

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
Paul Gunn, Pastor

**FEAR NOT: WHEN YOU'RE STILL SCARED**

Matthew 14:22-33

August 14, 2022

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There are two points to today's sermon:

- Fear can cause you to miss opportunities.
- Fear can drive you closer to Jesus.

**INTRODUCTION:** Fear is a natural emotion that is evoked by the presence of danger. Fear could be a good thing if it prevents us from getting hurt or making a bad decision. That's really elementary level talk, and I know all of you get it.

The world is full of things to be afraid of. Since there are a lot of scary things in this world, it's sometimes hard not to be afraid. If you are facing a real threat, telling you not to be afraid is about as helpful as telling a man in a blizzard not to be cold. The better solution is to get him out of the blizzard. Unfortunately, it's often not within our power to remove someone else or ourselves from frightening situations. However, we can learn to trust. Jesus is the One who can give us shelter from our storms.

**1-FEAR CAN CAUSE YOU TO MISS OPPORTUNITIES**

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 14:22-29

*Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. <sup>23</sup> After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, <sup>24</sup> and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. <sup>25</sup> Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. <sup>26</sup> When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. <sup>27</sup> But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."*

<sup>28</sup> *“Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”*

<sup>29</sup> *“Come,” he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.*

**EXPLANATION:** When we read this story, most of the time we jump right into the part where Peter walks on the water. We’re going to get there, but first, I want us to look at the other men, the men who chose to stay in the boat.

Remember these men had just seen Jesus feed more than five thousand people with five small loaves of bread and two little fish. They were fully aware of the miraculous power of their friend. Second, I want you to recognize, this was no ordinary storm. In Mark’s account of this story, he says that Jesus saw the disciples straining at their oars. One English translation says that they were in serious trouble.

Several of these men were experienced fishermen. They had experienced storms before. If they were struggling, there was a reason to be scared. Notice that scripture does not tell us that they prayed. Maybe they did, and it is not recorded, but maybe they were too consumed with trying to keep their boat together under the pounding waves. Maybe they were so busy bailing water that they did not take time to ask God for help.

These men knew that they were out of their league in regards to their own safety, but they should have known that their friend Jesus had the power to save them. And who knows? Maybe they did know that in a cerebral sort of way, the same way we know that Jesus can do anything but doubt whether he will.

Either way, they did not recognize Jesus. Was it because the rain and waves obstructed their view? That’s doubtful. They obviously saw something. Who else did they think would be walking on the water? I believe that the disciples did not recognize Jesus because they were looking through the eyes of fear.

It is said that superstitious sailors believed that to see a ghost was an omen that a shipwreck or disaster was sure to follow. When they saw Jesus, they did not immediately recognize him as their Savior because they saw what they expected to see, another indication of imminent doom.

**APPLICATION:** Psychologists explain that our fears can become a lens through which we see the world. Just like the man in the blizzard can only see snow, and the disciples could only see impending doom, when you are afraid, everything you see is tainted by that emotion. This is a problem because, as the German proverb says, “Fear makes the wolf bigger than he is.”

When we begin to view our life and our circumstances through fear-colored glasses, we become discouraged and hopeless and miss the opportunities God gives us.

- We may miss the opportunity to see new places and meet new people because we’re afraid of change.
- We may miss the opportunity to go on that mission trip because we’re afraid to travel.
- We may miss the opportunity to experience the joy of giving because we are afraid we will not have enough. Most importantly, we may miss the opportunity to grow in our faith.

It's interesting to me that the other gospel writers did not include Peter's part in this story. Only Matthew recorded Peter's walk on the water. Do you wonder why? Maybe it was a little bit of a sore spot with them. When they looked back on the experience, maybe there was a tinge of regret. Maybe they were a little jealous. After all, Peter was the only human other than Jesus to walk on water. Yet, every man in that boat had the same opportunity that Peter had.

