

INTRODUCTION

One of my favorite stories is about the country preacher who used to visit a widow in his church named Mrs. Jones. He liked to visit her around lunchtime because she had a vegetable garden and she loved to cook fresh vegetables for her pastor. One day the preacher arrived at lunch, and knocked on Mrs. Jones' door, but she didn't answer. So he walked through her garden calling, "Mrs. Jones, Mrs. Jones." He was perplexed because the back door was open and he could see food cooking on the stove, but he didn't see Mrs. Jones. Knowing her sense of humor, he left his card on her door with this note: "Dear Mrs. Jones, Read Revelation 3:20." That verse says, "Behold I stand at the door and knock and if anyone will hear my voice I will come in and eat with them."

What he didn't realize was that about the time he showed up, Mrs. Jones was getting out of the bathtub, and she was too embarrassed to answer the door, so she hid behind the door until he left. After reading the pastor's card, she wrote him a note and left it on his desk the next Sunday. It said, "Dear Pastor, I got your card. Read Genesis 3:10." "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid myself."

That's a great story, but it also gives us the first reference to fear in the Bible. The very first recorded conversation of God with a person was when Adam said, "I was afraid." Before they sinned, Adam and Eve never experienced fear. But after they disobeyed God, they experienced the uncomfortable emotion of fear. Since that time until today, fear has been a part of our human existence.

In this message we're going to discuss how Jesus can transform your fear into faith. This is miracle #5 in John's narrative about Jesus.

John 6:16-21 (CSB): "When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. Darkness had already set in, but Jesus had not yet come to them. A high wind arose, and the sea began to churn. After they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea. He was coming near the boat, and they were afraid. But he said to them, 'It is I. Don't be afraid.' Then they were willing to take him on board, and at once the boat was at the shore where they were heading."

There have been many artists who have tried to capture this amazing scene of Jesus walking on the water at night. I've chosen to share one by Scottish



Jesus Walking Upon the Sea
William Brassey Hole
Oil on Canvas

artist William Brassey Hole. In 1900, Hole traveled to Israel to study the country. After his visit he painted eighty different scenes from the life of Christ. I think he captured the scene well, because it must have been a spooky experience. In fact, in Mark and Matthew's accounts, the disciples were terrified and cried out, "It's a ghost!" It wasn't a ghost—it was just Jesus walking right into their fears. As we examine this miracle, we can learn four applications that we can apply to our lives.

I. When we proceed without Jesus we may encounter scary storms.

The disciples left Jesus on the shore and they struck out on their own across the lake at night. In Mark's account Jesus sent the disciples on while He stayed behind to spend some time in prayer.

Fear can be a good thing. There is healthy fear that prevents us from hurting ourselves. If you see a coiled rattlesnake on the path in front of you, you should avoid it. When you hear that a tornado is coming your way, you should seek shelter.

But there are many fears that are irrational. These are called phobias, from the Greek word *phobos*. There are over 300 different phobias recognized by the National Institute of Mental Health. According to them the ten most common phobias are: (1) Fear of public speaking. (2) Fear of death. (Jerry Seinfeld said that means that if you are asked to give a eulogy at a funeral, you'd really prefer to be the one in the casket). (3) Fear of terrorist attacks. (4) Fear of snakes. (5) Fear of spiders and insects. (6) Fear of heights. (7) Fear of flying. (8) Fear of confined spaces. (9) Fear of open spaces. (10) Fear of thunder and lightning.

One of my long-time heroes was John Bisagno, who pastored First Baptist Church in Houston for over 30 years. John graduated to Heaven last August. He used to joke about how he was afraid to fly in airplanes. He told the story of going to a bus station to get a ticket to travel to another city. The ticket agent said, "It would be a lot easier to fly there." John replied, "Well, I'm kinda' afraid to fly." The ticket agent suddenly recognized him. He said, "You're that Baptist preacher. And you're afraid to fly! Doesn't God say in the Bible, 'I am with you always?'"

