

9 Fears and faith: With Jesus around and not around Part 2



Corinth today

“Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul;
but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

Jesus, Matthew 10:28

Job, a reminder as we look forward toward today

As we have discovered, Job felt real fear and real dread in the midst of deep, enduring faith. His fears and dread were normal feelings—the feelings that men and women, and also children might feel.

“What if I lost my job or didn’t get the opportunity I worked so hard for?”

“How would I handle getting the news that I or someone I know was just diagnosed with cancer, or ALS, or MS?”

“What if I was falsely accused of something that I never did?”

For Job, all that he naturally feared and naturally dreaded did actually happen. His livelihood and most of those he worked with were murdered or burned to death. His children were all crushed due to a bizarre wind that caused the house to crumble. And then his body was afflicted with boils. These atrocities happened all at once and on a massive scale.

Job didn’t turn his back on God when the “worst of the worst” and what he had dreaded actually happened. No, instead, Job turned toward God and honored him.



However, in contrast, when we look at the history of the Israelites when they felt real fear they usually faltered and turned away from God. Not only did they turn away from God's and his godly leaders, they wanted to go back to slavery and relied on themselves—often worshipping false gods and idols which were places of spiritual slavery.



One might wonder, “So, how did followers of God in the New Testament handle their fears?”

About the same as followers of God during the days of the Hebrew Bible. We can see several cases for those who demonstrated faith in the midst of their fears and those who succumbed to fears even when Jesus was present.

This all to say, Jesus often told his disciples and a variety of men and women, “Do not fear.” And then he would soon explain or show why they need not fear. He usually followed up his instruction “do not fear” with his immediate actions. We see Jesus healing, raising someone from the dead, demonstrating power over Satan by casting out demons, or displaying power over nature.

Jesus often reprimanded his disciples and others for having little faith and then demonstrated why. “I am here.” “God is here.” “Trust God.” “God will take care of this fearful situation and bring healing, restoration, and help.”

Peter—Faltering Faith to Stellar Faith

Jesus' most often repeated command throughout his ministry was “Do not fear” or “Fear not.” He knew how people of his day, just like many of us today, are prone to feel fear in the midst of loss and danger. Jesus exhorted his men, “Do not fear those who can kill the body...”.

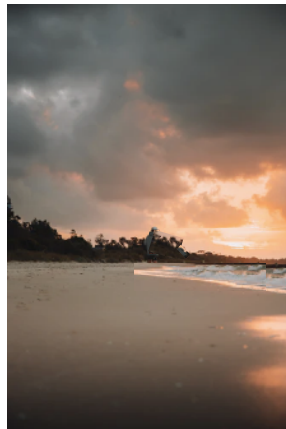
'Easier said than done. Most of us fear those who can kill the body. Peter even boasted to have stellar faith, “I will die for you, Jesus.” However, we know that when Peter's life was on the line, after Jesus had been taken into custody by the Roman guard, he felt real fear. Being questioned as a follower of Christ, when it was not a safe time to be a follower, his faith quickly crumbled into nothing. He flat out lied three times. “I don't even know the man [Jesus].”

Although, Peter failed in his faith, Christ knew that he would come back. Jesus had warned Peter that he would deny him three times. Peter did not believe it.

[Jesus speaking to Peter as he predicts his future failure in faith and hope] “but I have prayed for you, **that your faith may not fail**; and you, when **once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.** *Luke 22:32, bold mine*

Even before Peter’s failure in faith and fearful denials, Christ predicted a better future for him. Jesus could see Peter’s soon demise as he would fail in faith, but also a hopeful future ahead. “And when you, Peter, have come back, strengthen your brothers.”

Wonderfully, Jesus directly extended kindness and a sure hope to Peter, to the one whose faith would for surely falter, to the very one who denied him.



As we recall, one morning after his resurrection, Jesus was walking along the shore and called the disciples who were fishing on their boat. Peter jumped into the water first to be with Jesus. As the disciples enjoyed a breakfast of fresh roasted fish over charcoal, they sat on the beach together. Importantly, Jesus focused in on Peter.

“So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me more than these?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.’ He said to him, ‘**Tend My lambs.**’ He said to him again a second time, ‘Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.’ He said to him, ‘**Shepherd My sheep.**’ He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me?’ Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, ‘Do you love Me?’ And he said to Him, ‘Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.’ Jesus said to him, ‘**Tend My sheep.**’” *John 21:15-17, bold mine*

Notice Jesus’ expectations only made to Peter, the failed one. “Tend my lambs, shepherd my sheep, tend my sheep.” I think it is comforting that Christ foresaw that Peter would become a man of great faith and a caregiver of the new believers, his believers, his sheep. He told only

Peter that he specifically wanted him to take care of his sheep, his lambs. What an important responsibility Jesus assigns to Peter alone. Peter would do so.

