

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. Before they sinned, Adam and Eve never experienced fear. But after they disobeyed God, we find the first expression of fear. Since that time until today, fear has been a part of our human existence.

Fear is coming from all sides today. If you watch the news or read the newspaper, you know there are a lot of scary things happening in our world. A recent *Wall Street Journal* article calls 2014 "a year of living on the brink." Why? Ebola in West Africa; and popping up in the U.S.; and another tragic school shooting in Washington. Overseas, ISIS on the move in Syria and Iraq; riots in Hong Kong; Russian and Ukraine facing off and then toss in the wild fluctuations in the stock market.

The National Institute for Mental Health has cataloged over 300 different phobias or fears. The top 10 on their list are:

1. Fear of public speaking
2. Fear of death
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.

Comedian Jerry Seinfeld jokes that when you consider more people fear speaking in public than death, at a funeral a person would rather be in the casket than giving a eulogy!

My friend, and long-time Pastor at First Baptist, Houston, John Bisagno, used to joke about being afraid to fly. He tells the story of going to a bus station and booking a ticket to another city where he was going to preach. The ticket agent said, "It would be a lot quicker to fly there." Dr. Bisagno said, "Well, I'm afraid to fly." The lady recognized him and began to give him a hard time. She said, "Here you are a preacher of the Bible and you're afraid to fly? Don't you know that God says in the Bible, 'I am with you always?'" He corrected her and said, "No, it says LOW, I am with you always. And that's why I'm staying LOW!"

In this passage we're going to discover some terrified disciples. We're going to learn how Jesus taught them to overcome their fears.

Mark 6:45-53. "Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray. When evening came, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. About the fourth watch of the night he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, because they all saw him and were terrified. Immediately he spoke to them and said, 'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.' Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened. When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there."

What is fear? If you looked it up in a dictionary you find that fear is "a feeling of agitation and anxiety caused by the threat of danger." The disciples felt agitation and anxiety because they thought they were going to sink and drown. Jesus walked right into their fears and said, "It's just me. Don't be afraid." What is it in your life that is causing you to be afraid? Jesus has a message for you today and it the same. "I'm here. Don't be afraid."

In this message I want to focus on Jesus in three different locations. As we examine each location, I'll be sharing a life lesson about it.

Scene 1: JESUS PRAYING ON THE MOUNTAIN

The language makes it clear that Jesus insisted the disciples got on the boat while He waited behind to pray on a mountain. He was watching them and praying for them. We're told that they were halfway across the lake, there was a strong headwind, and it was totally dark. Can you relate to that?

The lake was about 7 miles across so they had only managed a little over 3 miles. Have you ever noticed problems seem to stick up their heads when we're right in the middle of a challenge? Nobody talks about a young-life crisis or an old-life crisis, but everybody is talking about a mid-life crisis!

I ran in the 5K Komen Race for the Cure last spring. I don't want to brag, but did you know that for a while I was leading the race? For the first few steps. And for any of you who compete in

those races you know the middle stage is the hardest. That's when you want to stop and walk. And when you get close to the finish line and everyone is cheering, you find this burst of energy to sprint across the line. It's the middle where we have trouble.

And sometimes there is a contrary wind blowing in our faces. You are struggling against something and it seems like you have to take two steps back and one step forward. And because it was cloudy and dark, they couldn't see the stars to determine their direction. Our fears are always magnified in darkness.

And yet while they are struggling in a dark storm, Jesus is on the mountain watching all this happen. He was watching and praying for them.

Life Lesson: Jesus sees me and prays for me in my most difficult times

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 can know that God sees you and God 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, O God!...Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand." (Psalm 139:17)

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.

In Luke 22:31 we read an interesting conversation between Simon Peter and Jesus. It was the night before the crucifixion and Peter has just bragged that all the others might forsake Jesus, but he never would. Jesus said, "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat." Remember having a flour sifter in your kitchen? Back before the time of the highly refined flour we have today, flour often had lumps and imperfections, and the sifter was to trap the lumps and allow the light, pure flour to fall through. Jesus said Satan wanted to sift Peter; the devil wanted to bring out his imperfections. But then Jesus said, "But I have prayed for you. That your faith will not fail." Jesus didn't say, "Peter, Satan wants to sift you, but I'm not going to let him do it." No, He said, "I'm going to pray for you that your faith won't fail, and when you are changed, strengthen your brothers."

That night around a campfire, Peter's faith faltered, but it didn't fail, because Peter repented with tears and rejoined the disciples.

You might be thinking, "I wish Jesus was praying for me." He is. The Bible says, "Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them." (Hebrews 7:25)

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!"

Scene 2: JESUS WALKING ON THE WATER

Jesus did something more than just watch them and pray for them. He came to their aid. He walked on the surface of the water to do it. In Matthew's account of this miracle, Jesus arrives at the boat and Peter walks a few steps on the water, and then he started sinking and Jesus had to rescue him. Mark doesn't mention this detail. Remember John Mark is writing down what Simon Peter told him, so why did Peter choose to omit his water walking? We're not sure. It might have been that Peter was a little embarrassed that he started sinking and had to cry out for Jesus to rescue him. On the other side of the coin, perhaps by the time Peter was an old man telling Mark these stories he had developed a well-needed sense of humility and he didn't want it to seem like he was bragging about his water-walking. We will have to wait until we get to heaven and ask Peter himself!

