

Do Not Be Afraid . . . His Mercy Is More

Introduction

Do Not Be Afraid . . .

- A. Let's continue on in our "Do Not Be Afraid . . ." series now where, as you remember, each week we are dropping into one of the countless places in Scripture where this command—"Do not be afraid . . ."—or others like it show up.
1. And we're just going to reflect together on the matter—why ought we not to be afraid?; what should we be feeling and doing instead?; how should such a thing look walking out into our present situation and all that we are facing with this global pandemic?
- B. It's a crazy time, isn't it? I'll often be feeling fine during the day, and then at night, I turn on the news, and I just feel the anxiety rising. I wonder if it's that way for you?
1. This is scary. This is hard. That's why I'll just keep saying it each time we gather virtually in this way: I want it to feel like we are entering into this sanctuary together—where we can come in with all our fears and anxieties and troubles and unburden ourselves in God's presence as we meet with Him together in and through His Word by way of His Spirit.
- C. In the previous weeks' sermons . . .
1. We've seen that we don't need to be afraid because God hears—we can cry out to Him in the midst of our wilderness and He's right there.
 2. We've seen that we don't need to be afraid but instead we should remember. Recalling His faithfulness in the past reassures us that He will yet be faithful in the future. We may not know what tomorrow holds but we know the God who goes with us into it.
- D. And now this week we're going to take on the subject from yet another angle. Let me read the text here for us, we'll pray, and dive in.
1. But before I do, I should at least mention, you'll notice we're dropping into Luke's gospel here, so this is a text I preached on a few years ago. But my plan is to bring out different emphases and things this time around. I just thought this too important to pass up on, and I hope you'll feel the same when we're done.

The Text

¹ On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, ² and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³ Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. ⁴ And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." ⁵ And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." ⁶ And

when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking.⁷ They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.⁸ But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."⁹ For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken,¹⁰ and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men."¹¹ And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him. (Luke 5:1–11)

. . . His Mercy Is More

A. It is really a simple truth that I wish to bring out this morning, and I make it clear there in the title of this message: "Do Not Be Afraid . . . His Mercy Is More."

1. Of course, I borrow the verbiage here from that song we would often sing together during our Sunday Services entitled, as you would expect, "His Mercy Is More." (You should see a link to this song in your Worship Guide under the Call to Response.)

a. But now, while the verbiage for this sermon's title is borrowed from that song, as I'm sure you've already noticed, our text for this morning really illustrates the idea in vivid detail.

B. Now, before I outline for us where we're headed this morning, let me explain why I think this text may be especially relevant for us right now, why I wanted to bring it in today.

1. We're now a couple weeks into our shelter-in-place here in the bay area, right? And I just have to think it's been hard for some of us.

a. You get in close quarters with your family, kids, roommates, whatever, your rhythms and norms and schedules are all colliding and a mess, your job situation is in turmoil, you're having to homeschool your kids while trying to keep up with your side job, and I know some of you are just isolated and lonely, and you don't have your normal connection points for community . . . and I just have to think sin has probably been coming out.

C. When you shake the soul a bit, muck starts to surface, right?

1. Am I alone in that? I spent the better part of the first week of this just throwing a tantrum before God, mad that all my plans or whatever are being messed with.

2. So I'm guessing there have been some sharp tongues between spouses, some frustration with kids, maybe if you are isolated, you're watching stuff on TV or the internet that you shouldn't, you're letting your mind go places that you shouldn't . . .

a. I think we're all probably seeing sin come out perhaps like it hasn't in a while.

D. And so the question then becomes: What do we do with that?

1. “Look at me. What a ridiculous Christian. What a hypocrite. Frustrated with my spouse. Frustrated with my kids. Arguing with my coworkers. Now I’m going to go pass out Neighborhood Care Cards with my family and try to reach the city for Jesus? Now I’m going to try to lead my family in devotions? What a joke. I’ve blown it. It’s over.”
 - a. When you see your sin, isn’t the temptation just to do exactly what Peter does here? “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man. I just outed myself. I just disqualified myself. I don’t belong here. You go ahead and move on with Your mission. You and I both no there’s no place in that for me.”
 1. Have you been feeling like that? If so, this sermon is for you. This sermon is for those of you who, like me, are just starving to hear the gospel once more.
- E. So this morning we’re going to divide this text up under four headings: (1) A Divine Beholding (vv. 1-7); (2) A Frightening Exposure (vv. 8-10a); (3) An Unexpected Welcome (v. 10b); (4) An Abounding Inclusion (vv. 10c-11).
 1. Obviously, for the purpose of this series, the real focus of this text for us is there in v. 10, and we shall get to that pinnacle point, but there are things we must see along the way.