- Fear can cause you to miss opportunities or

## **2-FEAR CAN DRIVE YOU CLOSER TO JESUS**

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 14:28-33

*“Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”*

*<sup>29</sup> “Come,” he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. <sup>30</sup> But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!” <sup>31</sup> Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?” <sup>32</sup> And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. <sup>33</sup> Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”*

**EXPLANATION:** Peter was not stupid. He may have been crazy, but he was not stupid. Before jumping out of the boat, he asked for confirmation. He did not want to take that step until he heard Jesus's command to do so. Then, for a few moments, Peter walked on water. Why? How? Because he kept his eyes on Jesus.

Make no mistake. The storm was still raging. The rain was pouring. The wind was blowing. The waves were pounding. I imagine water was lapping at his shins. Lightning may have illuminated his way, but Peter was walking on water, and then he started to sink like a rock. What changed? He took his eyes off Jesus and started looking at the circumstances. He stopped looking at Jesus and started looking at the storm.

It's easy for us to concentrate on the failure. Poor Peter, messing up again. But failing does not make a person a failure. Peter took his eyes off Jesus, and as a result, he began to sink. But for a few moments, Peter knew the exhilaration of walking on water. He experienced in a tangible way what it meant to have the power of Jesus work through him. He understood what it meant to rely solely on a power beyond his own. He also knew what it meant to experience a personal rescue. Yes, Jesus was getting ready to calm the sea for the rest of the disciples, but he had not yet done that. In desperation, Peter called out to Jesus, and Jesus saved him.

**APPLICATION:** Peter was just as human as those other men. He was just as human as you and me. I'm sure he was terrified, but instead of seeing the storm through the eyes of fear, he saw it as an opportunity to draw closer to Jesus. I do not think Peter put a lot of thought into his request in the beginning. I think he was in a boat that was going under. A storm raged all around him. He was afraid, and when he saw his Savior, he realized that he would be safer outside the boat with him than inside the boat without him.

As long as we are on this side of heaven, we are going to have storms, and they are going to be scary. The question is not whether we will experience hardships, trials, and tragedies. The question is how we handle them when they come. Peter understood that the closer he could get to Jesus, the safer he would be.

A lot of things feel safer than the storm. Job security feels safer than being unemployed. Health feels safer than a terminal diagnosis. Life with a loved one feels safer than life alone. But Peter knew the secret. The safest place to be is in the center of God's will.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Maggie's little boy, Todd, was afraid of storms. The rumble of thunder sent him running across the living room. The flashes of lightning made him cry. He would run to his parents' bed and burrow under the covers or wrap himself inside the drapes. When that happened, did Maggie yell across the room for her son to man up? Did she point a finger and shout, "What's wrong with you? It's just a storm! Don't be a scaredy cat." Of course not, Maggie was a loving mother. She wrapped her arms around her son and comforted him. She told him not to be afraid and assured him that everything was OK because he was with her.

**APPLICATION:** Over and over again, God tells us not to be afraid. Is he any less loving than Maggie? Of course not. God is our heavenly father. He created us and knows our weaknesses. He is not shouting at us. He's calling to us. He knows the storm is scary, but he does not want us to run and hide or to shut down because of our fears. He wants us to run to him. 1 Peter 5:7 says, "*Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*" The things that scare us most also provide us with an opportunity to spend more time in the arms of our Savior.

- Fear can cause you to miss opportunities, or
- Fear can drive you closer to Jesus.

**INVITATION:** If you are a person who struggles with fear, you may have tried everything. You may have tried self-help tips and counseling, even medication. All those things have a place, but telling yourself not to feel something that you feel is often not productive. Instead of telling yourself what not to do, why not try doing something different instead? If you cannot get rid of the feeling, use the feeling to propel you towards Christ. If it had not been for the storm, if it had not been for his fear, Peter would have probably never stepped out of the boat.

Isaiah 41:13 says, "*For I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.*"

Instead of looking through eyes of fear, look for Jesus. Run to Jesus for your comfort, strength, and help. Take shelter in him. The altar is open if you want to pray about it today.

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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Thanks to Jennifer Anderson for her editing assistance.

Sincerely, Paul Gunn  
Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
Nashville, Tennessee  
USA