

What Makes Us Afraid?

Mark 4:21-41

²¹ And he said to them, "Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket, or under a bed, and not on a stand? ²² For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret except to come to light. ²³ If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear." ²⁴ And he said to them, "Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you. ²⁵ For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."

²⁶ And he said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. ²⁷ He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. ²⁸ The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. ²⁹ But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

³⁰ And he said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? ³¹ It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, ³² yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

³³ With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. ³⁴ He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.

³⁵ On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." ³⁶ And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. ³⁷ And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. ³⁸ 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?" ³⁹ 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. ⁴⁰ He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" ⁴¹ 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?"

- Mark 4:21-41, ESV

We all understand that certain fears are more normal and rational than others. If you decide to go bungee jumping, it's normal to be afraid right before you jump off the bridge. But if you walk around your daily life terrified of the prospect of a Sharknado, that's a little bizarre.

Jesus challenges our accepted categories. He shows us in today's passage that even our normal and rational fears have no place in our hearts if we have real faith in Him. Experienced sailors and fishermen, the disciples would not be terrified on the Sea of Galilee without real cause. They knew their lives were in imminent danger. But they were wrong.

Now God does not encourage us to be foolishly unwise in our decision-making. We shouldn't be recklessly disobedient to the wisdom of Proverbs and assume that nothing bad will happen

to us. But if we're following the Lord and trusting in Him as our Lord, we don't need to be paralyzed by fear. In fact, we must not be paralyzed by fear.

But how can we escape the grip of fear on our hearts? The disciples' experience in the storm shows us the key: We are delivered from paralyzing earthly fears by a genuine fear of the Lord. We don't take the fear of the Lord very seriously anymore, which is a shame because it is centrally important in the Bible's teaching on faith.

We are accustomed to a tamed version of the fear of the Lord that means a holy reverence or a solemn respect. But that's not the picture of the disciples, who were "*filled with a great fear.*" Nor does it fit what Jesus said when He taught us, "*do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*" (Matthew 10:28)
Sometimes fear actually means fear.

Why fear the Lord? Because He is terrifyingly holy. He is intensely, perfectly, unapproachably holy, holy, holy. He destroys sin and sinners by His intensely holy presence. Isaiah was terrified in His presence, as was Peter in the presence of Christ. He is also absolutely sovereign, having full rights as our Creator and King to do with us whatever He pleases. He is also the light that penetrates everything and sees all. In today's passage, Jesus tells us, "*nothing is hidden except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret except to come to light.*" (v. 22)

But because of the great love of the Lord, the fear of the Lord is liberating and not enslaving.

*Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed,
Because His compassions fail not.
They are new every morning;
Great is Your faithfulness. - Lamentation 3:22-23, NKJV*

It is dangerous to fear anything other than the Lord, because only the Lord is as absolutely wise, compassionate, and merciful toward us in Christ as He is absolutely powerful, holy, sovereign, and all-knowing. The greatness of God means that we must fear Him and no one else. The goodness of God means that we may fear Him with confidence and even with joy. In fact, we'll never find true freedom, confidence, and joy anywhere else but in the soul-gripping fear of the Lord.