

Fear Is Not Welcome

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- [0 : 0 0] Today's scripture readings begin with Psalm 27. 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? When the wicked advance against me to devour me, it is my enemies and my foes who will stumble and fall.
- Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear. Though war break out against me, even then I will be confident.
- One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.
- For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling. He will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock.
- [1 : 1 2] Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me. At his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy.
- I will sing and make music to the Lord. Hear my voice when I call, Lord. Be merciful to me and answer me. My heart says to you, seek his face.
- Your face, Lord, I will seek. Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger. You have been my helper.
- Do not reject me or forsake me, God my Savior. Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me.
- Teach me your way, Lord. Lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors. Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes.
- [2 : 2 0] For false witnesses rise up against me, spouting malicious accusations. I remain confident of this. I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.
- Wait for the Lord. Be strong and take heart. And wait for the Lord. And from Matthew chapter 14, verses 22 through 33.
- Immediately, Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side while he dismissed the crowd.
- After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.
- Shortly before dawn, Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. It's a ghost, they said, and cried out in fear.
- [3 : 3 9] But Jesus immediately said to them, Take courage. It is I. Don't be afraid. Lord, if it's you, Peter replied, tell me to come to you on the water.
- Come, he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, cried out, Lord, save me.

Immediately, Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. You have little faith, he said. Why did you doubt? And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down.

Then those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, Truly, you are the Son of God. This is the word of our Lord. Thanks be to God.

So friends, let's pray together. Almighty God, we give you thanks for this moment and this time. And as we come with our hearts wide open, having given ourselves to you in praise, having lifted you up with all our focus and energy, Lord, move in us now.

[4 : 52] Plant a seed in each of us that you know will grow and bear fruit for the honor and the glory of your name. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray. Amen. So we have had some great reflections over these past few weeks about different songs and how they've had an impact on each of us and how they brought us closer to God in our faith walk.

This week, it's my turn. So that's why this is mixed in with the sermon. And the song we're talking about today is called Fear Is Not Welcome.

Fear is not welcome. So to begin, I'd like you to think about something for me. See, when I was a kid, I ended up in a friend group where we dared each other to do a lot of stuff.

How many of you were dare takers? That when friends would say, I bet you won't. Yeah, I see some smiles out there.

So it's good to know I'm not the only one. Yeah, I did my fair share of stupid stuff as a kid. I will own that up front. I mean, a lot of it was, there's this place where I grew up.

[6 : 04] I had this one friend, and the way our yards worked out, he lived on the street next street over, but Pittsburgh is built into hills, as most of you know. And so there was this fence immediately behind my backyard that we could both jump over, and they had this apple tree in it.

And Rodney lived next door to the house that had the apple tree in it. So a lot of our time was spent jumping over this fence and getting apples because the family that lived there, as you can imagine, didn't like kids running randomly through their backyard.

And so it was how much could you get away with, sort of thing. And I was joking yesterday after service, it was like, you know, it wasn't even about the apples. It was about what you could get away with.

Now, the other side of this fear thing was a lot of our dares involved bike riding. So darting in and out of traffic, that sort of thing.

And, you know, fair share of Band-Aids and alcohol and peroxide were involved, that sort of stuff. And I remember one time distinctly my mother saying to me, you know, you're too young to realize how scared you're supposed to be of some of this stuff.

[7 : 14] And I want that to just hit you for a minute. When we're young, we don't get how scary certain things are. We don't have enough sense to recognize that we're supposed to be afraid.

But when we get older, fear kicks in at a different level for us. We recognize that there are things out there that we're supposed to worry about. Things out there that legitimately scare us.

Now, I'm not a person who panics much, and not a lot scares me, but I've certainly known authentic fear in my life. And I'm sure most of us have had those moments.

Hopefully you haven't had a lot of those moments. But I'm willing to bet everybody's had at least a few. And the challenge for us is not so much to hear something like, you shouldn't be afraid.

That's actually bad advice. Okay? I want to be clear on this. It's one thing to be able to manage your fear and go through scary situations. But fear is a perfectly normal, instinctive, psychological response to certain stimuli.

[8 : 28] And in fact, the inability to process fear properly leads to a lot of other problems. And so, don't get the message that you should never be afraid.

Because certain things should cause you to feel fear. Our challenge is this, is to not let fear paralyze you. To not let fear keep you from doing what needs to be done.

And that's where I think we land today. Especially when we start talking about our faith walk. Because fear can keep us from doing what God wants us to do.

And that is really where we need to concentrate. Because I'm willing to bet most of us have probably had moments where God may have been calling us to something.