Early on as the church was just beginning, Peter spoke Jesus' message of salvation with power to a great crowd. He also healed people. He openly rebuked Ananias and Sapphira for their deception to the church. His small, faltering faith would continue to mature and grow over time. He was amazed to watch the Spirit being poured on on the Gentiles and he would eventually lead the Council in Jerusalem. During the council gathering, the salvation of the Gentiles was determined to be based on faith in Jesus Christ alone, and signified by baptism.

All the while as Peter was tending to believers, both Jews and Gentiles, Emperor Nero ruled the Roman empire. Nero was a madman. According to historians, he commanded his mother's assassination at her villa, poisoned his brother and kicked his first wife (who was with child) to death. By his command the Roman statesman and dramatist Seneca the Younger (4 BC–AD 65) was forced to commit suicide. Tradition notes that Nero quickly blamed the horrendous fire in Rome in 64 AD on the Christians soon after a rumor began that he had set the fire and then sang while watching the city burn.

Tradition also notes that Peter died a martyr, crucified in Rome in the year 64 AD. He was 64-67 years old when he died. Peter's life, his letters of encouragement to the persecuted believers, and his death all demonstrate that he learned to not fear those who killed the body. Peter did tend well the Christians sheep under the evil rule of Nero—just as Jesus exhorted him long ago. His words would continue to strengthen believers for generations to come.

Here are Peter's words as he strengthened his brothers, and tended Jesus' sheep, and fed Jesus' lambs—

“But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be in dread, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, but with gentleness and respect; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who disparage your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.” *1 Peter 3:14-16*

Fear Now? The life of Paul

Does the Spirit of God who indwells us somehow make us free of all fear?

As we think of the apostle Paul, filled with God's Spirit, we recall how he repeatedly asked for prayers for his boldness. Paul openly spoke of how he and his companions had fears on the inside. Why? As Paul traveled from place to place, he ministered and preached in the

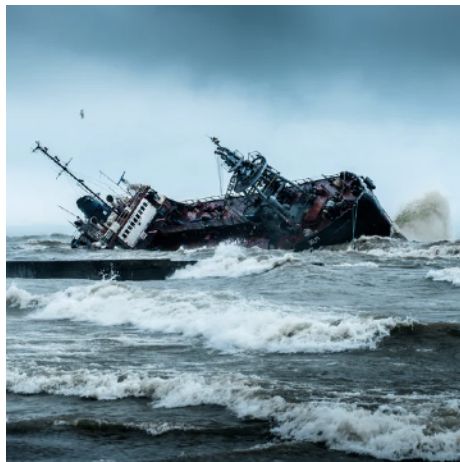
dangerous and unpredictable Mediterranean world. He and his fellow workers faced multiple fear-inducing situations. He and his comrades often needed boldness.

When we read 2 Corinthians 11:22-33, we are amazed by such brave faith of Paul—

“But in whatever respect anyone *else* is bold—I am speaking in foolishness—I too am bold. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ?—I am speaking as if insane—I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in *danger of death*. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine *lashes*. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent *adrift* at sea.

“*I have been* on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from *my* countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers at sea, dangers among false brothers; *I have been* in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from *such* external things, there is the daily pressure on me *of* concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?

“If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me, and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and *so* escaped his hands.”



As we read all that Paul went through, we admire this courageous man who was determined no matter what to bring to the unbelieving and often hostile world the message that

Jesus came to save. The list of all that Paul willingly endured as he went out to spread the good news and to help establish the churches is exhausting.

Most of us would never act so bravely.

Are we not scared to tell our nearby neighbors or our co-workers or classmates or family members about our love of Jesus? Paul however has been going from place to place, far from home, knowing in his heart that no matter what the severe reactions he encountered, he would keep pressing forward.

For example, Paul knew what it was like to be in the open, violent sea and lose the safety of a ship. Three times he was shipwrecked. We can picture him hanging onto a piece of splintered wood praying and hoping for rescue. We may wonder how many of his parchments were ruined, lost in those waters since he seemed to write a lot. Nature itself was dangerous. Crossing the open seas was dangerous.

Life in general was dangerous for Paul. At times he lacked food, drink, and decent clothes.

People were dangerous.

