

Sunday, August 15, 2021 pm

Why did you doubt? Is Your Faith Greater than Your Fear? Matthew 14:28-33

In our text, we find Jesus walking on water to meet His disciples. This is also recorded in Mark 6:45-52 and John 6:14-21. However, Matthew includes the account of Peter asking to join Jesus on the water. Jesus permits it and Peter begins to walk on water. But because of the winds, Peter was afraid and began to sink. Jesus reached out and caught him and said, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" (vs. 31). We find here an example of one who let his fears cause his faith to waver.

IN this lesson I want to ask the question, Is your faith greater than your fear? I believe this to be a very timely lesson as we are living in times of great apprehension, doubts and fears. I believe we need to pause and ask, what is this doing to my faith?

I. Fear vs. Faith

a. What is faith?

- i. Simply stated, faith is a firm persuasion that something is true. Especially when it is related to God. Faith is based upon trust and believing God (as opposed to merely believing IN God).
- ii. Hebrews 11:1 – "The substance (assurance) of things hoped for, the evidence (conviction) of things not seen." NKJV (NASB).
- iii. Without faith we cannot please God - Hebrews 11:6. It is at the foundation of our Christian lives and everything else builds upon it (2 Peter 1:5-7). Faith is the victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4).
- iv. True faith is tried and strengthened. IT is a trust that is so great, NOTHING will hinder it. It is "getting in the wheelbarrow". It is the trust demonstrated throughout Hebrews 11 by godly men and women.

b. What is fear?

i. Two types of fear

1. Reverence for God – this is good and healthy. AND it includes because fearful of Him – especially rejecting Him.
Webster says, "*profound reverence and awe especially toward God*"¹
2. Being afraid of something
 - a. Again, Webster says, "*an unpleasant often strong emotion caused by anticipation or awareness of danger.*"² It can be an instance or the state of this emotion.
 - b. This fear can be healthy if it is properly responded to and provokes reasonable caution. In fact it is one of the primary emotions.
 - c. But it can also paralyze us to the point that we fail to do what we should be doing. When used in this sense, **it is condemned in scripture.**
 - d. And we are seeing a lot of this unhealthy fear today. We are living in a time that seems to thrive on fear. Some are saying that it can be an addiction, like other behavioral addiction (not substance), with chemical releases (adrenaline) in the brain that we become dependent upon. Have

¹ "Fear." *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fear>. Accessed 13 Aug. 2021. Definition #3

² Ibid. Definition #1

you ever seen someone so tied to the news that it is all they think and talk about? And the news media is FULL of negative and fearful stories. People feed on it – the way they watch a car chase – hoping to see the crash at the end.

- c. Biblically, faith and fear (in this lesson, I am focusing on the bad fear) are opposites – influence our decisions one way or another.
 - i. Which is greater? Again, I remind you of Peter as he sank – his fear overwhelmed his faith. Earlier, on another sea journey Jesus rebuked their little faith – Matthew 8:23-27
 - ii. There is a saying by Jon Gordon, “*Fear and faith have one thing in common. They both believe in a future that hasn’t happened yet. **Fear believes in a negative future.** Faith believes in a positive future. If neither has happened yet, why wouldn’t we choose to believe in a positive future?*”

II. **Examples of fear that overshadowed one’s faith**

- a. Abraham as he lied about his wife Sarah to Pharaoh, and later to Abimelech in Gerar (Genesis 12:11-13, 20:1-18)
- b. The children of Israel heeding the advice of the 10 spies after spying out the land of Canaan the first time (Numbers 13-14). Even though Joshua and Caleb pleaded with them to trust God – their fear overpowered their faith (Num. 13:30, 14:6-10)
- c. King Saul, in sparing Agag and animals from the destruction of Amalekites. He claimed that he feared the people (1 Samuel 15:24). If so, you have a leader afraid to lead in difficult circumstances.
- d. Israel facing the Philistines and Goliath (1 Samuel 17). But not David, he had faith (1 Samuel 17:29-37, 45-47) greater than his fears.
- e. Peter denying his Lord – he was in the company of the enemy (Matthew 26:69-75)
- f. Peter withdrew from Gentiles when his Jewish friends were around (Galatians 2:11-12)

III. **When our fear is greater than our faith**

- a. It can cause us to make problems greater than they really are – Israel refusing to enter Canaan – grasshoppers (Numbers 13:33)
- b. It leads to worry and anxiety, and even depression if it lasts long enough
- c. It can rob us of the joy of our spiritual blessings – how many let fears paralyze them? King Saul continually failed and was miserable and bitter.
- d. It can cause us to be silent when we need to speak up – how many will not stand up for truth for fear of being ridiculed, rejected or persecuted? See Matthew 10:32-33, Luke 9:26
- e. It can keep us from serving God as we ought to (teaching someone, associating with our brethren, correcting errors, even attendance). This is fear paralyzing us to keep us from doing anything.
- f. Ken Weliever, in a post dated May 3, 2021, dealt with the word “Unafraid”. At the conclusion of his article he listed several of the destructive and debilitating effects of fear:
 - i. Fear paralyzes us from acting.
 - ii. Fear arouses suspicion.
 - iii. Fear breeds distrust.
 - iv. Fear limits our potential.
 - v. Fear saps our power.
 - vi. Fear undermines our resolve.
 - vii. Fear weakens our immune system.
 - viii. Fear produces fatigue.
 - ix. Fear clouds our judgment.
 - x. Fear short-circuits mental acuity.
 - xi. Fear drains us emotionally.
 - xii. Fear erodes our joy and happiness.
 - xiii. Fear cripples good decision making.