John said, what God actually said was, LO, I am with your always—so that's why I'm staying low!"

Sometimes we can laugh about our fears, but at other times, fear can paralyze us. Let's get in the boat with the disciples of Jesus that night and try to understand their fear.

A. Fear is multiplied by the cover of darkness.

It was a dark and stormy night ... really. It was the middle of the night and darkness always magnifies your fear. The disciples couldn't see how far away from shore they were. In those days they didn't have equipment to determine the depth of the water, and there was a legend that the Sea of Galilee was bottomless and there were rumors of leviathans, or monsters that

came out at night. It doesn't take much to push you over the edge when you're afraid that something big is in the water. Cindy and I watched Jaws the first summer we were married, and she hasn't been more than ankle deep in the ocean since then! Darkness is when things go "thump" in the night. There may be some kind of fear that is keeping you up in the dark hours of the night. It's amazing how the voice of fear gets louder during the nighttime hours.

B. Fear is multiplied by the loss of direction.

Because it was stormy, they couldn't see the stars to give them a reference of their direction. They didn't have a compass back then. The Bible says a high wind arose and the waves were surging. They didn't know where they were and couldn't tell where they were going.

When you compare John's account with that of Mark and Matthew, we can learn that they were toiling in the water for over 6 hours because Matthew tells us Jesus came walking on the water at the fourth watch of the night, that would have been about 4:00 a.m. They could have just been going around in one big circle.

That may describe how some of you feel right now. You don't have any sense of direction for your life. You seem to be just going around in circles and can't break out of that cycle. God has a plan for your life but fear can rob you of a sense of direction that you are moving forward with God.

C. Fear is multiplied by the threat of death.

The disciples weren't just afraid of the darkness and the winds. They were afraid they would sink and drown. They were afraid of the prospect that they might die. If they had been standing on solid ground during the storm, they wouldn't have experienced fear.

If the boat had capsized, they wouldn't have known which direction to swim. They had lost all sense of where the closest shore was. Some of them had grown up fishing on the lake and no doubt had heard stories of people drowning there.

Fear of death is one of the most common fears. It may not be the fear of death itself, but many people fear the uncertainty of how they are going to die. If I could choose how I would die, I'd live to be a good old age with full health and mental awareness. I would say goodbye to all my family and friends. I'd put on my pajamas and pull the covers up under my chin and go to sleep and wake up in Heaven. But that's not the way most people die. So there is a nagging fear about how we might die.

The Bible says when Jesus died, one of the benefits was that "He freed those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death." (Hebrews 2:15 CSB) If you don't know the Lord, you should be afraid to die. But if you know the Lord, you don't have to fear death. Paul was in prison waiting to die, and as he contemplated his death he wrote these amazing words, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." (Philippians 1:21 CSB) It was like he was flipping a coin

and said, "Heads, I win; tails I win." If I live, it's Jesus. If I die, that's even better. When you know that Jesus has already conquered death, you can be set free from the fear of death.

II. Jesus sees and cares when we are struggling in a storm.

Remember, Jesus is on shore praying. Mark gives us an important detail. "He saw them straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. Very early in the morning he came toward them walking on the sea." (Mark 6:48 CSB)

The disciples couldn't see Jesus, but the good news was that Jesus could see the disciples. When you're going through a dark struggle, you may look around and ask, "God where are you?" You may not think you can see God, but you can be certain that God sees you and He cares for you.

There are over 7 billion people on this planet but God is constantly thinking about you and me. The Psalmist declares, "How precious to me are your thoughts, God!...Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand." (Psalm 139:16-18 NIV)

You may be wondering. If Jesus cared so much for the disciples, why did He let them go out into a storm? And why did I have to go through this terrible struggle? Jesus knew the storm was coming; in fact He MADE them get into the boat. Jesus doesn't pray for us to avoid the storms, He prays for us to endure the storms.