Paul regularly faced many human enemies. For sure his message of Jesus being the Messiah and only way to God angered with fury a lot of people. Wherever he traveled as he explained the truth of Jesus. He anticipated that some in his audience might become enraged, beat him up, whip his back, or stone him. So, being run out of town might have felt like a reprieve.

Nowhere was Paul safe. He spoke of dangers even from his own countrymen. Yet, no matter how much pain, and danger Paul kept on going.

Paul needed boldness to go into the unknown. Boldness to walk directly into danger and pain. Paul described his personal feelings.

“For when we came into Macedonia, we had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn—conflicts on the outside, *fears within*.” 2 Corinthians 7:5, italics mine

Note how Paul, a man of great faith and filled with the Holy Spirit, openly admitted that he and Silas both experienced tremendous harassing and conflicts from others, and fears within. Their “fears within” were natural responses to real threats. It’s important to note that Paul said that they were exhausted and harassed men, and had fears within.

God watched Paul as he tirelessly entered into the unknown.

On his second missionary trip, Paul faithfully worked his way along northern Greece/Macedonia and then southward. It was rough at times. In Philippi, he cast a demon out of a young slave girl who was gifted at fortunetelling. When the slave girl's owners found that their source of income from this girl was destroyed, they brought Paul and Silas to the magistrate. A crowd was incited and both men were stripped, beaten, flogged, thrown into prison, and their feet were placed in stocks. They willingly endured much pain and suffering as they brought God's love to others. After a mighty earthquake, and saving the life of the jailor, they were released with an apology due to them being Roman citizens.

After Paul, Silas and Timothy arrived to Thessalonica some Jews incited a mob, accusing Paul and Silas of promoting another king besides Caesar. "They and others are turning the world upside down." The mob dragged the missionaries' host, Jason, to the city authorities. That same night, the missionaries slipped away to Berea, fearing for their own lives. Once again fear caused them to make wise decisions to leave.

However, soon Berea would become another place of persecution. The unbelieving Jews from Thessalonica soon tracked Paul to Berea. After the crowds were stirred up as before, Paul was now sent to Athens for his safety. Silas and Timothy stayed back in Berea.

The Athenians listened to Paul's talk about God not dwelling in physical temples made with hands. While some scoffed at the idea of Jesus' resurrection, others believed. When Paul left Athens, he traveled by sea, south in Greece to the bustling city of Corinth. The Lord spoke to him through a night vision.

"Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city."
Acts 18:9-10

God's vision must have been wonderfully encouraging. Notice that God told Paul that he didn't have to be afraid any longer. God had been with Paul through all the trials and sufferings during his many journeys. Now God was giving Paul a much needed break.

Also, it's important to note that God didn't reprimand Paul for being afraid. He simply told him that he didn't need to be afraid any longer. In fact, he gave Paul three reasons to not be fearful, at least for awhile. First, God would be with Paul in a special way of protection and for a specific time period. Second, God promised that no one would attack and harm Paul in Corinth. Wonderful news. And last, there were many believers for Paul to be with and work with. Also wonderful news.

I imagine Paul slept very well that first night in Corinth. He didn't need to be afraid. He would be able to wake up each morning totally free of fear as he began his ministry for the day. The beautiful city was located on an isthmus, hills on one side with gorgeous blue waters all around. He might have thought, "Wow. How absolutely refreshing it is to not worry about men

beating me up today or kicking me out of their local synagogue. I don't have to flee tonight in the dark. I won't have to try to sleep while chained up in another dank prison. I won't be eating nasty gruel. It's so beautiful here. Thank you, God!"

Thus, God made it clear that he knew Paul experienced fears. Paul's fears were natural fears both from real and potentially dangerous attacks. God did not reprimand Paul for his natural human fears. Paul had worked tirelessly, boldly, and bravely in the midst of his fears. Now God placed him in a lovely safe city, with fellow believers.

Corinth was a merchant city where travelers from Asia and Italy came. The Corinthians also hosted the Isthmus Games where victors wore a wreath. Paul was able to stay for eighteen months.

Paul worked mostly with the Gentile Greek members in Corinth. The new members of Christ would have a checkered past. They brought with them their pagan and cultural influences such as glorifying wisdom and ecstatic utterances, eating meat offered to idols, practicing all sorts of promiscuity, and denying the bodily resurrection of Jesus." Paul worked hard as he spent his time reasoning with the people, teaching them how to live the Christian life.