→ Pause and consider the question(s) under Pause Point #1

(1) A Divine Beholding (vv. 1-7)

From Master to Lord

- A. In vv. 1-7, Peter comes to see something of the glory and majesty of Christ. There’s a divine beholding as I’m calling it here.
 1. Peter and his boys have been out on the “lake of Gennesaret”—which is another way of referring to the Sea of Galilee—and they’ve been fishing through the night and they’ve all come back to shore with nothing. It was a rough go.
 2. And yet here this Rabbi from Nazareth, a carpenter, certainly not a fisherman, tells Simon Peter: “Give it just one more try.”
 3. You can hear, perhaps, a bit of the reluctance and maybe even irritation in Peter’s response can’t you: “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets” (v. 5).
 4. And so he does . . . and he pulls in a catch unlike anything he’s ever seen. Nets are breaking and boats are sinking from all the fish.
- B. And, somewhere in the midst of this miracle, Peter realizes, God is here. It’s as if the curtains were just drawn open and, as Paul puts it, in the face of Christ Peter is seeing something of the glory of God.

1. Which is why, by the way, the appellation Peter uses to address Jesus changes from v. 5 to v. 8. In v. 5 Peter refers to Him as “Master.” But down in v. 8, after this stunning display of deity, Peter refers to Jesus as “Lord”—a word in the Greek used throughout the Greek OT to refer to none other than YHWH Himself.
 - a. It’s as if Peter is saying: “I thought You were just a Rabbi, now I’m thinking you just might be God!” Of course, his awareness of such a thing will develop and grow as the gospel goes on, but, nonetheless, we see hints of it here already at the beginning.

Taming the Sea

- A. I’ve mentioned before, but, for ancient cultures, the sea was not thought of as this lovely place you vacation beside.
 1. For us now it is a picture of serenity, right? That’s why we put pictures of the beach and water on our screensavers and our posters on the wall. That’s why on long weekends we head up to Tahoe and hang out by the water. It calms us.
 2. But the sea in ancient cultures was understood in quite the opposite way. It was a threatening, and ominous, and chaotic reality—unruly and unable to be tamed.
- B. It’s presented this way really throughout the whole of the biblical record, from Genesis to Revelation.
 1. So in Genesis, creation is presented as God bringing order from these chaotic primeval seas: “The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (Gen 1:2; cf. Job 38:8-11; Jer 5:22).
 2. And in Revelation, the beastly opponents of God are depicted as rising out from the depths of the sea: “And I saw a beast rising out of the sea” (Rev 13:1; cf. Dan 7:3).
 3. This, in fact, is at least part of the significance of what we looked at last week with the Exodus where YHWH brings His people out from slavery in Egypt and into freedom as His children. But how does He do it? He parts the Red Sea. He subdues the chaotic waters and brings His people out through it (cf. Isa 51:9-10).
- C. So the sea, as far as the Bible is concerned, is a frightening reality—one that only God Himself can tame and control.
 1. Therefore, when Jesus comes in the gospels and He calms the sea with a word (Mark 4:35-41); or He walks on the sea without sinking (Mark 6:45-52); or (as He does here in our text) when He orders and governs the creatures of the sea with absolute authority—He is signaling not so subtly towards His own divinity.
 - a. He is giving evidence of the fact that He is, as the author of Hebrews would say, “the radiance of the glory of God” (Heb 1:3). When you look at the Son you see the Father (cf. John 14:9).

(2) A Frightening Exposure (vv. 8-10a)

Seeing God Seeing Me

- A. And, as we've said, Peter catches something of this. But here's the thing. Initially at least, he's not excited about it. He's terrified.
1. Look at v. 8: "But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."
 - a. I wonder if you've ever felt like this? You feel so filthy, so sinful, so polluted, that you just can't imagine God would ever want anything to do with you.
- B. Here's the thing that so interesting about Peter's response here. I just got done making the point that really Peter, in this miracle, has just caught a sighting of God. But, notably, in one sense at least, that doesn't seem to be the focus in his response. Seeing God is one thing. But his great concern is that this God, whom he has just seen, sees him.
1. There's this growing awareness in Peter, then, both of God's holiness and of his own sinfulness. The revelation in moments like these cuts in both directions. When God shows up, certainly, we see something amazing of Him, but we also come to see something a bit awful in ourselves. There's this frightening exposure that follows.
 - a. The light that emanates from God in His glory, exposes me in my shame.
- C. And this is always how it is with divine beholdings, divine encounters all throughout the Scriptures. We see men and woman, who would have otherwise thought they were in a good place, but then when God shows up, suddenly they're left feeling like they no longer have a leg to stand on.
1. So Adam and Eve, when God is moving through the garden after they'd given way to temptation. When they hear Him coming, they don't run towards Him. They run and hide. I don't want Him to see me.
 2. So Abraham, when he's attempting to approach God in an effort to intercede for Sodom says: "Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes" (Gen 18:27).
 3. So Israel, when they caught a vision of God up top of Mount Sinai say to Moses: "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die" (Ex 20:19).
 4. So Job, when he encounters God at the end of the book: "⁵ I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; ⁶ therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5-6).
 5. And of course that classic example of the prophet Isaiah, when He's given a vision of God on the throne in heaven and he cries out: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" (Isa 6:5).
 6. You could just add Peter to this list: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (v. 8).