Something great that we couldn't even see coming. that we couldn't fully understand. But fear kept us from taking the steps that God wanted us to take.

[9 : 34] Our conversation today is about how we get through that. How do we not let fear keep us from moving forward in faith and in life?

So, you know this song called Fear Is Not Welcome. We started singing it here a few months ago. And, I recommended it to Tom and Nancy because, literally, I was sitting in my office.

And I was having a day where something was on my mind. Not some huge, major crisis. But something was causing me some stress. Because I wasn't sure how we were going to deal with a particular thing.

And then you know how your mind gets, right? Start worrying about this thing. You start worrying about that thing. And all of a sudden, that voice is just telling you, no, you know this is going to happen and that's going to happen and this is going to happen.

And I have, I usually, when I'm working, I'll listen to some sort of music, right? This particular day, I was listening to Pandora in my office. And this song came on.

[10 : 39] Now, I don't know what your experience with music is like and I don't know how God speaks to you. But multiple times in my life, God makes me sit up and pay attention to something.

And this song was one of those times. Because I said, I was already in this moment. It was kind of like a death by a thousand paper cuts kind of day, right? Not so much anything major was going on, but a bunch of little stuff was getting to me.

And then these words, started to hit me. I was listening to what was being said. And like I said, I had never heard the song before. The song came out in 2020. It's by an artist I had never heard of either.

His name is Brian Courtney Wilson, who I've actually started listening to a lot of. His songs are really powerful. But this one in particular, in that moment, grabbed me. Because I think it teaches us and reminds us of something God wants us to remember.

It hits in a way that we get dealing with fear wrong, especially on a spiritual level. And that's what I want us to talk about today. And I think the story of Jesus walking on water and the interaction he has with Peter encapsulates this problem really, really well.

[11 : 52] Now this is a familiar story to many of us. Jesus walking on the water is one of his most popular and well-known miracles. But, many of us who've done Bible study, many of us who've, you know, delved into this and Sunday school and all of it, know that the point of the lesson is something really in particular that most of us miss.

And so we need to get into this in a certain level of detail. So I want to read you a couple of the opening verses. So if you want to follow along, we're in Matthew chapter 14. We're going to start at verse 22.

Matthew chapter 14, verse 22. Immediately, Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side while he dismissed the crowd.

After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

So, a couple of things to set the stage here. Jesus has had a pretty intense day in ministry and he's actually worked a pretty significant miracle before this.

[13 : 09] But he makes the disciples leave and go on ahead of him across the lake. Now, what I want you to remember is something we were talking about just last week. The disciples, or at least a few of them, are experienced fishermen.

They know how to sail this lake. They know how it works. They're familiar with the storms, they're familiar with boats, and they're familiar with the territory. And so, when they are on the lake and they are having problems, that should tell you the significance of what's going on.

Now, as they are out here dealing with this, then something else happens. Something pretty distinct. So, we're in verse 25.

Shortly before dawn, Jesus went out to them walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified.

It's a ghost, they said, and cried out in fear. So, let's take a minute here. Now, most of us know how we handle storms.

[14 : 16] And I think that what we have seen just happen in this particular story is one of those times that really represents how most of us deal with life, right? So, a storm hits.

Whatever the storm is. And you go to your expertise. You go to what you know. You got certain skills. You got certain gifts. You got certain training. And so, you just kick into that mode by default.

In other words, sailors on a lake. People who have fished. So, they know what they're dealing with. Now, it may have frustrated them and they couldn't move and this may have been bad and all that sort of stuff.

But they're doing what they know how to do. And even in the midst of it, if this storm is bigger than what they're used to, these are also people of faith. And so, what they will start to do is, God, will you help me with this?

God, will you come through? Now, your storms, you probably say those prayers too. The question is, what happens when you start to realize that this storm may be kicking to another level?

[15 : 23] Where your training and your hands and your brain aren't enough. And so, you cry out to God. Say, God, I need you.

God, come through for me. Now, here's what happens to a lot of us. One of the things where we get thrown is that God will do what we don't expect.

God shows up, but God does something we didn't expect. Real world example. So, you're a disciple in a boat on a lake with which you are familiar.

You cry out to God because this storm isn't breaking and you don't know how you're going to get to the other side of the lake. And you look up and you literally see Jesus coming.

Now, that's not expected. Of course, that's not expected. And you would be understandably afraid. Okay? But, in this moment, are you really surprised that God shows up?

[16 : 34] You might be surprised that God shows up like that. But, are you really surprised that God shows up? This is the faith question. Because, if you look around at your storm and you say, God, help me, and you're surprised that God shows up to help you, what do you think your prayer was for?

