

CAST YOUR FEAR ON JESUS

Luke 8:22-25; from the series, "Cast Your Cares on Jesus"

Message from the Master broadcast June 15, 2008 by Pastor Jeremy Mattek

Did you know that while America holds just 5% of the world's population, we hold 20% of the world's prisoners? Our prisoner statistics, especially with men, are pretty disturbing. Did you know that 1 in 8 men have been convicted of a felony? 1 in 20 men have gone to jail. 1 in 5 African-American men have been in prison. 7 out of every 1000 residents are behind bars. If you focus just on those between ages 16 and 70, one out of every 80 Americans are right now locked away behind bars. And, apparently, it's not doing them a lot of good. Over 2/3 of ex-prisoners are re-arrested and re-incarcerated within three years.

But that's not the biggest problem we have. There are a lot more prisoners in our communities and our country and our world than can be counted in the state and federal penitentiary systems, men and women living in prisons without bars. They are prisoners of fear; the fear that comes from despair, loneliness, hate, addiction, neglect, rage, poverty, and sin. And, apparently, these prisons are not doing anybody any good. In fact, I think we all agree that when you are captive to any of these, your life only becomes worse.

And the fact that every one of you doesn't just know what I'm talking about but has felt exactly what I'm talking about means that this is a monumental problem.

Do you know what it's like to live without fear? Have you ever felt the soaring sensation of having salvation from everything that would hold you back, drag you down, and throw you out? Abraham Lincoln is known as a very confident man. When the majority of the nation was against him, he confidently and fearlessly stuck to his guns and did what was right to him. Do you know what they found in his pocket the night he was assassinated? Newspaper clippings. He carried with him newspaper articles written about him by a man named John Bright, who called Lincoln "one of the greatest men of all times." When Lincoln would sit by the candlelight all alone in the Oval Office, knowing that, at the time, most of the country disagreed with John Bright and hated him, he would pull out this article and read it for reassurance because, even for Abraham Lincoln, fear got to him, just like it gets to you.

Fear can paralyze you. It can stop you dead in your tracks. Fear that your child is sick will drain you. Fear that you won't beat your cancer will exhaust you. Fear that your spouse is a cheater will debilitate you. Fear that you're dependant on drugs will infuriate you. Fear that you'll always be alone can suck the wind out of you. But there is another greater fear that none of us have yet had to face up to.

I was talking about end-of-life experiences with a friend of mine who used to be a nurse. We've both had some experience being with people as their life ends. She was telling me about a friend of hers who was dead for 45 minutes before she was brought back to life. She said that when her friend woke up, she was terrified. She said that she had been walking down a very bright corridor toward an even brighter light. It was so peaceful. And in front of her she could see so many people who were all so happy and so comfortable, free of any kind of fear, burdened with absolutely no pain. She started walking faster so that she could join them. And just as she was about to reach out and touch them, she realized she couldn't. There was something like a glass wall between them. She could see everything they were doing and how happy they were, but she couldn't join them. She knocked, banged, screamed and cried for what seemed to be an eternity until, totally demoralized, she was brought back to life.

Do you know what she experienced? She experienced life without Jesus. She experienced hell. This is not to minimize the fears you carry now, but there will be a time when they won't exist, when all you will be left with is either side of the glass, life without or life with Jesus. And life with Jesus will be good. Where else could a man who had no fear come from? Pressure did not crush him. Pain did not stop him. The prospect of going toe-to-toe with the most powerful armies that target your soul only urged him to keep going.

He must come from a place where there is nothing to fear. And that place is real. Life with Jesus is real. And that peaceful life where pain has an end and fear has a grave will go on with or without you. I wonder if the disciples thought it was going on without them.

There they were in the middle of a sea in which they had many times sailed so confidently, but not this time. And they knew that Jesus could do something about it. They knew he could calm this storm. By this time in Jesus' ministry, he had already changed water into wine, healed the centurion's servant, and a leper, and a paralytic, and raised the widow's son. He could certainly handle any storm. But I wonder if the fact that they were losing their minds while Jesus kept closing his eyes made them wonder if Jesus was content to go on without them.

Maybe Jesus had had enough. Maybe he was fed up, putting up with their sorry excuses for why they weren't more helpful, more mature, more grown up and sincere. Why did he commend the faith of the centurion, but never the faith of any of them? Maybe Jesus would have been a little bit quicker to help them if they would have been a little quicker to listen. Maybe if they wouldn't just stand there with their hand in their pockets, staring at the ground, when confronted by the Pharisees and Sadducees. Maybe Jesus realized that helping these guys was a waste of his time.

Do you ever wonder if Jesus has decided to go on without you? And it's not like you'd blame him, would you? Do you think Jesus ever gets fed up with you, wondering why after 30, 40, 80 years he's not seeing someone who's more helpful, more mature, more grown up and sincere? Why does it take you so long to open up his book and go to him in prayer? Maybe he'd bless you a little bit more, make things a little bit easier if you'd be a little quicker with these things. Why do you just stand there with your hands in your pockets when you have family members who need Jesus' attention? Maybe if you'd fight a little bit for him he'd think that you're worth more of his time.

Maybe if you weren't so full of yourself, always talking about how you do this and you do that, and people don't respect me here or understand who they're talking to over there? Maybe if you'd hold your tongue a little bit he'd hold onto you a little tighter. Maybe if you weren't always craving attention, or if you were a little more giving instead of always taking; maybe then you wouldn't have to be so afraid that things will turn out well.