So God is going to allow us to go through some dark struggles. But He's watching over us and He's praying for us. As the wonderful song that Ethel Waters made famous says, "While should I feel discouraged? Why should the shadows come? Why should my heart feel lonely, and long for heaven and home? When Jesus is my portion, a constant friend is He. His eye is on the sparrow and I know He watches me. I sing because I'm happy. I sing because I'm free! His eye is on the sparrow. And I know He watches me!"

III. Jesus walks into your greatest fears and says, "Don't be afraid."

Fear is a powerful force and it can make you do strange things. A few years ago in Spain, a farmer was standing by a road hitchhiking. A pickup truck stopped to give him a ride. The only other item in the back of the truck was an empty casket that the driver was delivering to a funeral home. As they drove on, it began to rain. So the farmer figured that the driest place to be was in the casket, so he raised the lid and climbed inside. Meanwhile the driver stopped to pick up two other hitch hikers who sat in the back of the truck with the coffin. When the rain stopped, suddenly the top of the casket opened and the farmer sat up and said, "Good, it's stopped raining." The two other guys were so terrified that they jumped out of the moving truck. Both received multiple injuries—caused by fear.

Let's go back to the disciples struggling in the dark, stormy water. Imagine what your reaction would have been if you had been in the boat. You look up and see Jesus walking toward you. Here's how John described it, "After they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus

walking on the sea. He was coming near the boat, and they were afraid. But he said to them, 'It is I. Don't be afraid.'" (John 6:19-20 CSB)

Some skeptics scoff and ask, "Do you really believe that Jesus walked on water?" After all, you put a heavy solid object in liquid and it will sink. Try telling that to a ship. Or some liberal theologians try to explain it away by saying it was dark and foggy and they were actually near the shore and Jesus was actually walking on the shore. There's a Greek word for that position: Hogwash. I believe that the One who created the Heavens and the earth could very easily walk on water. All He had to do was to temporarily suspend the laws of nature and that liquid surface became as supportive as a stone pathway. Jesus could easily walk on water, just as He can easily walk into your fears today.

But instead of focusing on the miracle of what He did, walking on the water, notice what He said. He said two important things. He said, "It is I." In Greek it reads, "*Ego eimi*." It is literally translated, "I am." When Moses was speaking to God at the burning bush, he said, "God, who can I tell them has sent me? What's your name?" And God said, "Tell them I AM has sent you." And Jesus constantly identified Himself as "I AM."

"Mary, did you know?" is my favorite Christmas song. And the climax of the song says, "Mary did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation? Mary did you know that your baby boy would one day rule the nations? Did you know that your baby boy is heaven's perfect Lamb? That sleeping child you're holding is the great I am!" So when Jesus approached the disciples in the boat He didn't say, "Hi guys." He said, "God is here."

That led to the second thing Jesus said, "Don't be afraid." Because He is the Great I Am, He can say, "Don't be afraid." If you are searching for a word from God here it is: These three words straight from His mouth to your ears: DON'T BE AFRAID.

The Bible is full of times when God invites you to exercise faith rather than give in to fear. In Isaiah 41:10 CSB God says, "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will hold on to you with my righteous right hand."

Is there some scary storm of fear that you are facing now? It might be a health storm, an emotional storm, a relational storm, or a financial storm. Storms come in all shapes and sizes. But you don't have to be afraid. Look up and focus on Jesus. He walks up to you and says, "I am God. I am here. Don't be afraid."

IV. Jesus hasn't promised smooth sailing; but He has promised a sure destination.

When they saw Jesus and invited Him to get on the boat an amazing thing happened. The Bible says, "Then they were willing to take him on board, and at once the boat was at the shore where they were heading." (John 6:21 CSB)

When you compare the accounts from John, Mark, and Matthew, several miracles took place. First, Jesus walked on the water. Second, Matthew tells us that Peter walked on the water until

he started sinking. Third, Jesus calmed the storm. And the fourth miracle was that they arrived immediately at their destination.