What? How many of us pray, but don't pray in expectation? I want to say that again.

How many of us pray, but don't pray with expectation? In other words, when you say, God, help me, you don't really think that God's going to do anything. And so, when God does show up, you're that much more surprised and, even more so, afraid.

We have to wrestle with that. because, if you don't believe in a God that shows up, then, let me give you some very good news.

God shows up. And God will show up in God-only kind of ways. And that's the story we're dealing with because God shows up walking on this lake.

[17 : 55] And we get terrified. How much of our fear, as we said before, as we were already talking about this morning, is not so much of the storm itself, but God.

Because the storm is scary, but wait until God shows up and does God stuff. That can be really scary. So, now you're in this boat and you were just kind of hoping, right, that when you said this prayer, that the storm would just break and the wind would die down and you'd just sail on across the other side.

that's cool. You were not expecting Jesus to walk on the lake. So, now we're in this moment. What's scarier, the storm or God?

Because God showed up doing God things. So, Peter, being Peter, does what Peter does, right? God, if it's you, command me to come out to you on the water.

I want you to think about that for a minute. Because, no matter what your storm looks like, the kind of storms you may have been dealing with in life, if God showed up and said, I got you.

[19 : 10] I'm going to take care of this for you. But you're not really sure it's God. You're not entirely convinced yet. And so, you throw out some little thing that says, God, help me understand that this is really you.

But here's the thing. You got to take this step in faith that is scary in and of itself. How many of you think you would have done what Peter did?

That's a scary idea. Because your logic kicks in. All those same reflexes and education and all that common sense that you know the people don't do this.

Yet you're looking right now at a God who is doing it. But you're not sure that that power will work for you.

So Peter actually does muster the courage to deal with this fear. He gets out of the boat and he heads toward Jesus. Now we don't know how far he got because we don't have any sense of how far apart they were.

[20 : 24] And we don't know whether he took three steps or whether he took ten. But one thing we do know to be true is that it was working. It was working.

Peter was walking on the lake just like Jesus was. But most of us know how the story goes from here.

I want you to hear the verse again. The verse that really matters in this. And this is verse 30. But when he saw the wind he was afraid and beginning to sink cried out Lord save me.

Those of us who have studied this for a while know the key to the story here is that as scary as the idea of God's power working in your life might be we actually let ourselves get talked into believing that the storm is scarier than God.

In other words when he saw the wind in the waves he was fine as long as he was focused on Jesus. He was fine as long as he trusted in the power that was working already in his life.

[21 : 52] But when he let his eyes and his mind get off of Christ and get back on the wind and the waves and the storm he started to sink.

that voice in your head right how long would it take you you were out here and you taking one step two steps three steps and then that voice goes you know this ain't supposed to work this way.

And then all of a sudden you hear the howling of the wind and you go oh this storm is still raging. and the fact that you actually doing it the fact that God is actually doing what God only can do you get talked out of it.

You get literally talked out of it. I want you to hold on to that thought because I want you to think about the storm that you're dealing with right now.

What is the thing in your life that has got you like that? What is the thing where Jesus is saying come to me? I know it's scary.

[23 : 12] I know this is different and yes I know this might be different than how you are taught the world is supposed to work but this is me says Jesus. Will you trust me?

And even if it's working, even if you can feel it, you let the world talk you out. I want you to hear that because one of the reasons why this song spoke so powerfully to me that day was because it says something that is different than the way we are taught to process fear.

Right? As I said, so many of us get that message that say don't be afraid. In other words, like it's a switch, you can flip it off. Like you walked into the room, the light was on, you clicked it off and now you can just proceed with your business.

It doesn't work like that. The key for us is to recognize that when fear shows up, because that's what happened to Peter, he got scared.

He's like, this is not supposed to work like this. This storm is really scary and all of a sudden God isn't working anymore. But the idea here is will you give fear that kind of power in your life?

[24 : 37] Fear is going to show up, but will you make it welcome? Will you give it that kind of power? See, the song itself has a pretty powerful lyric in it.

and it starts with this idea, let me confess, talking to God, let me confess, I need your healing, because I've made a friend of the fear I've been feeling.

How have you made a friend of the fear in your life? I mean, the idea that this situation is so big and it's scary, and you have just chosen to sit down in the scary.

that you just accepted it. And the idea here is that, well, yeah, as we said, certain stuff is scary, but the question is, are you going to give fear that kind of power?

Are you going to remember who Jesus is to you? Because if you let that voice have all the power, one that says, no, this isn't going to work?