D. What we have here is precisely the sort of thing John Calvin famously wrote about in the opening chapter of his Institutes: “[I]t is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinize himself. For we always seem to ourselves righteous and upright and wise and holy—this pride is innate in all of us—unless by clear proofs we stand convinced of our own unrighteousness, foulness, folly, and impurity. Moreover, we are not thus convinced if we look merely to ourselves and not also to the Lord, who is the sole standard by which this judgment must be measured. For, because all of us are inclined by nature to hypocrisy, a kind of empty image of righteousness in place of righteousness itself abundantly satisfies us. And because nothing appears within or around us that has not been contaminated by great immorality, what is a little less vile pleases us as a thing most pure—so long as we confine our minds within the limits of human corruption. Just so, an eye to which nothing is shown but black objects judges something dirty white or even rather darkly mottled to be whiteness itself. . . . As long as we do not look beyond the earth, being quite content with our own righteousness, wisdom, and virtue, we flatter ourselves most sweetly, and fancy ourselves all but demigods. Suppose we but once begin to raise our thoughts to God, and to ponder his nature, and how completely perfect are his righteousness, wisdom, and power—the straightedge to which we must be shaped. Then, what masquerading earlier as righteousness was pleasing in us will soon grow filthy in its consummate wickedness. What wonderfully impressed us under the name of wisdom will stink in its very foolishness. What wore the face of power will prove itself the most miserable weakness. That is, what in us seems perfection itself corresponds ill to the purity of God” (I.1.ii.).

1. I think I am looking good until I look upon the Lord. And then I just want to fall on my face with Peter.

E. You know, there’s this strange thing about us. We want to be seen, desperately we want to be seen, and yet at the same time, we don’t.

1. I think you’ll get what I’m after when you consider how most people use their social media feeds.

- a. You put stuff on there and you want it to be seen, you can get obsessed with how many likes and how many views and things like this.

- b. But, then in another sense, even in the midst of our begging to be seen, we’re hiding. We put the pictures only after we do our makeup and tidy the room and things. We present ourselves not as who we really are but as who we want people to think we really are.

1. Again, we want to be seen and yet we want to hide at one and the same time. It’s quite ironic.

F. And Jesus just pierces through it all. That’s why the author of Hebrews says God’s word, it’s like a sword, it just cuts through the façade and exposes us as we really are.

1. That's where Peter is sitting. That's where perhaps some of us have been lately. "I'm seeing stuff that's not right in me. I'm ashamed. I'm embarrassed. I don't belong here. Get away from me. I'm a pariah. I'm a mess. I'm a hypocrite. I'm a sinner."

→ Pause and consider the question(s) under Pause Point #2

(3) An Unexpected Welcome (v. 10b)

The Pinnacle Point

A. So here now we've climbed to what I called the pinnacle point of this text. It is here really where we come to discover the very heart of the gospel. We see how Jesus responds to Peter in his open shame and it is altogether breathtaking. There is so much hope for the weary sinner here.

1. Look at v. 10. Jesus, looking down as Peter lay sprawled out at his feet, with compassion and affection in His voice says: "Do not be afraid . . . (v. 10b).

- a. And he would say it to those of us who have taken our place down there in the dirt with Peter: "Do not be afraid . . . (v. 10b).

B. Here I say is the unexpected welcome of the gospel.

1. The holiness of God exposes us for what we truly are. And we think at once surely we have no business here. As the people of Israel said, if we get too close to God in His glory, we're going to die.

- a. And we would be right to feel that. Jesus does not tell Peter, "Oh Peter, don't be so hard on yourself, you are not so bad, you are not a sinful man, you're just human, you need to work on your self-talk brother, don't be so harsh." No that's not what He says at all! Peter is right. He is a sinful man. He has no business being in the presence of a holy God.

2. But He has forgotten one thing: God is not only holy, He is also merciful and gracious. Though Peter has no business being in the presence of God, yet still He belongs there, and even more, in view of Christ, He is welcome there!

C. That's when you know you really get the gospel. You don't fall off on either side of this cliff. You are simultaneously humbled to the dirt ("I am a sinner") and lifted to the sky ("I am welcomed").

