

Holy Fear

A Sermon by Rev. Joel Christian Glenn

2 November 2025

Children's Talk: What Are You Afraid of?

Today we are going to talk about fear and how the Lord helps us overcome fear. So first of all what are some of the things that you are afraid of? Are any of you ever afraid of getting lost? Of getting hurt? Of snakes? Of speaking in front of a group of people? What about you?

So there are lots of things that people are afraid of. Well the disciples, the Lord's closest followers, were also sometimes afraid. Isn't that interesting that even the people who always had the Lord with them could be afraid? We all get afraid sometimes.

Now in order to try to understand the fear that the disciples felt we're going to play pretend for a little bit. This story took place when the disciples were in a boat with the Lord. So we have marked here on the floor an area shaped like a boat, so let's all get in there and sit down. Now I'm going to describe and read the story, and while I do that there will be noises playing in the background. You can close your eyes and just picture yourself sitting in a boat.

Picture yourself in a boat out on the water. It is peaceful and calm, you can hear the slow movement of the water all around you. The Lord is peacefully sleeping at the front of the boat.

On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side." Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him. (Mark 4:35-36)

But then something frightening starts to happen. So picture the winds starts to blow faster and all of the waves are rising around us higher and higher! Some of the water starts to splash into the boat! And you want the Lord to help do something but He's still asleep!

And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" (Mark 4:37-38)

What is the Lord going to do?

Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. But He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!" (Mark 4:39-41)

You can open your eyes now.

What is the scariest most dangerous thing that you can think of? The Lord is bigger and stronger than that: the good news is that He is on your side. No matter how scary what you experience is, the Lord can take it on and overpower it.

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Why are you afraid? Seems like a foolish question to ask in the aftermath of a storm that almost drowned you, but that's exactly what the Lord asked His disciples after He had rebuked the wind and calmed the sea. Why are you afraid? How is it that you have no faith? I want to start today by asking you that question: why are you afraid? Think about that for a few moments; then I will ask those who are willing to share what it is that you are afraid of. This is anything too, from spiders and public speaking to staying afloat financially or the thought of losing a child. Why are you afraid? [Pause] I'll share first. One thing that gives me fear is acting in a play or performance, and another thing is being vulnerable with emotions. So what did you think of?

We now have in mind all sorts of different kinds of fear. I invite you to keep some of those in mind as we move forward because I think you'll start to see two kinds of fear emerge and you'll start being able to categorize your fears. Now this idea of two kinds of fear or two different types of fear shows up in the story of the Lord calming the winds and the waves. Obviously the disciples had been afraid of that, which is why the Lord asked them the question: why are you afraid? But notice that afterwards it does not say, "And so they were no longer afraid." Listen again:

And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. But He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" And they feared with great fear, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!" (Mark 4:35-41)

After their fear of the wind and the sea had passed they were overcome with an even greater fear: the fear of Jesus, the fear of this man who with a few simple words

could turn a violent storm into calm. Their fear of the storm had transformed into a fear of the Lord Himself.

The Lord speaks to these fears more directly in another passage, this time from the Gospel of Luke. And again, just like before we go from one kind of fear into another, from a fear of destruction and death to a fear of the Lord. This passage is also even harsher in its presentation:

And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!

Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. (Luke 12:4-7)

This passage is hard to get your head around. It begins with the message of don't be afraid of death. But then it seems to replace that fear of death with the fear of God. But then it changes course again and says actually don't be afraid at all, God even cares for the little sparrows, He knows every hair of your head, don't be afraid! So we again have this mixed message that seems to be saying, don't be afraid, but also, somehow fear can be a good thing.

The most troubling message here is that we should be afraid of the Lord. However, I am going to ask you to put that aside for a moment so that we can look at the other kind of fear, the fear represented in the fear of drowning in a storm, the fear represented in bodily death. This is hellish fear, or fear that comes from hell and tries to drag you down. One of the big problems with this fear is that it can paralyze you. Think of those disciples in the boat tossed by the waves knowing they were going to die and that there was nothing they could do about it. They were overcome with desperate, wild, panic.

Of the things you are afraid of, which ones make you desperate? That paralyze you? That take control of your life like a storm on the sea? The Lord implies that we fear many things that don't actually threaten the things that matter most in life. The Lord goes so far as to say that we don't even have to fear bodily death: once someone has killed your body they cannot do anything further to you. When the Lord talks about this fear of killing the body He is not just talking about death either. He is talking about the loss of all those natural or bodily things that we cling to. The fear of not making enough money, of not being able to enjoy retirement; the fear of what people think or say about you; the fear of making mistakes; the fear that you won't ever get the life that you want; and so on. Now I'm not saying your evil if you have these fears; we all have them; but the Lord calls us to not let those fears control us. If these kinds of fears control us then it will hold us back from doing some of the things that matter most.

