got to remember, it's dark.

Maybe, I don't know, it could have been starting to get light a little bit, but it was still fairly dark. So he says, if it's you, Jesus, tell me to come to you on the water. He knows that voice.

And Jesus simply says, come. Here's my interpretation. Come on, big boy. Man, I'll let you come as far as your faith will carry you because I have big plans for your life.

I want to take you further. And I can just picture Peter steadying himself in the boat, which probably wasn't easy in the storm. And then he lifts one leg over and then the other.

[17:53] And I bet his eyes got as big as the waves as he was standing on the water, really standing on top of water. And this makes no earthly sense at all because it's miracle number two in this story.

And as quickly as he got out of the boat, the steps started. And this guy was the first and only person in the history of the world, not named Jesus, to walk on water without help.

But here was the secret. He had to take his eyes off fear and place them on Jesus. And I like how Proverbs 29, 25 puts this.

It says, fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe. And while it may have seemed crazy to others, Peter was safer walking on water with his eyes on Jesus than they were in the boat glaring at the storm.

What an incredible stroll of faith this was. But then, he, just like we've done many times, Peter takes his eyes off of Jesus and he looks at the wind and the waves and the storm howling around him and he began to sink.

[19:00] And I'm not making excuses for him. It was a lack of trusting God. Jesus told him that and we can relate. I have a picture in my office that I absolutely love because it's this picture of, it's almost this, it's the story of Peter walking on water, but it's at the point where he begins to sink.

And as you look at the picture, it's like you are Peter in the story and you are looking up through the water to on top of the water and you can see kind of a shadow of Jesus and then his hand is coming through the water.

And I love that painting because we can be substituted in Peter's place in this story and when our faith falters, Jesus' hand comes through the water at just the right time.

And maybe the first time you get out of the boat, you get a step or two in and you fall and Jesus' hand is there. Maybe the next time it's three to four steps and it's there again.

And then seven or eight, there might even be religious people in the boat who are mocking you and criticizing you but hear me, I'd much rather walk on water, sink and be rescued by a God of grace than never get out of the boat at all.

[20 : 11] But the goal is to trust him more every day to seek his face, to walk more steps in faith on that water, to grow your roots down deeper in his love and keep taking more steps because what does Hebrews 12 verses 1 and 2 say?

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, listen to this, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Here we go. Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. Sometimes we make this walk with Jesus way too complex like the Pharisees.

We like to add all of our own rules and regulations to it and you see so many churches doing this but listen, you can simplify it to this. Our job is to keep our eyes fixed on him and when we falter, we call out to him just like Peter did and then fix those eyes, fix those eyes back on your Savior and he'll take care of the rest.

Okay, last fear killer today and that's worship. Worship. I had the privilege to go to CIY Superstart with our 4th through 6th graders a little over a week ago at Traders Point Christian Church and I'm so thankful for Pastor Mitch who is our youth pastor and Lynn who is our children's director because I couldn't do what they do with our youth and children's ministries.

[21 : 48] It is not my calling. They are fantastic but probably the highlight of the high energy weekend for me was a time where we sang worship music. There were probably around 2,500 of us in this large sanctuary up in the Indianapolis area.

Most of us kids had flooded up to the front by the stage and us old fuddy-duddies were left in our seats. We just actually had some room which was kind of nice and as I'm singing out to Jesus looking through a sea of kids pouring their hearts out in worship my heart just started to break for these kids and here's why.

I couldn't help but to beg God in that moment to take an exciting event like this and drive the powerful truths from God's word that they were teaching deep into these kids' hearts because listen the lights go out the crowd fades but I prayed that the love for Jesus and worshiping him would never die down and it was a powerful moment with God as the tears were streaming down my face and part of that was the fact that my own son was one of the kids and man I've been praying for him to become a follower of Jesus which he has done now which is awesome and live out God's calling on his life I've been praying that since before he was born and so in this powerful worship moment God was just doing something as I was just praying over these kids and listen I know worship is so much bigger than the songs we sing once a week in a church service it's the lives that we live you can look at Romans 12 1 and 2 okay just check that out on your own but it's the lives we live the love we show towards our God at church on Sunday and even when the annoying co-worker gets going on Tuesday or when the guy cuts me off in traffic on Thursday and even when I decide how I'm going to spend my Saturday night worship is 24-7 lifting up the name of Jesus giving him the glory he's due in my words in my actions and here's where it's hard in my motives now look at the third miracle in this story in Matthew 14 starting back in verse 32 so Peter just by the way let me give you a little context he just walked on water in faith sank because of fear and he's being rescued by Jesus because of grace then God's word says this and when they climbed into the boat that's Peter and Jesus when they climbed into the boat the wind died down then those who were in the boat worshipped him saying truly you are the son of God now once again

Jesus has control over the weather and the sea becomes calm as they get in the boat at his command and here's what I want you to see the reason worship is so powerful in overcoming fear is because worship lifts our eyes off of our own circumstances and it puts them on a God who is awesome in power and that's why I join in with Hebrews 10 25 and will always because it's biblical number one but I will always encourage you to make going to church with the body of Christ a priority in your life it doesn't have to be first Christian we may or may not be the church for you but make sure it's biblical because every part of what we do is designed to worship when the service

starts and we go into the music it's worship singing biblical lyrics lifting up and praising the only one who is worthy Jesus when we go into this time into the time of preaching God's word it's worship as we seek to grow deeper in our faith in him when we take communion and we examine these hearts by focusing on the cross it's worship when we pray together that's laying everything down to God in worship when we do announcements and we give you opportunities to serve Jesus with your gifts or even to grow in your walk that's worship and what you do before and even after church as you talk and you do life together and you build that support system and you encourage each other that's worship because true biblical worship takes our stare takes our gaze off of our current struggles our own limitations our own fears and it fixes our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith so I don't know about you but I have some fears that I need to lay down at the foot of the cross so let's do this let's see Jesus for who he really is let's fix our eyes on him and let's worship as fear disappears and our faith and an awesome God grows

Jesus is greater than my fears you need to hear me Jesus is greater than my fears now say it with me Jesus is greater than my fears let's pray heavenly father thank you so much for your word and how you have just spoken it right into our hearts today I'm thankful God that we don't have to be overcome with fear even though it's easy to do I'm thankful that we don't have to be overcome by all the circumstances and all the whispers that Satan puts in our ears that make us doubt and question and everything else I'm thankful that you are a God who could walk on water who could call Peter and us to walk on water with you and who could get in that boat and calm the waves with a simple command God you are awesome and when our eyes stop focusing on ourselves and our own limitations and our own fears and we focus on you and who you really are when we fix our eyes on you and Jesus when we worship you with all our hearts that's when the fears disappear and the faith takes control so help us to have faith in you Lord every day grow us more and more into the image of Christ we pray we pray this in Jesus holy name amen and amen hey I want to just give you this invitation

[28 : 11] I have no idea where you are in your walk with Jesus maybe you're not a follower of Christ maybe God led you to this and you don't even know why you listened to it for this long that was on purpose by God and so I hope that if you have questions about your faith or maybe you're ready to talk about hey I want to give my life to Jesus I want to repent and be baptized like scripture talks about listen we would love to come alongside you once again we are First Christian Church Greensburg Indiana my name is Ray Sweet I'm the lead pastor and we would love to come alongside you so here's a couple ways you can reach out to us you can call 812-663-8488 that's 812-663-8488 or you can email me at ray at fccgreensburg.com hey thank you for tuning in today and God bless you as you step out in faith and you walk on that water and you trust that God is in control God bless you