Maybe the wall between you and Jesus wouldn't be so thick. Maybe you wouldn't have to be afraid that the reason Jesus doesn't just immediately jump up from his sleep whenever life hurts you really means that he doesn't want to be bothered by you; that he wants to be left alone by you, done with you, finished with you, free of you, far away from you because of all the ungodly and ungrateful things you do to him. Were the disciples afraid of that? Maybe.

Did you know that almost 40% of minors who have an abortion never tell their parents. Can you guess why that is? They don't want their life to get any worse. If they tell their parents the truth, they could get yelled at, belittled, kicked out of the house, or worse. It's not like they're lying to their parents. Their parents aren't asking them if they're pregnant. They just withhold information because, when the full truth is out there, the truth hurts them.

The storm of fear that swirls in your conscience doesn't lie to you. Sin is more powerful than you, and Jesus doesn't have to listen to you. But there is one piece of information that a guilty conscience will never tell you about your sins. What it never tells you is that Jesus is more powerful than them, and they have no choice but to listen to him.

Time and again the bible records Jesus coming face to face with storms, and spirits, and demons, and devils. And every time, the one hanging his head is the storm, the spirit, the demon, and the devil. They swirled all around him. Jesus calmed them. They taunted him, tested him, and talked back to him. Jesus expelled them. They gathered a legion and tried to outnumber him. Jesus threw them into a herd of pigs and got rid of them. Devilish enemy #1 dedicated a month and half to tempting him, starving him, buying him, and cutting his feet out from under him. Jesus said no to him. He spent three years putting together his dream team that would finally crush him. He got church leaders, political leaders, the voice of all the common people; he got Judas, Peter, and Pilate, all trying to oppress him. And this team had a good deal of hope when they finally had Jesus pinned to a piece of wood, pierced in his pale side, and put inside a grave because the Son of God had died. The devil stood tall – until the empty tomb cried, and Jesus was proven to be Lord of all.

The devil sends storms into your life to prey on your weakness, to increase your guilt every time you give in to sin, to frustrate you on account of the frequency with which your fears overpower you; but they can't do a thing to Jesus. But Jesus didn't come to earth to prove that he was free from the things you fear. He came to earth to set you free from everything you fear.

Your storms have to listen to Jesus. So when Jesus looked out from the cross and saw you, and instantly knew every time a storm revealed your imperfections, took advantage of your weakness, and put on full display your greatest sins; when Jesus saw all that, looked up to heaven and said, "Father, I want you to forgive them those sins," doesn't every storm have to obey it? What can the devil do to change it? When Jesus told you, "Because I live, you will to," when he promised, "I'm going to prepare a place in heaven just for you," the devil heard it too. But to change it, there was nothing he could do, except work very hard to make sure that truth is never heard by you. Because he knows that if you are to receive it, you have to believe it.

That is why he works your whole body over, working himself until your death to make sure your storms are so loud that you never hear about Jesus, or if you have heard about him, that the rain is so thick you can't see him. He floods your eyes with scenes where you've failed, people you've hurt, bad choices you've made. He's in your mind playing and replaying every thought that God. He's forever in your ear shouting, not whispering, shouting that you dare not lift your head and expect anything good from God because your shame is too great, your pride is too high, your life is too low; your guilt is too much, your sins are too many, to hell you will go; I've gotten you then, I'll get you again, never wanting you to know that, to silence these shouts, Jesus says simply "Be quiet. Be quiet."

Did you notice for whom Jesus calmed that storm on the sea that day? He calmed it for Peter, who was so full of himself, always talking about how he's doing this and he'll do that, and Jesus doesn't respect me here or understand who he's talking to over there. He was talking to James and John, who were always craving attention, and Matthew, who had a hard time with giving because his heart and hands were so good at taking. He was talking to you, people just like you, promising that he will calm all of your storms and carry all of your burdens for you.

And why? Because he knew that every wage you owed God would be paid at his crucifixion, which means that all your regrets, and guilt, and sins would be buried and forgiven,

making you as pure and holy in the eyes of our Father as our brother Jesus, who is still living to calm every storm for you.

What storm can he not calm for you? How does he not comfort you? What reason do you ever have to be afraid if Jesus really is your brother, your shepherd, your way, your truth, your life, your strength, your defender, your protector and Savior? What enemy can he not protect you from? Whose strength is he weaker than? No one's! The devil tried to kill him, and he living. The grave tried to hold onto him; our sins tried to damn him, but he is right now alive and in heaven. And yet we still get afraid, don't we?

We fear sickness, and death, and loss, and pain, and the plans I don't have, and the bills I can't pay. We fear too many murders, and far too much crime, and too few helpers and not enough time. We fear heads that hurt, and guts that ache, and news that's bad and hearts that break. No matter the good Jesus does, we still get afraid, don't we?

Aren't we often like Abraham Lincoln – alright most of the time, able to put up a good front, but when you're by yourself where no one can see, you dwell in your fears and insecurities? Are you alright with that? Are you content with that?

Jesus is not, which is why he tells you in his Word so often never to be afraid, which is why he looks you in the eye through the revelation of his Word and says that "My resurrection means that you are free like me, unburdened like me, unshackled like me, unbound like me, unloaded, unencumbered, untroubled, unyoked just like me and guaranteed to live forever in the heaven that is right now holding me." I don't know about you, but if that's true, then I don't feel much like a prisoner anymore. Do you?

Lord Jesus, you are powerful over every enemy and every storm. You calm the painful cries of our guilty conscience by your loving sacrifice for our sins. You calm every fear with your promise to remain with us and never take your love away from us. Help us find comfort in the abundance of your love and the strength of your arm, confident that we truly have nothing to fear. We pray in your name. Amen.