That's easier said than done. It takes being able to move forward without having any guarantees that your worst fears won't come true. Bad things really do happen; and sometimes the things we fear the most come to pass. Rather than trying to pretend that we have nothing to be afraid of, we need instead to try as best we can to put our trust in the Lord, even as everything goes to hell around us. The hells like to get us by making us think that our worst fears coming to pass would mean the end of the world; and they may even mean the end of some incredibly good and important things. But when all those fears actually happen people can and do survive, and even thrive in time. And yes it isn't fun or enjoyable, but it's not the end of the world or of life like they thought it was. Even very realistic fears are an illusion to the extent that they contain a fear of losing everything for all time, including

the Lord. When that kind of fear gets to us we become like the people in the Word of whom it is said,

The sound of a shaken leaf shall cause them to flee; they shall flee as though fleeing from a sword, and they shall fall when no one pursues. (Leviticus 26:36)

We spend too much of our lives fleeing from fears that are not real. And that's exactly why the Lord asked His disciples, "why are you afraid?" Because He knew that they had nothing to be afraid of, not even a storm that could have killed them; and He wanted them, and us, to know that too. So as hard as it is to accept, take one of those fears that you thought of earlier and picture the Lord asking you: "why are you afraid?" If that fear came true, would the Lord still be in charge? The Lord invites us to not be afraid. Over and over again He says it, "Do not be afraid!" Have trust. Be willing to risk what you have. Don't avoid everything that may be painful. Let go of the fear that paralyzes you and holds you back. The Lord will carry you through.

So there we have the one kind of fear: the fear that comes up from hell and restricts you. And yet, there's another kind of fear too. It's not the fear of drowning in a storm, it's the fear felt in the presence of the one who can calm the storm. It's the awe and reverence for the Lord, and for everything that is good and holy and precious. And in this there is the fear that we might hurt these precious things, and in fact, the Lord *wants* us to feel that fear. At first glance that doesn't sound like a very loving God; so we have to go one step deeper in order to hit on the truth. The truth is that true fear of God is not a fear of what He will think of us or that He will punish us or that He will reject us. The fear of God is a fear that is born entirely of love. Listen to this passage from the Writings that explains this idea further:

Regarding holy fear, meant by 'the fear of God' in the Word, it should be recognized that this fear is love. That is, it is the kind of love young children

feel towards parents, parents towards young children, married couples for each other, who fear to do whatever is displeasing, thus whatever injures love in any way. A fear like this is instilled into a person's love when he is being regenerated. And since this fear accords with his love, and can exist within his love, and does in actual fact exist within or united to his love, it is called holy fear; and it is a fear of sinning or acting contrary to the Commandments, thus contrary to the Lord. (*Secrets of Heaven* §8925)

When you feel the good kind of fear, it's really love: we are afraid to hurt the people we love. It's the kind of fear you feel when you hold a newborn infant in your arms. It's awe at the precious, innocent fragility of this being you are holding. The good kind of fear is that pang you feel when you realize you might have hurt someone you love. Real fear, holy fear, is precious because it reveals to us what it is in life that we truly love. If I love someone but have no concern over how I treat them than my love is shallow. It's that deep fear *for someone else* that deepens my love. This fear does not need to be stormy or panicked. Heavenly fear does not paralyze; rather it empowers us by moving us to defend what is good.

So what does this loving fear look like when applied to the Lord? It looks like the fear we might have of violating His commandments, yes, but *not* because we fear His wrath: simply because we love what He teaches, we love living in His order, we love His presence and the idea that we would voluntary push those things away is a frightening one, and so we are afraid. And that fear leads us to treasure that love and presence of the Lord all the more. The idea that we might lose it all keeps us from taking it for granted. And in the end, the awesome thing is that our fear of the Lord does not have to feel like fear. In other words there is a fear there, but that fear is so deeply hidden within our love that all we experience is the love (*Secrets of Heaven* §3718).

Do not be afraid the Lord says; and yet at the same time we will feel fear in His presence. There are then two things we should do when we feel afraid. When we

feel the fear that paralyzes us, that is concerned with self, that is about me not losing the things that I want to make me comfortable, we need to lose that fear, or at least that part of the fear. Then once we have rejected that fear that hell wants us to feel, take the fear that remains, the fear that is for others, the fear that we might fall short, the fear that what the Lord wants is not going to happen, take that fear and find the love that is behind that fear and embrace that love. That's the holy fear: let that fear become transformed into a powerful love that impels you to action. Let that fear empower your love. *Amen.*