

A greater fear (Part1)

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- [0 : 00] Well, what do you fear will overpower you? Can you think of something? Growing up, my brother had complete power over me, complete power.
- Often he would show it by wrestling me to the ground with relative ease and sit on me, me sitting on my side, him sitting on me like this.
- If he was feeling especially happy to show his power over me, he would turn me so my ear was facing up and drool into my ear.
- I was helpless. There was nothing I could do about it. Well, now I'm fully grown, which is good because being much taller than this would be a bother.
- But being an adult really means that the threat of David sitting on me and drooling in my ears doesn't worry me too much. Plus, he lives a long way away and that's in my favour.
- [0 : 58] But, you know, there are things in my life and there may be in yours that I still fear will overpower me. Things that I have no control over and worry about, like my health.
- Or even relationship breakdown. I wonder if you can think of something which has power over you. It may not be something that you think about a lot, but what we're going to see today is what and even how we fear says a lot about our faith in God.
- Today, as we watch the disciples of Jesus experience a moment of great fear under great power, we're going to think about that which we fear and what that fear looks like and what it means.
- Well, last week we began a short series in Mark chapters 4 and 5 called Faithful Followers. And in that passage, we heard about Jesus who speaks the truth of the kingdom of God.
- Do you remember? And we saw that those who want to understand and believe must seek and listen to Jesus. This passage, which Helen read, continues immediately after.
- [2 : 15] And in it, we continue to follow Jesus as he teaches truths about the kingdom of God. However, in this passage and the ones following, he reveals the truth about himself, more so by the things that he does rather than only what he says.
- And something we'll see again tonight is that while Jesus' followers see and hear him, they still don't grasp who or what he really is.
- The story begins as the day of teaching parables is winding down. It said it was evening. So Jesus says to the disciples, let's go over to the other side.
- And Jesus was already sitting in the boat. So the disciples jumped in and they took him along just as he was and they left for the other side. The body of water they were crossing was the Sea of Galilee.
- It wasn't that small. It was about 21 kilometers across. And as they were starting their journey, it was becoming dark. So they set off in the evening and other boats were with them.
- [3 : 23] And what should have been a pretty easy boat ride, especially for fishermen, became a fight for their lives. We're looking at point one.

Not long after their journey began, we're told that the weather suddenly changed for the worse. Look at verse 37. It says a furious squall came up and the waves broke over the boat so that it was nearly swamped.

Seemingly out of nowhere, a strong wind appeared and turned the sea choppy and violent. In fact, it was so violent and choppy that waves were breaking over the side of the boat so that it was filling with water.

How would you be coping if this was you? In a boat on a rough sea, getting wetter and wetter? A moment ago, the water was around your ankles and now it's approaching your knees.

Would you be panicking? Would you be freaking out? You might be thinking, can I swim to shore? Some of you might be thinking, perhaps I'm going to die.

[4 : 29] I reckon I'd be freaking out. But surely not these men. Why? Well, because they were pros on the water, weren't they? At least a handful of them were.

They were fishermen. They would have been out on the water all day before they started following Jesus. What's a bit of wind and waves? But on this occasion, things were a bit different. Yes, usually they would have been all over the boating and the challenges that come with it.

But not this time. Tonight, things were out of control. They were completely overpowered. Can you think of a time or a place where you're usually in control or confident?

Perhaps one place for many of us would be behind the wheel. I'm sure lots of you have lots of confidence behind the wheel. Many of us drive a lot and in lots of different situations.

Some of you may even have dodged a tricky situation with your mad skills. But can you think of a driving situation which would stress you out so much that despite your years and experience behind the wheel, there's nothing you can do?

[5 : 37] One time, my other brother was driving home from holidays and it started to rain. It was on the freeway. Now, driving in the rain, a lot of you know, is a little bit more sketchy.

But on this occasion, on the freeway, it began raining so hard that even the fastest wiper setting wasn't enough. He started to get a bit worried because visibility became very poor.

And so he found himself slowing down from 100 to 80 to 60. And then he and his passengers noticed that the other cars on the road were slowing down as well and the rain was getting heavier.

And so eventually he had to pull over and stop completely. He said the rain was so heavy and thick that even while stopped, he could hardly see 50 meters in front of him, just past the end of the road we're in.

He's a good driver. But in this case, there was nothing he could do. I wonder if anyone's experienced something like this before. Well, the disciples are in a situation a bit like this, aren't they?