- xiv. Fear damages relationships.
 - xv. Fear subverts God's mission for the church.
 - xvi. Fear suppresses God's ministry by the church.
 - xvii. Fear sabotages God's message through the church.
- g. Truly this is something we need to pause and look at in our own lives. Consider 2 Corinthians 13:5 – examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith...

IV. Strengthening our faith to overcome our fears

a. Consider the following verses:

- i. Psalm 27:1, *The Lord is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid?*
- ii. Proverbs 29:25, *The fear of man brings a snare, But whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe.*
- iii. 2 Timothy 1:7, *For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.* God does NOT want you to live in fear
- iv. Hebrews 13:6, *So we may boldly say: "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"*
- v. **"Do not be afraid"** – a good exercise (that will take some time) is to look at the number of times the LORD (God) or Jesus said, "Do not be afraid" – The NKJV uses the expression some 50 times; "Do not fear" – 51 times; "Fear not" – 10 times. That is more than 110 times with the direct statements.

The number is substantially greater than that when you weigh the various ways the Bible deals with fear as it relates to God (both "fear not" and "fear Him"). Based upon a statement that the admonition to "fear not" is found 365 times in the Bible, I did research and actually found a site that listed 365 verses about not fearing, fearing God (which also implies NOT fearing anything else), trusting God, etc.³

- b. **First, you HAVE TO appreciate what genuine faith is!** It is more than a platitude. It is something developed. It is what cause Abraham to offer his son, Paul to endure everything he could, etc.
- c. **Attitude** – perspective. How we perceive things has much to do with how strong our faith is.
 - i. Proverbs 17:22 – *A merry heart does good, like medicine, But a broken spirit dries the bones.*
 - ii. Philippians 4:8 – "meditate" or "think" on these things.
 - iii. Ephesians 4:23 calls for us to be renewed in the spirit of our minds (think differently). E.g. Ephesians 4:31 – *let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from among you...*
 - iv. It is clear that attitude is where everything starts. Attitude sparks fears AND how we deal with our fears. We can let every setback cripple us, or we can let it make us better and stronger – Romans 5:1-5
- d. **Think about God** – a healthy understanding of God – who He is, how much He loves and cares about us, needs to be at the forefront of our minds.
 - i. **Think about how He wants you to view Him** – with reverence and "godly fear" (Hebrews 12:28-29).
 - ii. **Be afraid of failing God** – as that has eternal consequences – Matthew 10:28, Hebrews 10:31, Matthew 25:26, etc.
 - iii. **"The fear of the LORD"** - this expression is found in passages like:
 - 1. Psalm 19:9 – the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever
 - 2. Psalm 111:10 – the beginning of wisdom
 - 3. Proverbs 1:7 – the beginning of knowledge
 - 4. Proverbs 14:26 – In the fear of the LORD, there is strong confidence"
 - 5. Proverbs 14:27 – is a fountain of life to turn one away from the snares of death

³ August 12, 2021; <https://believersportal.com/list-365-fear-not-bible-verses/>

6. Acts 9:31, after Saul ceased persecuting churches in Judea, Galilee & Samaria we read, “*And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.*”
 7. Thought: Should we learn how to fear the Lord?
 8. Note 1 John 4:18, Perfect love casts out fear.
- iv. **Pray about it** – cast all your cares on Him. Do not forget to pray when you are fearful – 1 Peter 5:6-7, Philippians 4:6-7
- e. **Realize that when you let fear keep you from doing what you ought to do, you are letting Satan rule you.** 2 Corinthians 2:11 challenges us to not be ignorant of his devices.
1 Peter 5:8-9 – warns us that he is seeking to devour you – and to resist him.
If he can with fear (or anything) keep you from doing what you ought to be doing, he is ruling you.
 - f. **Face your fears** – Admit them and work to overcome them. And if they have led to sinful decisions – repent and ask forgiveness. Then DO SOMETHING! Take steps to overcome.
 - g. **Love one another** –
 - i. As we deal with faith and fear in these times, we must never forget that we are brethren.
 - ii. Realize that people are different – often at a foundational level that affects how they think, react to a given situation, how they perceive others, and even what they do.
 - iii. When dealing with fears, we need each other, and we need to be willing and able to lean on each other as we deal with them. We are to serve one another through love – Galatians 5:13
 - iv. The gospel, in God’s eternal and superior wisdom, is designed to overcome that. Passages like Roman 14 challenge as to how we deal with one another. So be careful in passing judgment on each other.

Conclusion: IN our lives, we all have to deal with fears. The question is HOW will we handle them. Will we let our fear rule us, or will we let our faith overcome our fear? Which is greater – your faith or your fear? Think about it!