**You of Little Faith, Why are You So Afraid?**

September 16, 2018

Matthew 8:18-34

Key Verse 8:26 “He replied, 'You of little faith, why are you so afraid?' Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.”

In Matthew chapter 8 we are introduced to the power of King Jesus. Jesus has power over various diseases. Jesus has power over storms. Jesus has power over demons. Even though King Jesus was with them, his disciples were afraid. The opposite of faith is fear. That is why Jesus rebuked them, “You of little faith, why are you so afraid?” In order to grow as disciples of Jesus, they needed to overcome their inner fear. Likewise, in order to follow Jesus, we need to overcome our inner fear. First, we need to overcome fear of losing comfortable lives and fear of our family’s disapproval, and give first priority to Jesus. Second, we need to overcome our inner fear in the face of storms of life. Third, we need to overcome our fear of unpleasant people such as demon-possessed men.

**First**, overcome the fear of losing comfortable lives and fear of our family’s disapproval. Look at verse 18. “When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake.” Because of his healing ministry, Jesus had gained much popularity. As word had spread around Israel, more and more people began flocking to him. Sometimes it seemed like he was running a medical clinic that was open 24/7. Jesus had a tremendous shepherd heart on the crowds of people. However, his main focus was always on his disciples. He needed to spend personal time with them. He also needed rest from an exhaustive schedule. It was at this time that Jesus distanced himself from the crowd. He gave orders to take a boat to cross to the other side of the lake.

Jesus’ disciples were ready to go with him. Surprisingly, there was the most unlikely candidate who came to Jesus expressing his willingness to go also. Look at verse 19. “Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, `Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.’” This was such a bold statement coming from a teacher of the law since many teachers of the law opposed Jesus. Obviously, this teacher of the law really liked Jesus’ teachings. We might think that Jesus would praise or compliment this man saying, “Cool! Come along!” But that is not what Jesus said to him. Jesus wanted this man to know what it truly meant to follow him. Look at verse 20. “Jesus replied, ‘Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.’” Here Jesus uses a metaphor to reveal the cost involved in following him. Basically Jesus told him that there would be no hotel reservation where he was going. He might be sleeping under the stars, under an oak tree, or in a barn somewhere. Following Jesus is not what you want to sign up for if you are seeking a comfortable, easy, wealthy or luxurious life. Jesus doesn’t promise these things to his followers. Following Jesus doesn’t include free lodging and meals. Rather, one can expect much sacrifice and hard work to follow Jesus. Why would anyone be willing to sign up for that? They would do so if they were seeking treasure in heaven, eternal life and the true meaning and fulfillment of life. Jesus wanted this man to know what he was volunteering for. Jesus wanted him to know that there is a cost in following Jesus, that is, in pursuing God’s kingdom and righteousness.

In 2012 when I visited Mumbai, India, I stayed in a hotel right next slum area. Even the most basic thing such as water was not safe to drink. I had diarrhea for 3 days. As I passed through the miserable living condition, I was convicted of my selfishness. “Can I follow Jesus here to serve these people? Jesus’ coming to this world was much worse than my living here.” Many young people today have romantic ideas about being missionaries. They think that going abroad is to become a missionary. But can they drink the same water as natives and eat the same food?

Someone else approached Jesus next. Look at verse 21. “Another disciple said to him, ‘Lord, first let me go and bury my father.’” It would be very strange if his father had just died, because he should be busy making funeral arrangements. Most likely this disciple was not asking for permission to go to his father’s funeral, but rather to put off following Jesus until his father died. Perhaps he was the oldest son and wanted to be sure of his inheritance. Perhaps he did not want to face his father’s wrath if he left his family business to follow an unknown preacher. He had fear of financial security, family disapproval and he did not want to commit to Jesus yet. Jesus did not accept his excuse. Jesus said, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.” Jesus did not mean this man should ignore taking care of his father. But Jesus taught his disciples about priority. When Jesus said “let the dead bury their own dead,” he was referring to those spiritually dead in their sins. Any unsaved person can do the job of burying the dead. But only the disciples of Jesus can do the job of saving souls. Jesus is saying, “Don’t waste your precious time on trivia.”

As the Son of God, Jesus demands complete loyalty. Even family loyalty was not to take priority over the demands of Jesus. His direct challenge forces us to ask ourselves about our own priority in following him. We all have a “Let me first” list that hinders us to make an absolute commitment to Jesus. We say, “I will follow you Lord, but first let me finish college,” or, “first let me get married,” or, “first let me get a good full time job, not a part time job.” The list is endless. We can always find what we think are good reasons to do something first before following Jesus. But when Jesus calls us, there is nothing more important than serving our Lord and Savior who gave everything for us. Of course we have responsibilities and obligations to take care of, but a personal invitation from Jesus should take priority over everything else. May God help us to follow Jesus, make him our first priority, and live the life that is truly worth living.

**Second**, discipleship requires overcoming inner fear in the face of storms of life. After all these events, Jesus got into the boat and his disciples followed him. Look at verse 24. “Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping.” A number of the disciples were skilled fishermen. They had experienced storms on the lake before. But this must have been the ‘storm of all storms.’ Waves came crashing over the bow flooding the boat. The disciples were frantic. How about Jesus? Being tired as he was, he was peacefully sleeping despite the tsunami like event. The disciples had thought all hope was lost. They thought this could be the end and that they all would sink to the bottom and become fish food. What did they do next? Verse 25 says, “The disciples went and woke him, saying, ‘Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!” In a desperate situation, the disciples were gripped with terrible fear.