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. Scientists can observe that matter is made up of molecules, comprised of atoms with protons, electrons, neutrons, and croutons (just seeing if you were listening). Inside these atoms are even tinier sub-atomic particles called quarks. The electrons are whizzing in orbit around the nucleus of those atoms, but physicists disagree about what holds it all together. Why don't the molecules in this Bible just go spinning off in random directions?

I think the Bible answers that mystery. We read, "All things were created by him (Jesus) and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." (Colossians 1:16-17) That word "hold together" is the Greek word *sunestimei* which means, "to stick together" "to cohere." Jesus is the super-glue of all matter. Jesus could walk on land. He could walk on water or He could walk on air. And He can walk right into your heart.

Life Lesson: Jesus walks into the middle of my greatest fears and says, "It's just me. Don't be afraid."

Now, let's go back to the dark stormy night on the lake. Jesus walked by at the fourth watch of the night. That meant it was around 3-4 a.m. Jesus walked by the tossing boat as if he was going to just walk to the other side. They were already afraid, and at first they thought Jesus was a ghost. They cried out in fear begging Jesus to help them.

Jesus said, “It’s me. You guys need to cheer up and calm down. I’m here. Have you forgotten how I just fed 5,000 with some minnows and muffins?” But the Bible says they were slow learners because they hadn’t understood the lesson of the loaves.”

Can you remember a time when you were so afraid you thought you weren’t going to make it?

My very first trip to Israel was in 1973. I was one of about a dozen university students participating in an archaeological dig. We arrived when the Yom Kippur War was still being fought. We could hear the sounds of jets screaming overhead and the dull thud of artillery shells landing out in the countryside. A couple of days before we were to leave Tel Aviv, the news reported the PLO had stolen a portable ground to air rocket and they threatened to shoot down an El-Al airliner as it took off—and we were flying El-Al. The night before we left, we gathered for a prayer meeting, but it actually turned into a scare meeting. Some of the students were married and had young kids and they cried when they talked about never getting to see their family again—the fear just escalated. I was in bed later that night and I had a hard time sleeping. I was scared. But then the Lord came to me like the disciples in the ship. He told me He was with me and that I shouldn’t be afraid. And He reminded me of a scripture from Psalm 27 that I had memorized that year. “The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?” (Psalm 27:1)

I quoted that scripture aloud several times and I can promise you the Lord removed my fear on the spot and I slept all night, and of course, our return trip was uneventful.

Scene 3: JESUS CALMING THE STORM

The most dangerous storm that night wasn’t the weather. It was the storm of fear raging in the minds of the disciples. They were terrified. Fear can be a powerful and destructive force. Jesus prophesied that a time would come when men’s hearts would be failing them because of fear.

Fear can make you do strange things. There is a true story about hitchhiker in Spain. A pick-up truck carrying an empty coffin picked him up and he jumped up in the back of the truck. Meanwhile it started to rain, so the hitchhiker climbed into the casket and pulled the lid shut. Meanwhile, as the rain continued, the truck stopped to pick up two more hitchhikers. After the rain stopped the hitchhiker in the casket raised the lid and said, “Good. It’s stopped raining.” When the other two hitchhikers saw the man climbing out of the casket they were so terrified that they jumped out of the moving truck and sustained multiple injuries.

The disciples cried out to Jesus for help. And the Bible says when Jesus climbed into the boat with them that the storm died down. They were amazed. In Matthew’s account they began to worship Him saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

Let’s examine their fear for a moment. They were afraid the boat was going to sink and they were going to drown. They were afraid of going into the water, and the water going into them, and then they would die. 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.

Life Lesson: Any problem over my head is already under his feet

You may not fear drowning in water. You may fear poor health: It's under his feet. You may fear financial loss: It's under His feet. Whatever threatens to be over your head is already under His feet!

God has placed everything under the feet of Jesus. The Bible says, "He [God] raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion...And God placed all things under his feet." (Ephesians 1:20-24) You say, "That's nice, but I'm down here in the middle of the mess." Actually, spiritually speaking we share the same perspective Jesus has. The Bible says, "And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 2:6)

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. You have the same choice!

I recall when I was first taking flight lessons as a college student. My flight instructor weighed a couple of biscuits over 260 and we were training in a little two-seat Cessna 150. We could barely close the doors, and the little engine whined to get up enough airspeed to climb off the runway. But finally the day came for me to take my first solo flight. Without the load of my extra-large flight instructor that little airplane jumped off the runway and climbed like a homesick angel. Over the next few weeks I practiced flying around the pattern doing touch-and-goes. There was a two-lane highway that ran by that little airport and one day I was on the downwind leg about 1500 feet high. I looked on the highway and a long 18-wheeler truck carrying a load of lumber was going slow. I could see a little car behind the 18-wheeler wanting to pass, it would pull out and then tuck back in. I looked ahead up the highway and saw that nothing was coming for at least a mile. If there was some way I could have told the driver of the car, "Hey you don't have to be afraid. Nothing's coming. You can safely pass that truck." But I'm sure it looked different to the driver of that little car behind that load of logs. I had a totally different perspective. How many times would we look at problems differently if we could see them from the perspective of above?

CONCLUSION

Jesus has three words for you today: **DON'T BE AFRAID**. 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, and when she did, us kids fought over who got to sleep with daddy. 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 it the problem, I wasn't afraid. While he was sitting up listening, I knew everything would be okay. The next day he said someone just tried the door and it was locked, so they left.

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)

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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