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THE ROOT OF ALL FEARS¹

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It seems that every passing year now brings more to fear than the year before, does it not? Here we are in 2011, and everywhere we look we find cause to fear. Ten years ago, we had no idea that we had an enemy who hated us so much that they would fly commandeer commercial airplanes and use them as weapons of mass destruction against us. We have since then altered our outlook on travel, haven't we? And as bad as the events of September 11, 2001 were, they are not the extent of the things that we might worry about. We fear for our jobs, we fear for the effect of society upon our families, and, perhaps for the first time, many of us fear for our nation in ways that we never thought possible. Three years ago it seemed impossible for the United States's credit rating to be downgraded, and yet here we are with our credit downgraded and whispers of the world dumping the US Dollar as the standard of international currency. We have raging oil prices, troops tied down in interminable conflicts, unrest across the globe, hurricanes and earthquakes. Some of us may be very afraid for our health, and for the health of our families and our fellow church members. Some of our students may be more focused on things like algebra tests, but the fear is very real at any level!

I'm so glad that we have the Word of God. I find that as I preach through a book, chapter by chapter, we come to exactly the word we need when we need it. I'd like to take a look today at how Jesus views our fear. Let's look together at Mark 4:

³⁵ *And the same day, when the even was come, he saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side.*

³⁶ *And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as he was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships.*

³⁷ *And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full.*

³⁸ *And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish?*

³⁹ *And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.*

⁴⁰ *And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?*

⁴¹ *And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?*

It's a familiar story, is it not? We've heard before about the Master who can, at a word, calm the storm and bring peace where there was terror. We certainly can draw comfort from that! Yet there is also much that we can learn from this story and find truth that applies in our own lives.

Let's remember that Jesus had been healing people and teaching people for quite some time leading up

¹ This sermon is unedited.

to this. We have read about the throngs that pressed in upon Him. We see from the Gospel of John that some people even came to Him at night. Jesus has been working, working, working. He's God, fully God, yet living in a very human body which seems to have met its limit. He asked the disciples to take Him across the Sea of Galilee, and He promptly fell asleep. Now, keep in mind, this is not a yacht or a corsair or some other kind of vessel with multiple decks. It's a fishing boat, and that means there's not likely to be some little room below decks for Jesus to sleep in privately. Jesus, being completely physically exhausted, falls fast asleep. I mean, He's just dead tired. If you have ever just collapsed after a hard couple of days, you know what that's like.

There's this little fleet of boats that sets out, carrying Jesus, His disciples, and an unknown number of other people. That little phrase there in verse 36 tells us that this was a spontaneous trip: "They took him even as he was in the ship." He had been teaching from a boat, and He asked them to take Him in that same boat with no advanced preparation. This was not premeditated. Jesus simply asked them to take Him over to the other side of the lake, which was about five miles across. He needed some down time, which He could not get if He were to go back ashore. The paparazzi, the press, and the crowds would flock right to Him. You know, kids, some of you might want to be famous someday, but popularity has a lot of drawbacks, too.

As they began to cross that lake, the weather began to change very suddenly. The Sea of Galilee even today is noted for the sudden onset of storms; but this one, I think, is a bit different. I think there is a supernatural element to it that we'll get to when we get into chapter five. For now let me just say that while I don't believe the devil can make a storm arise, I do think he can take any problem and try to make it worse! The devil doesn't make our problems; he doesn't even need to try; but he can and does make them worse.

But even as this storm arises, Jesus flops down and begins to snooze. The waves get higher, the wind blows harder, and there's Jesus in the back of the boat sleeping. He's not helping at all. He's not rowing, He's not pulling sheets or sails, He's not even praying! He's fast asleep. He knew that storm was coming because that much was obvious; yet He flopped right down there and went to sleep!

The disciples could not wrap their heads around that. How could Jesus, knowing this storm was coming, knowing how bad it was getting, fall asleep? So they're working, they're bailing water, they're trying to keep these ships upright, and they are losing the battle. They're desperate. And in their minds they are wondering, "Doesn't Jesus care that we're in this trouble? Why doesn't He *do* something?"

Aren't we just the same way? We get into our trouble, and we wonder in our minds and hearts, "What's Jesus doing? Doesn't He know about my problem? Doesn't He care?" Now, be honest: have you ever felt that way? Well, guess what? You're in pretty good company!

The disciples are doing everything they can do. Many of them are experienced fishermen, and they are drawing on all that experience and strength; but it is clear they are losing this battle. They are in trouble, and their own work won't be enough to save them. And the whole while, they are being gnawed by the doubt that Jesus cares for them.

Finally, they decide that it's time Jesus do something, or at least act as if He cares. They wake Him up: "Master, don't You care that we are going to die?" Now, these are not words that we would normally say out loud. We might think them in our hearts, but we wouldn't dare speak them. But there are times when we are shaken so badly that what is inside, the things we normally guard very closely, get shaken out of us. When we are shaken and upset, we sometimes let slip those thoughts that are normally buried

inside. Here the disciples wake Jesus with the indignant words, “Don’t You care?” It’s a question, but really, it’s a statement: “It’s obvious that You don’t care.”