[6 : 45] They're experienced men of the sea and they are totally freaking out. And unlike a driver being able to pull over on the freeway, these guys are totally overpowered by the violent wind and waves and there is nothing they can do about it.

It's so rough. They're fearing they'll drown. And so in the midst of their panic, with no power to help themselves and fearing that this is the end, they plead with Jesus for help.

Verse 38 says, Jesus was sleeping in the stern on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said, teacher, don't you care if we drown?

Now, I actually find this a little bit amusing. In one moment, we hear about the raging storm with waves breaking over the boat, filling with water, a scene of absolute chaos, the mighty sea ready to swallow its victims.

And in the midst of it all, we have Jesus, who's had a big day teaching parables and who's using this boat trip to have a bit of a nap.

[7 : 54] While the waters rage and foam, here we have Jesus sleeping. But his nap time is abruptly cut short by the disciples' flurry.

They wake him up. And did you notice that they didn't only ask him for help? They were so panicked and stressed when they woke him, they accused him of not caring for their safety.

Look around, Jesus. We're about to drown and you're sleeping. Don't you care if we drown? I think it might be important at this point to pause and consider the imagery here.

On one hand, we have this image of chaos in the raging sea. It is powerful and terrifying. A picture of chaos and even death, which the disciples are greatly fearing.

In the Old Testament, the sea is described as a place of chaos and disorder. It's uncontrollable. It's uncontrollable. It's untameable. It's a place of violence and death. And on the other hand, we have a sleeping Jesus who seems to be completely undisturbed by this powerful force.

[9 : 10] Now, it's hard to really know just how spacious and comfortable the stern was. But there is a stark contrast, isn't there, between the disciples' panic and fear and Jesus' undisturbed calm.

And it makes me wonder, why are the disciples so afraid of something that Jesus isn't? And also, why is Jesus not afraid?

It is a scary situation, isn't it? Are they not right to fear for their lives? Well, whatever the case, they're afraid and they turn to Jesus for help.

Jesus woke up and took zero time to survey the situation. Have you ever been woken up in the middle of a high stress situation?

It takes that much longer to sort of get your bearings and figure out what's going on. But not Jesus. Look what he does when woken in verse 39.

[10 : 12] He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, quiet, be still. And the wind died down and it was completely calm.

Now, I don't know if you know this. But this is actually why Mark tells us which part of the boat Jesus was sleeping in. Because he gave the sea a stern word.

Many of you will be familiar with this story. But just try and put yourself in it. Can you imagine what it would have been like to witness this?

Jesus didn't wake up and join the panic and say something like, how could you let me sleep during this? Or what do you want me to do about it? That's what I probably would have said. But not Jesus.

When Jesus sees the chaotic, life-threatening sea trying to bring down the boat, he doesn't freak out. In fact, he doesn't fear at all, does he?

[11 : 14] Why? Because despite the immense power of the wind and the waves, Jesus has a greater power, doesn't he? The sea wants to overpower this boat and its passengers.

But little does it know that this boat is carrying the very person who gave the sea its power. So when Jesus rebukes the sea, which sounds ridiculous when you say it out loud, it does exactly as it's told.

Growing up, I had a dog called Rani. She was lovely and an obedient dog with a bit of a food problem. At one house, we had no gates. And so sometimes she would sneak next door and give puppy dog eyes to the lady who lived there.

And she would always cave. Rani was overweight. And so we had to keep a lookout. She'd wander down our driveway and then up the other side.

The fence was very small. And sometimes we'd catch her halfway up the neighbor's driveway. She was nearly there. And if I saw her out the window, I'd call in a loud, stern voice, Rani!

[12 : 22] And as soon as she heard my voice, which she knew well, was she knew that the gig was up. She'd look at you through the fence with those, don't you love me slash I know I've done the wrong thing eyes.

She'd lower her head and very slowly waddle back down the driveway. And she'd happily do it again any other day. But as soon as she heard the voice of someone in the family saying, stop, she'd come back.

She was very obedient. She knew her masters. She always did as she trained to. She was trained to. The scene in verse 39 is a bit like this.

And I want us to try and feel how striking and even unbelievable Jesus' authority is. Jesus is standing on a lake big enough to feel like the ocean when you're on it.

In a storm so big and violent that pro-fishermen were completely undone by it. And he gets up and he rebukes the wind and the waves.

[13 : 24] And like a parent telling kids to be quiet, they stop completely. Before I asked, why is Jesus not afraid in such a scary situation?

Well, now we know. He sleeps in a storm like this and he's undisturbed by it when woken because he can control it with a word.

