

In His Hands

One of the most powerful emotions human beings experience is fear. Fear is the reaction we have to the threat of future pain or evil of any sort. Edmund Burke once said, "No passion so effectually robs the mind of acting and reasoning as fear." Jesus came to deliver us from every fear that prevents us from knowing, loving, and serving Him. Our text this week provides a wonderful example of how He does this.

Mark 6:45-56

⁴⁵ Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. ⁴⁶ And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray. ⁴⁷ And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. ⁴⁸ And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, ⁴⁹ but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, ⁵⁰ for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." ⁵¹ And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, ⁵² for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

⁵³ When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored to the shore. ⁵⁴ And when they got out of the boat, the people immediately recognized him ⁵⁵ and ran about the whole region and began to bring the sick people on their beds to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶ And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.

Notice here that Jesus does two things to deliver us from unworthy fears.

I. Jesus presents Himself as the only One to be feared (vv. 45-48)

Jesus sent the disciples away so that they wouldn't arouse among the crowds anymore clamor to make Him king (see John 6: 15). He then dismissed the crowds so that He might continue His ministry without undue distraction.

After the disciples had struggled all night to make progress against dangerous headwinds, Jesus seized the moment to make Himself known to them by walking on the Sea. The language in verse 48, "He meant to pass by them..." is intentionally identical to Exodus 33: 19,22 and I Kings 19:11 and Job 9: 8-11, where God is revealed His glory to His people. Jesus teaches us that if we fear Him as we ought, we shall fear Him alone. See Matthew 10: 28. It was written on the grave of Lord Lawrence in Westminster Abbey, "He feared man so little, because he feared God so much." When we are afraid of anything in this life, it is manifestly because we have failed in our fear of God. Look at the life of the Apostle Paul and you will see that one of his principle motives for holiness and missions was the fear of God (II Corinthians 5: 11; 7:1); likewise with the prophet Isaiah (Is. 6).

II. Jesus rebukes all other fears (vv. 49-52)

There are reasons why we must rid ourselves of worldly fears:

A. Worldly fears blind us to the glory of Christ. (vv. 49,50)

Notice that, although Jesus revealed His deity in this story, His disciples didn't get it. When Jesus said, "It is I," (literally "I Am") He was using language familiar to the student of the OT: in Exodus 3: 14 God revealed Himself as "I Am," and in Isaiah 42-44 God said over and over again to Israel not to fear for "I Am" is with you. But because of our fears, we don't see him as He really is (a ghost?) and, therefore, do not trust Him as we ought.

B. Worldly fears come from hardened hearts. (vv. 51,52)

This is the most profound reality of all: our fears come from hardened hearts. Recall from Ps. 95 that the first generation of Israel in the wilderness did not enter their rest because their hearts were hard. What is a hard heart? It is one that is desensitized to the voice of God through stubborn rebellion against His Word. We have worldly fears because we have replaced Christ with some idol, so that when something comes along that threatens our ability to enjoy our idol, we become fearful.

Discussion Questions

1. What types of fears most frequently disable us in our life of following Christ?
2. How can we cultivate the fear of Christ in our hearts? In our church?
3. Describe a situation when worldly fear was keeping you from thinking and acting faithfully as a follower of Christ.
4. Describe how you have successfully managed one of your worldly fears. What difference does it make in your spiritual life when you successfully manage that fear?
5. If worldly fears are largely driven by idols of the heart, how can we best rid ourselves of these idols?

Going Deeper

What are the worldly fears and their associated idols that need to be removed from your life?

What's your action plan to remove them?