[25 : 58] That, no, this letter you got that's talking about you being behind on the bill, this diagnosis you've heard from the doctor, this situation or relationship where people are telling you things about yourself that you know aren't true, but it's got you believing things that aren't true.

Have you sat down in it? Have you just decided to let it come on into your life and have a seat and be comfortable? Or will you challenge it based on what you know to be true about God?

Do you know that Jesus is bigger than your storm? Because if you know that, then why does this person get that much kind of power?

power? That's what we need to wrestle with. That's why that message is so powerful.

It's not that fear isn't real, but you don't have to make fear welcome. And then the song continues. I believed the lies it spoke.

[27 : 11] Think about that for a minute. when fear shows up and starts to tell you just like it told Peter on the water, you know it's not supposed to work like this. Did you believe that? Did you accept that? And now you're surprised that you're all wet? Because that's what's happening.

The fear is keeping you from moving towards your miracle. The fear is keeping you from getting closer to Christ. The fear is keeping you from moving to where God wants to take you and experiencing what God has for you.

But you've given it that kind of power because you believed the lies it's telling you. Because they are in fact lies. When the fear says this storm is going to get you and you are looking right at the one who commands the wind and waves.

And hear this. The rest of that line says, I believed the lies it spoke that led me into doubt. Think about that for a second.

[28 : 30] I believed the lies it spoke that led me into doubt. Think about this story. Because what's the most famous line in the story?

Peter starts to sink and Jesus comes running over to him sticks his hand out and says you know what he says to him. You a little faith. Why did you? That's the problem.

It was working. But we didn't hang on to it. because we believed the lies that the fear was telling us. And so when you find yourself in this moment when fear is having this kind of power with you think through what you heard in Psalm 27 because this is one of the foundational pieces of the psalm.

The first verse of the psalm says this. the Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life.

Of whom should I be afraid? Is that your truth? Because sometimes you got to remind yourself of that truth.

[29 : 54] and if you forget because the lies speak, speak back to the lies. Because when you hear the psalm, you'll notice that in the middle of it there are some powerful declarations.

And I'm just going to read you a couple. It says, God, you are my soul's protector, my shield and my defender. from now until forever.

What shall I fear? Through trial and tribulation, you're still my strong salvation. I sing in celebration.

What shall I fear? If that's where your heart is, if that's where your soul can go in the face of fear, fear.

See, that's the difference. Don't talk yourself into the world's hype that says you should never feel fear. Because fear is going to happen. But, when you remember whose power it is that gives you the ability to overcome your fear, then you don't have to sit in it.

[31 : 12] This is my final thought for today. Is that the chorus of the song says something really powerful. fear is not welcome.

I'm casting it away by the power in your name. You see, remember, you're not bigger than the storm, but he is.

And if he is the source of your power, if he is the source of your courage, if he is the source of your strength, what will you fear?

Don't let fear be welcome. Because your God is exactly who he says he is. Amen? And amen. Loving God, we know that you are bigger than all of our storms.

You are the one who commands the wind and the waves. And you can do what our minds tell us can't be done. But Lord, when the fear speaks, let us remember that you are our light and our salvation.

[32 : 21] Of what shall we be afraid? That you are the stronghold of our life. What will we fear? Lord God, move in our lives today and command the wind and the waves that scare us now.

Those situations in life that are making us doubt. Those things that are making us afraid. Give us the courage to press on in faith and to not be paralyzed.

Lord, you are indeed the one who makes it all possible. Amen. So the band is going to get in the place and you're going to hear this song now. You'll recognize it because we've sung it in here a few times.

But today, I hope those words as you see them on the screen will speak to you and that you will be able to sing along and make this a declaration of your own. Don't let fear be welcome today.

When the storm comes, know that your God is bigger than the storm. And fear, no matter what it tells you, no matter how it makes you feel, no matter how logical it seems, fear does not have to be welcome in your heart anymore.

[33 : 36] So as you consider how you might live your faith this week, we do have several things happening, of course. There's a sign-up sheet in the back for the rummage sale that's coming up next month. There are a variety of ways in which you can help make that event a success.

We have Tough Stuff Bible Study coming up this Thursday. We're going to be talking about what the Bible teaches us about hell and heaven. And so if you would like to take a deeper dive into those scriptures, you are welcome to join us.

There are several things happening. We continue to collect for different missions, so all of that's laid out in your bulletin, please use that resource to consider how you might give some of yourself.

That said, let's receive our benediction. Now in the name of God, our Creator and King, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Savior, and in the name of the Holy Spirit, our Comforter and our Sustainer, may God bless us as we leave to love and serve God and all God's children.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.