

Dealing with Fear

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In Mark chapter four, we are told of a familiar scene with Jesus and the apostles (Mark 4:33-41). A large crowd gathered on the shore of the Sea of Galilee to listen to Jesus teach. Jesus taught parables of the kingdom from a boat. Afterwards, Jesus and the apostles got into the boat to cross the lake.

Traveling by boat to the other side of the Sea of Galilee was common. The lake is eight miles at its widest point. Crossing by boat would be much faster than walking around the shore. In 1986, during a drought when the waters receded, the remnants of an ancient boat were discovered at the Sea of Galilee. Archeologists believe this would have been similar to the kind of boat common in Jesus' day. Some refer to this boat as "the Jesus boat." The boat is twenty-seven feet long and seven and a half feet wide. The remnants of this boat can be seen at the Yigal Allon Museum in Israel.

As Jesus and the apostles were crossing the sea, a storm came over them. Storms on the Sea of Galilee were not uncommon for the apostles. Remember, most of them were seasoned fishermen. Without doubt, they had weathered numerous storms on this sea. Yet, this storm was especially threatening.

As the apostles began to feverishly weather the storm, Mark describes an "all hands on deck" moment. Waves were breaking onto the boat. Water was filling the vessel. If a strong wave hit their boat in just the right place, the boat could capsize or be broken into pieces. These seasoned fishermen became worried at the ferocity of the storm.

When this storm began, Jesus was sleeping in the boat. No doubt, He had been exhausted from the teaching He had done throughout the day. In a moment of panic they yelled to Jesus, "*Teacher, do you care that we are perishing?*" (Mark 4:38).

Hearing their cry, Jesus awoke and calmed the storm by speaking three words: "*Peace, be still*" (Mark 4:39). After calming the storm, Jesus questioned the apostles. He asked, "*Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?*" (Mark 4:40).

Jesus asking the apostles why they were afraid seems to be a relevant question for us. There are always many things which cause us fear. Today, we are fearful of the coronavirus. The virus has proven harmful and even deadly. More broadly, though, this virus represents the unknown.

We do not know the extent to which the virus has spread. We do not know how to treat or cure the virus. We do not know when the virus will dissipate. Unanswered questions make us afraid.

Fear is powerful. Fear can penetrate deeply into our psyche and paralyze us. Fear can cause some to retreat and others to lash out. Fear can breed racism and xenophobia. Fear can cause us to think, say, and do terrible things to our neighbors. Fear can destroy our faith.

Paralyzing, destructive fear does not come from God. Paul reminded Timothy, *“God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control”* (2 Tim. 1:7). The fearful, cowardly, and faithless will be consigned eternally to the lake of fire and brimstone (Rev. 21:8). Therefore, we must identify our fear and learn how to cope with it. Consider how we can deal with our fear.

1. We must be cautious. When I was growing up, people wore t-shirts with the slogan “No Fear!” This attitude encourages throwing caution to the wind: ignoring the reality of danger. Pride is not a solution to fear. Solomon warned, *“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall”* (Prov. 16:18).

Fear is not entirely a negative thought process. Some fear is legitimate, right, and warranted. For example, we are to fear God. We must have a healthy respect for God. Solomon wrote, *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction”* (Prov. 1:7). Fear for God is designed to shape how we live and make decisions.

We must also fear sin and its consequences. The Bible warns us of sin and its destructive consequences. Solomon described a young person who did not fear God or listen to wise counsel. He wrote, *“Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD, would have none of my counsel and despised all my reproof, therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way, and have their fill of their own devices”* (Prov. 1:29-31).

We do not have to sin in order to appreciate the destructive consequences of sin. If we fear God and fear sin, we can avoid a ruinous life and eternal condemnation. We must take danger of every kind with caution.

2. We must face the facts. Wild speculation feeds fear. We can make ourselves crazy with “what if” scenarios. On the other hand, ignoring reality is no answer to fear. Instead, we must identify what makes us fearful and determine what must be done to address those fears. Only truth will calm anxieties and illuminate a path forward.

For example, saints in Thessalonica were fearful about the spiritual condition of their loved ones who had died before the return of Jesus. There was confusion and doubt among them. Rather than leaving them uninformed, Paul explained the truth (1 Thess. 4:13). After explaining the truth, he wrote, *“Therefore encourage one another with these words”* (1 Thess. 4:18).

The constantly changing, uncertain circumstances of our lives often cause us to lose sight of the facts. As David asked in the Psalms, *“If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?”* (Psa. 11:3). He gave the answer in the next line, *“The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD’s throne is in heaven; his eyes see, his eyelids test the children of man”* (Psa. 11:4). Even when our world is shaken, God remains in control. This is as true today as it has ever been.

3. We must remain confident. When we are cautious and focus on the facts, we can confidently navigate the unknown. Regardless of how the coronavirus impacts our society, we can keep our faith and find our way forward. We must retain our faith and confidently endure our circumstances (Heb. 10:32-39).

Fear is conquered by faith. Instead of being paralyzed or ignoring reality, we must trust God as we address life's dilemmas. We must seek Him and His word for answers. Keeping God's commands and maintaining faith in Jesus is how we are to endure difficult situations in life (Rev. 14:12).

Conclusion

There will always be circumstances in our lives which cause us fear. We will always have to face the unknown in one form or another. Like God told Joshua at the beginning of his leadership, we must be strong and courageous, reassured by God's abiding presence (Josh. 1:9).

Without question, Jesus cares for us. His love for us has been proven by His cross. His promises have been solidified by His resurrection. Therefore, we can confidently trust Jesus to lead us through the storms of life and bring us peace.