Jesus spoke to his disciples, saying, “You of little faith, why are you so afraid?” This is the second time in Matthew’s gospel that Jesus said, “you of little faith.” The first time was in 6:30 when Jesus said, “will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?” In that example, Jesus said they needed more faith to overcome worry. Here, Jesus teaches his disciples that they need more faith to overcome fear. We see that faith overcomes fear. Faith in God Almighty enabled the boy David to challenge the giant Goliath. Faith enables people to overcome impossible odds. Faith gives people peace in the midst of storms. John Wesley was on a ship sailing across the Atlantic Ocean to America with some German Moravian Christians. The Germans were worshiping when a storm hit their ship. Wesley entered into his journal, dated Sunday, Jan.25, 1736: In the midst of the psalm wherewith their service began, the sea broke over, split the main-sail in pieces, covered the ship, and poured in between the decks, as if the great deep had already swallowed us up. A terrible screaming began among the English. The Germans calmly sung on. I asked one of them afterwards, “Was you not afraid?” He answered, “I thank God, no.” I asked, “But were not your women and children afraid?” He replied, mildly, “No; our women and children are not afraid to die.” Faith in Jesus gave these German Moravian Christians peace in the midst of a severe storm. May we also have grace and peace in the time of storms.

Even though Jesus the Creator God was in their boat, the disciples failed to put their faith in him. They did not believe that Jesus had power over storms. In their lack of faith, they could only be destined to be useless, fearful men. In order to live as disciples of Jesus, they would need to grow as men of faith in their lives because they would encounter many more storms of different natures and they would need the faith to overcome. After rebuking his disciples, Jesus got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. Jesus didn’t have to pray. He rebuked the storm and it became completely calm. Have you ever desperately needed a change in the weather, such as for safety purposes, and asked God to change it? Try it some time. We cannot change the weather. But God can. It’s a small thing for God to do. What is too big for us is not too big for God. So when you are feeling small, up against a giant or a task too big to handle, look at God in faith, the God who is much bigger than our storm or giant or problem or task. It pleases God to act on our behalf when we depend on him humbly in faith. The disciples were amazed and asked each other, “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!”

When Jesus calmed the storm through his authoritative word, the disciples recognized him as the Almighty Creator God. When faith in Jesus came to their hearts, they were afraid no more. There are many kinds of storms that we will inevitably encounter in our lives. We have to deal with storms of diseases, death, finances, and relationships, just to name a few. We can grow so afraid at these times. Jesus rebukes us, “You of little faith, why are you so afraid?” We have to know that Jesus is in our boat. With faith in Jesus, we can remain calm in the midst of any storm of life. We should not look at the storms, but rather look at Jesus with our spiritual eyes.

**Third**, we need to overcome our fear of unpleasant people such as the demon-possessed. After Jesus quelled the storm, they all drifted safely to the other side of the lake. They arrived in the region of the Gadarenes. This was a Gentile territory. There they were immediately met by an unwelcome surprise. Two demon possessed men who were coming from the tombs met Jesus there. They were so violent that no one would even go through that area. Everyone stayed out of their way. These men were very scary and dangerous. What happens when we see something like a demon possessed man on the street? We become very fearful and move away quickly to the other side of the street. But Jesus was different. Despite their conditions, Jesus valued these two men’s lives. He was ready to take on these demons. Jesus had the power and authority to drive them out. These demons knew exactly who Jesus was and of his power. They were scared to death of him. “What do you want with us, Son of God?” they shouted. “Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?” The demons thought it was time for judgment. Since it was a Gentile region, there was a large herd of pigs feeding nearby. The demons begged Jesus, “If you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs.” They wanted to inflict some damage. Jesus did not negotiate with them. He only said one word, “Go!” When he did so, the demons came out and went into the pigs. Suddenly, the pigs lost all appetite and meaning of their existence and rushed into the lake. Jesus sacrificed a multitude of pigs in order to save two demon-possessed men. What Jesus did was to give a living demonstration of the deliverance of those two men that no one would ever forget. It was a living proof that those demons came out of those men.

When those tending the pigs witnessed all this, they were horrified. They suddenly saw all their ham, bacon, and pork chop sales floating in the lake. They rushed into the town to tell what Jesus had done. The whole town went out to meet Jesus. They should have come to say thank you or bring others for healing, but rather they asked Jesus to leave. They feared that Jesus would bring more damage to their economy. They didn’t want Jesus the healer to help anyone else. They had no room for him in their hearts. They only worried about losing money. Even though Jesus had healed two demon possessed men and given them a new chance of life, these people didn’t care. Fear made them useless and heartless people.

Life of disciples requires serving many needy people like the demon-possessed without fear. Jesus doesn’t want us to turn a blind eye to the needy like the townspeople of the Gadarenes. Jesus has the power and authority to heal the needy at the University of Toronto. He has the power and authority through his word to say, “Go!” and restore them completely in the image of God. Jesus wants us to have a shepherd heart for them. We want to serve only nice people. Serving the demon-possessed requires a tremendous energy and money. We should not be thinking about ourselves and our problems while ignoring God’s flock and Jesus’ mission. May God help us all to come out of our fear and self-centeredness to see those in need. May we bring those afflicted by Satan to Jesus so they may be set free and healed through the love of Christ.

In today’s passage, Jesus rebukes us, “You of little faith, why are you so afraid?” In order to grow as disciples of Jesus, we need to overcome our inner fear. May God bless you to grow as fearless disciples of Jesus.