Jesus is not even slightly overpowered by this stormy sea. Jesus has no fear when the boat is filling up.

Because when the sea winds up to bring a few more victims down to its depths, Jesus says, stop and it stops.

The disciples were afraid of the wind and the waves. They feared being overpowered by the storm. They feared drowning and they thought Jesus didn't care.

[14 : 22] But their fear was clearly misplaced, wasn't it? And the question that I think of now is, were they wrong to fear? It is a scary situation, isn't it?

Should they have been as calm as Jesus? Well, I doubt they were thinking much after witnessing that. And before they had any time to wonder, Jesus turns to them and not to tell them, whew, that was close.

No, right after he's done rebuking the storm, he turns to rebuke his disciples in verse 40. He said to his disciples, why are you so afraid?

Do you still have no faith? Why are you so afraid? Hearing this may make you think Jesus is totally crazy.

Like, who would sit calmly or even sleep in a storm like that? It's hard to imagine a person who wouldn't be afraid in their shoes.

[15 : 24] How could Jesus rebuke them for being afraid? Well, I don't think Jesus is rebuking them for being scared in a scary situation. I don't think this passage is teaching us that being afraid is not allowed.

Rather, he's rebuking them for faithlessness. He said, why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith? How is their fear a sign of faithlessness?

The disciples were taking a trip across the lake, not only with the creator of lakes, but with the creator of all weather too. Yes, it was a scary situation.

But the disciples' fear was faithlessness because they feared the power of that which Jesus has complete power over. And so, it made them doubt him.

It made them doubt his care and his character. Jesus rebukes them not because they're scared of scary things, but because of their unwillingness and inability to see and understand who Jesus really is.

[16 : 33] They do not believe that Jesus is God. And it's not surprising that Jesus' miracle doesn't produce faith, but rather a greater fear.

41 says, They were terrified and asked each other, Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him. The disciples had been following Jesus for a while now, but they did not have faith.

What would faith have changed? They would have known that Jesus wasn't simply an impressive teacher and powerful healer. They would have known that Jesus is not only able to calm the sea, but completely control it.

They would have known that what the psalmist wrote in 104 is true about Jesus. He set the earth on its foundations. It can never be moved.

Faith in Jesus means understanding who he really is.

[17 : 45] It means understanding and believing that the human man Jesus, who walked on our earth with human friends in our history, is the same God, Yahweh, who spoke creation into existence.

The same God who Paul writes about in Colossians 1. For in him all things were created, things in heaven, things on earth, visible, invisible, thrones, powers, rulers, authorities, all things created through him and for him.

When Jesus says, do you still have no faith? He's saying, do you not know who I am? Not a prophet, not Elijah, not just another descendant of King David.

Had they known, why would they fear? Who or what would they fear? Not people, not powers, not storms, not evil, not even death.

Had they truly known and trusted who was in their boat, they would have no reason to fear, even as a great power, even under such great power.

[19 : 01] But they were afraid. And in their fear of death and doubt of God's goodness and power, they showed that despite their love of Jesus, despite their desire to hear him, listen to him, follow him, they don't believe in him or understand his true significance.

So I think we need to ask ourselves, what does your fear say about your faith? You may have been scared in a storm at one time, and it's unlikely that changing our fear of the weather is the challenge of this passage.

But what do you fear will overpower you? Or when do you fear that God will not help?

Maybe when dealing with loneliness or sadness, maybe under pressure from work or school or bullies, maybe in the face of joblessness or mediocrity or debt or sickness, how might fear of these affect our faith in God?

Well, if we follow the attitude of the disciples, when these problems become a threat, rather than entrusting ourselves to God, knowing that he loves us and has rescued us completely, even when we're scared, we instead will find a way to question God's actions and even blame God for our struggle, like the disciples did.

[20 : 40] God, you obviously don't care about my situation. You probably can't even help. Fear like this is a sign of faithlessness. I don't understand who God is nor what he's done or will do.

Fear like this isn't a sign of lacking faith. It is a sign of no faith. When a Christian fears, we must trust God and remember what our master has mastery over.

Jesus says in John chapter 3, Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.

Scary things are scary, but trust in Jesus, who has complete power over what we fear and know that he has your life and best interests in his hands.

How about I pray now for this help? Our Father, there are many things in our life, in our world that we fear and oftentimes that we doubt your goodness and your love and your protection and your promise.

[21 : 56] Cause us to remember the challenge of this passage. Let us not fear what you have power over and have even completely destroyed. Amen.