Many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized, including Crispus, the leader of the synagogue. Although Paul dealt with many serious church-related issues, he must have appreciated having a year and a half respite from danger. No longer did he need to fear danger and pain.



Thought questions—

~Like Job (in Job 3:24-26), who speaks of fear and dread, as you live life, what are some of your fears? What do you dread? Job's worst nightmares became reality. How do you think he might have felt?

~Peter claimed that he would die for Jesus, but then he denied even knowing Jesus. What helped Peter move ahead to greater faith? Reflect on John 21:13-17.

~Paul faced fears as he worked as a missionary. See 2 Corinthians 11:22-33. What were some of Paul's fearful situations? How do you think you would respond as you list Paul's experiences? Have you ever been persecuted? How have you suffered trying to bring the news of God's love to others? Despite his fears and attacks, Paul kept pressing on. Describe an experience where you felt it was worth the pain and suffering to share the love of God with someone, or truth, or some wisdom with someone. Did it go well or not?

Notes:

1. Matthew 10:28 "Fear not him who can destroy the body ..."
 2. Tacitus (Ann. XIII.-XVI.), Suetonius (Nero), and Dion Cassius (LXI.-LXIII.) http://biblehub.com/library/pamphilus/church_history/chapter_xxv_the_persecution_under_nero.htm#1 (accessed 5/20/2017).
 3. Tacitus records the burning of Rome in 64 AD. <http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/rome.htm> (accessed 5/20/2017).
 4. Nero persecution, http://biblehub.com/library/pamphilus/church_history/chapter_xxv_the_persecution_under_nero.htm#1 (accessed 5/20/2017).
 5. See Acts 17 regarding Pauls second missionary journey in Acts 15:35 to 18:22.
 6. "The Culture of Corinth" <http://helpmewithbiblestudy.org/16History/CityCorinth.aspx#sthash.8LSXyBq0.dpbs> (accessed 5/20/2017).
 7. Peter's death as crucifixion according to historians: The death of Peter is attested to by Tertullian (c. 155–c. 240) at the end of the 2nd century in his *Prescription Against Heretics*, noting that Peter endured a passion like his Lord's. (<https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf03.v.iii.xxxvi.html> In his work *Scorpiace 15*), he also speaks of Peter's crucifixion: "The budding faith Nero first made bloody in Rome. There Peter was girded by another, since he was bound to the cross." <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0318.htm> (accessed 5/21/2017).
- Also attested by Origen (184–253) in his *Commentary on the Book of Genesis III*, quoted by Eusebius of Caesaria in his *Ecclesiastical History (III, 1)*, said: "Peter was crucified at Rome with his head downwards, as he himself had desired to suffer." (<https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf212.ii.v.xlii.html> *Sermon by Leo the Great (440–461)*" (accessed 5/21/2017). Ccel.org. 13 July 2005. Retrieved 12 September 2010.) The Cross of St. Peter inverts the Latin cross based on this refusal, and on his claim of being unworthy to die the same way as his Saviour. (Granger Ryan & Helmut Ripperger, *The Golden Legend Of Jacobus De Voragine Part One*, 1941.) <http://www.citylightchurchwb.org/blog/post/the-life-of-peter:-scripture-references>, (accessed 5/21/2017).

8. The Moravians and John Wesley Georgios Kollidas/Sutterstock Current Issue JUL/AUG 2016 July/August <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-1/moravians-and-john-wesley.html>, (accessed August 12, 2016).

9. Apostle Peter. Peter of Alexandria (d.311), who was bishop of Alexandria and died around A.D. 311, wrote an epistle *on Penance*, in which he says: "Peter, the first of the apostles, having been often apprehended and thrown into prison, and treated with ignominy, was last of all crucified at Rome." (of Alexandria, Peter. "Canonical Epistle on Penitence Canon 9"newadvent.org, (accessed 6/3/2015).

Jerome (327-420) wrote that "at Nero's hands Peter received the crown of martyrdom being nailed to the cross with his head towards the ground and his feet raised on high, asserting that he was unworthy to be crucified in the same manner as his Lord."^[78] (saint, Jerome. "De Viris Illustribus (On Illustrious Men) Chapter 1". newadvent.org,(accessed 6/5/2015).

Images

1. Photo of Corinth, personal.
2. Shipwreck photo. Published on September 10, 2020 by Yevhen Buzuk.<https://unsplash.com/photos/R6TMFhxRxeI>, (accessed 8/4/2021).
3. Man on beach, Pat Whelen, <https://unsplash.com/photos/h7KV01gbmdI>, (accessed 8/4/2021).