Social Distancing and the Gospel

A. We're all busy "social-distancing" right now, right? At least we should be. It's a term we didn't even know a couple weeks ago and now it's an everyday part of our vocabulary. And the concept of it, of course, is that we keep our distance from one another so that we don't spread the virus around. It makes sense. It's a good plan.

- B. But here's the thing with the gospel, we kind of see the opposite happening don't we? Jesus, though holy and perfect and pure, doesn't keep us at a distance, He invites us to come near, knowing full well that we are riddled with contamination and contagion.
1. He's come to let us pass our virus to Him because He alone knows what to do with it, He alone can tame and calm it.
- C. The chaotic waters of the sea in so many ways are just a picture of this—the unruly nature of man, the wrath of God that we deserve for our sin always threatening to swallow us whole, our utter inability to do anything about it.
1. And yet Jesus can calm it, Jesus can muzzle it. So we read in [Micah 7:18-19](#): “¹⁸ Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. ¹⁹ He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.”
- D. This is what Jesus has come to do. And, of course, He does it by taking our sin—all that stuff Peter is worried about, you and I are worked up about, all the stuff we're ashamed of, that we're sure disqualifies us from the kingdom and has God at odds with us—listen, Jesus takes all of that upon His own back and throws Himself headlong into the sea, as it were.
1. He goes down to the depths of the sea on our behalf. And He leaves our junk there, so that when He rises on day 3 there's a calm and a tranquility and a peace that was not there before.
 - a. We know that we have been, that we can be, that we are, in Christ, . . . forgiven!
- E. “Do not be afraid . . .” Our sins they are many, but His mercy is more. And, of course, that line is just a poetic riff on what Paul says explicitly in [Rom 5:20](#): “[W]here sin increased, grace abounded all the more.”

→ Pause and consider the question(s) under Pause Point #3

(4) An Abounding Inclusion (vv. 10c-11)

Grace Abounding

- A. But we haven't looked at the fullness of Jesus' response to Peter yet, have we? That will take us into heading four and this idea of An Abounding Inclusion. Where Jesus goes next is really just an example of this “[grace abound\[ing\] all the more](#)” thing. Let me explain to you what I mean.
- B. We've all probably had those experiences where you severely offended someone, and you were in the wrong, and you go to say sorry, you want to make it right or whatever, and they say you're all

good, what's in the past is in the past, they re-friend you on Facebook, on the surface it would seem okay.

1. But there's still this sense that you're being kept at a distance. Things aren't quite the same. They're not ready to trust you. You see pics of them going out to your old stomping grounds and they didn't you ring you up to go with them. You know something's off even though they said you're cool.
- C. Sometimes I think we assume God is like that. Oh sure, He'll let us back in because He's merciful and all, but we're sleeping in the basement, we're in the doghouse. And, okay we deserve it. That would still be grace enough.
1. But God gives us grace abounding.
- D. And so what does Jesus do with Peter here? Look at [v. 10](#) again: "And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men."
1. Now that may sound a little strange, but the essential idea here is this: "Peter, not only am I going to forgive you and welcome you, I'm going to include you in my mission. You are going to be an apostle. You are going to be one of the pillars of my church. I'm not just to relegate you to the basement, or the doghouse, or the bench. I'm putting you in the game, in fact, why don't I go ahead and make you the team captain. Oh and, by the way, I know you're going to blow it sometimes, but I'll be with you, I'll help you, My grace will continue to abound to you. You see, all of this isn't about your righteousness, your abilities, your qualifications, your strength . . . it's about Mine!"
 - a. And you say that is grace on another level. God doesn't just forgive us of our sin, He includes us in His mission. And, what's more, He actually goes on to use our struggles as an important part of our witness and ministry.
- E. Don't think you need to be perfect to be used by God. In fact, that sort of self-righteousness will actually undercut your ministry. So long as you think it's about you, you're going to be off-putting. People are going to sense that you feel superior to them and Jesus is going to seem unattractive.
1. Listen, the first prerequisite to being a missionary for Jesus is actually getting grace for yourself. We have to let Jesus come into those broken and sinful places, and let His love touch us there. When that happens, then you go out with a new power and a new humility. You don't think you're included in the mission of God because you're any better. You're included because He is gracious. It's no longer about you. It's about Him.
 - a. I love how one pastor has put it: "Evangelism is just one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread." "I'm just as broken, needy, and hungry as you are. But there's grace. I found bread. If he's welcomed and included a sinner like me, have no doubt, He will do the same for you!"
- F. I think of what Paul, the once murderer of Christians, wrote in [1 Tim 1:12-17](#). Let me read this and we'll close: " ¹² I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, ¹³ though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and

insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief,¹⁴ and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.¹⁵ The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.¹⁶ But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.¹⁷ To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”

G. Mercy Hill, we don't need to be afraid—though our sins they are many, His mercy is so much more!

→ Pause and consider the question(s) under Pause Point #4