Sometimes, perhaps, we feel that way about God. We call out to Him, we pray, and yet He seems silent. Friends, let me assure you that God hears and that He has a plan which He will carry out in His own time. A story which closely parallels this is the story of the death of Lazarus in John 11. Jesus received word that Lazarus was sick several days before he died; but Jesus did not go to Lazarus. He waited. When Jesus did go to the house of Lazarus, his sister accosted Jesus, saying, “If You had been here, Lazarus would not have died.” Jesus did a great miracle that day by raising Lazarus from the dead. His purpose was to show that His power exceeded the power of death. He is the resurrection and the life. The point is that neither Lazarus nor his sisters knew what Jesus had planned. Only He knew! And it is the same with us. Jesus knows the end from the beginning. We focus on the problem that we see, but Jesus sees the whole problem from beginning to end, and He sees how He will accomplish good for us through that problem. We just have to learn to be patient and trust Him.

So the disciples awaken Jesus, accusing Him of not caring for them. It just goes to show that we can find fault with anyone, can’t we? But Jesus got up and spoke those now-famous words, “Peace, be still!” I find this part of the language interesting. In the original language, Jesus actually issued two commands in that little statement. The word translated in the King James Version as “peace” is actually a command in Greek, and it’s based on a word that you wouldn’t normally make into a command! It literally means, “Be muzzled!” Now, friends, can you command an ox or a dog to put on a muzzle? No, of course not! But that is what Jesus said: “Be muzzled! Be still!”

I don’t teach very small children in a school setting. I love teaching children for Sunday school and vacation Bible school, but those are different from regular school. In Sunday school and VBS, it’s okay for kids to wiggle. It’s okay to squirm and need to move. But I cannot imagine trying to teach a room full of little ones in an environment in which they are restricted. I can get them all riled up, but getting them to be still is another matter entirely, isn’t it? Now, some people love that. Mr. Lovitt was one of them. In any case, I can imagine telling small children to be still. We’ve all told children to be still from time to time. But I’ve never told them to be muzzled! It might be kind of nice as a teacher to have that kind of power, though: “Be muzzled! Be still!”

Jesus tells the wind and the waves to be muzzled, to be still—and they obeyed! Now, look: if we can believe Jesus has the power to do that, it would be good to ask ourselves *why* He has the power to do this. *Why* is Jesus the Master of wind and sea? The answer will take you in one of two directions: either you will understand that Jesus has the power over the wind and sea because He is the Designer and Creator of the natural world, or you will choose to believe that the scriptural record here is simply a metaphor. That is, you will agree with the liberal commentators who suggest that Jesus merely calmed the storm in the disciples’ hearts. He spoke and they were no longer afraid, and then eventually the storm let up. Friends, this was a real storm, and there were witnesses to this event—the other ships. They saw what happened and they lived to tell the story. Jesus is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe.

Let’s turn our attention back to verse 40:

⁴⁰ *And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?*

This is the whole point of the story, and consequently the whole point of this sermon. Why are you

afraid? And the answer lies in another question: How is it that you have no faith? Where is your faith? You see, we are afraid whenever we have no faith; or perhaps it would be more correct to say that we are afraid when our faith is *misplaced*. And that is the key.

Friends, let me ask you, where is your faith? Allow me to ask it in a slightly different way: where is your faith *really*? What are you depending upon to get you through whatever storm may come your way? Is it your education, your family, your strength, your intelligence, your charm, your beauty, your talent, your money, your connections? What is it that, in the back of your mind, is sort of your ace in the hole, the thing that is going to get you through when the going gets tough? Maybe you are feeling pretty satisfied today, thinking, “Well, I’m okay because I have my _____.” It might be that we feel safe and secure because of our military might, protecting us. I thank God for our military; I really do. But with the monkey running the show today, cutting defense budgets and ordering political correctness and social engineering in our military from the top down, I think we have cause for concern rather than security. History is filled with story after story of invincible armies finding out they weren’t! Maybe you’re security comes in part from having money in the bank. Well, the way our government is handling money, that money you have set aside is becoming worth less and less month by month; and that pile of money might devalue to the point of being completely worthless. I hope it doesn’t, but you have to admit that it could! My point is not to make you afraid of boogeymen or Communists or hyperinflation or anything else; I simply am trying to make the case that we can’t put our faith in the things or the institutions of this world system.

There will come a time when the ship of your life will be tossed, and then the thing that you trust in the most will prove to be ineffective; it might even turn out to *be* the problem! When you are afraid, that fear is evidence that your faith is misplaced. And that is why it’s okay to be afraid from time to time, as long as we learn the lesson that God is trying to teach us. If we are afraid, we aren’t trusting in Him as we should. If the disciples had not been afraid that day, they would not have known or realized that their faith was misplaced. So let fear be the wake up call for you: it’s a call telling you that you’re trusting in something other than God. Then ask God to calm the storm in His own way and in His own time—and He will.

Friend, there is one fear I have not yet talked about today, and I would be very wrong to leave it out: the fear of dying. We are all going to die someday. We live in broken bodies in a broken world, cursed by sin. Yes, we are going to die; but we do not need to fear death. Jesus has shown His power over death. He raised three people from death to life while He walked on this earth, and as a final display of His power, He conquered death and rose again on the third day after He had died at the hands of cruel men. He lives so that you, too, may live. If you will come to Him today, you won’t have to fear death. Won’t you come? I urge everyone here today to trust Christ completely.