I love to see Jesus carrying out the role of the Shepherd in Psalm 23. When He fed the multitude, He had led the people to sit down in Green Pastures. then He rescued the disciples by leading them to still waters.

We are all going to face stormy experiences that produce fear. Life is not always smooth sailing. But if you invite Jesus into your life, the destination is always certain. It's a good thing to be with the Lord.

There's a final spiritual application I want to share with you today. The disciples were afraid of dying. They were afraid they were going into the water and the water would go into them, and they would drown. But Jesus came walking on top of the water. So don't miss this important truth: The very thing they feared the most, the water, was under the feet of Jesus. And leads to a very important life lesson. Anything that you are afraid of is already under the feet of Jesus. In the Bible when the Bible speaks of someone or something being under someone's feet, it speaks of the authority that one has over another. It was predicted in Genesis 3 that the seed of woman (Jesus) would crush the head of the serpent (Satan) under his heel. In other words, Jesus has absolute authority over the devil. The Bible speaks several times of how the Lord has made the earth His footstool. That means the Lord has authority over everything and everyone on the planet. In fact, the Bible teaches that God has placed *everything* under the feet of Jesus. So here's the life-changing truth. Nothing under the feet of Jesus can be over your head! The Bible says, "He [God] raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places... And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church... and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 1:21-22; 2:6 NKJV)

So everything is under His feet. And then it says that God has elevated our perspective so that we can see things as if we are seated with Christ in the heavenly places; that means NOW. Not just when we die.

Where am I right now? Physically I'm standing on the platform where GABC meets, but spiritually, I am seated with Christ in the heavenly realms. And Paul uses the phrase "in Christ" over 70 times. Christ in me speaks of power, but me "in Christ" speaks of position. I can either look at my problems from this perspective—and they look big and scary—or I can look at my problems from His perspective where they look tiny and minor.

Have you ever asked someone, "How are you doing?" They respond by saying, "I'm doing pretty good UNDER the circumstances." That would be like me asking you, "How did you sleep last night?" And you said, "I slept alright UNDER the mattress." You shouldn't sleep UNDER your mattress; you should sleep ON it. Circumstances are the same way. You don't have to live UNDER your circumstances. When you are "in Christ" you can live above them.

So that fear that you have? It's under His feet. And you should be looking at it from His perspective.

So the Lord has at least three words for you. Are you ready to hear them and obey them? Here they are: DON'T BE AFRAID.

CONCLUSION

When I was little, I thought my dad could do anything. I thought he was Superman. He was a World War II hero who had survived a sinking ship. When he was around, I wasn't afraid. One of my earliest memories was when I was about 4 or 5 years old. My mom was a nurse and she sometimes worked the night shift at the hospital. And when she did, us kids fought over who got to sleep with daddy. One night I was in bed with my dad and it was in the middle of the night. I felt my dad sit straight up in bed and that woke me up. Then I heard someone open our screen door and try to turn the doorknob. After a second, the screen door slammed shut. My dad didn't move he just sat still listening. Now, as I think back on that, if I had been in my bed alone, that would have been a frightening experience. But because I was there with my dad and he was paying attention to the problem, I wasn't afraid. While he was sitting up listening, I knew everything would be okay. The next day I asked him and he said someone probably just tried the door and it was locked, so they left. But he said, "Don't worry son, if they had gotten in, I would have taken care of them." And I believed him.

What a great lesson that is for all of us. This is a scary world. But He who watches over Israel—and you—neither slumbers nor sleeps. He loves you and He has told you to not be afraid. Whatever threatens to be over your head is already under His feet. And we are seated with Christ in the heavenly realms.

Your perspective determines the size of your problem. When you recognize you are in Christ, you are able to see your problems from His perspective. Jesus said, "I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33 NIV)

OUTLINE

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B. The loss of direction

C. The threat of death

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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