

Does Jesus make you afraid? We love to talk about loving Jesus, knowing Jesus, or being amazed by Jesus, but do you fear Jesus? You ought to. You need to.

We are still in the first section of Mark's gospel, where the main question that Mark seeks to answer shows up in 4:41: "Who is this man?" And what Jesus does in these two stories moves us closer to an answer, but it's not a safe or comfortable answer. It's like being out on safari and hearing more and more sounds, catching a glimpse of movement. You know *something's* up ahead but you don't know what it is – maybe a squirrel, maybe a cat. But then the pieces of the puzzle start to come together: it's about three and half feet tall; it has a large bushy mane, and then an ear-splitting roar rips through the jungle. And at first, you thought you needed more *information*, but now, you need to make a *decision*. We're very quickly coming to that point in Mark's gospel.

And CS Lewis' famous introduction of Aslan the lion in the Narnia books is exactly right: "Is he safe?" The children ask. "Of course not!" But he's *good*. He's the *king*. And so many of us are eager to love a Jesus who is safe, who is tame, who won't embarrass us or unsettle our lives. We need to learn the fear of the Lord; we need to stand in awe of Jesus not because He's safe; but because He's good, because He's the King. If you love Jesus because He is safe and polite and gentle and nice, you don't love Jesus. You love safety. And so these two accounts that Mark gives us really help us, because they present the real Jesus, not the edited version. This is important, because only the real Jesus saves us.

At first sight, the stories are very different: one is a nature miracle, the first one we've seen so far, while the second is another exorcism. But the common thread that links them together is the response that Jesus gets. When Jesus calms the storm, the disciples are filled with great fear (4:41), and when the people of Gerasa see Jesus sitting with the man who has been delivered from the legion of demons, they are afraid. In both stories, people respond to Jesus with *fear*.

In fact, the whole structure of both stories is the same, and you can see it clearly when Jesus calms the storm: first, there is a great storm (4:37), then a great calm (4:39), then a great fear (4:41). Great storm. Great calm. Great fear. Then, when Jesus encounters the man among the tombs, the great storm is *inside* him, a whole legion of demons. By the power of His Word, Jesus brings this man to a place of great calm, but the townspeople are filled with a great fear, so much so that they ask Jesus to leave.

And the driving force in both events is Jesus. The Word of Jesus changes the great storm to a great calm, but standing in the presence of a man who has absolute power over the wind and the sea, and over legions of demons is what prompts great fear.

Jesus makes people afraid. That's what we see in the text. But since human beings can't live in a state of fear, they need to make a decision. They need to respond to their fear, and it's going to go one of two ways. Either that fear will resolve into worship and awe, which is what happens to the disciples, or it will resolve into some sort of self-protection, getting some distance between you and what you fear. That's what the Gerasenes do by asking Jesus to leave.

And that's the decision you need to make when you encounter Jesus, as well. You might start out by being interested in Jesus, but soon you will come to the place where you are afraid of Him, and when that happens, what will you do with your fear?

The disciples made the right choice by turning their fear into awe, and that's what you should do, too. But don't just take my word for it; I want you to see in the text why they made the right choice. In the first account, the reason for moving from fear to awe is that Jesus quieted the storm and saved them. They are terrified because they have encountered unexpected power that they do not understand and that they cannot control. That's really where fear comes from: *power that you don't understand and can't control*.

And that was what was in question when the storm first arose, wasn't it? The disciples know that Jesus has *some kind* of power, which is why they wake him up. But they don't have faith that He will use that power for their good, do they? What do they ask him in v. 38? "Don't you care that we are perishing?" In other words, "aren't you going to use your power to save us?"

But when they see the *results* of that power, that Jesus uses His power for their good, the nature of their fear changes. You might say that awe is mature fear, fear that has grown up. And the disciples' fear grew up into awe when they saw that Jesus' supernatural power was *saving* power.

And I want to read to you from Psalm 107, so that you will understand exactly what the disciples are saying in Mark 4:41. [Read Psalm 107:23-31]. The disciples have just lived through Psalm 107. It was like a live-action responsive reading, and the man in the boat with them played God's part. After the danger of the storm is over, that's when they move from *being afraid* to *being filled with great fear*, because they are starting to realize that they are in the boat with the Lord of heaven and earth. "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" They aren't asking this because they don't know; they are asking each other because they can barely believe it, and because they are utterly overwhelmed by the answer.

In the second account, after the destruction of a very valuable herd of pigs, the townspeople are afraid of what welcoming Jesus will cost them, and so they send him away, except for the man who has been delivered from the evil spirits. He doesn't want Jesus to go away; He wants nothing more than to follow Jesus to the ends of the earth! Now, Jesus actually has another mission for him to do, but his desire to be with Jesus is a good one, and once again, we see that when people recognize that Jesus' terrifying power is actually *saving* power, then their fear becomes worshipful fear, and not the fear of someone who thinks he's in danger of harm or loss. When you see that *supernatural* power is *saving* power, then *fear* turns into *worship*.

And when fear turns into worship, that's called faith. Faith recognizes that even though Jesus isn't safe, He's good, He's the king. And the king uses His goodness and His power to deliver you from the storm, and to set you free from evil spirits.

So why didn't the townspeople respond that way? At first, you might want to say that they didn't need to be saved. They weren't caught in a storm, and they weren't possessed by evil spirits. Jesus wasn't a savior to them. He was a troublemaker.

But I think it might be better to say that it wasn't so much that they weren't caught up in storm as that they weren't aware of the storm that threatened them. And to see their storm, we need to put on our parable glasses when we look at the strangest part of this whole passage: the pigs.

For the Jews, pigs are unclean. This has nothing to do with health reasons; it has to do with religious reasons. So pigs are symbols of uncleanness. Just about the only thing worse than a pig would be an evil spirit. This is what I mean when I said put on your parable glasses: these towns were uncleanness farms, and then evil spirits moved in. And unclean people are in no position to resist evil!

Now, having crossed the sea, this story takes place in Gentile territory – this is Jesus' first Gentile missions trip. And if you thought the demon problem was bad in Galilee, just wait until you meet Legion! The Jews have been flirting with uncleanness for a long time, and so some demons have found a home among God's people, but that's nothing compared to the wickedness in among the Gentiles! That's the storm: the Gentiles are unclean, and are being overrun by demons.

And what I mean about the townspeople not recognizing the storm that threatened them was that there were thousands of demons running around their town, and they thought they had it managed pretty well.

But for goodness' sake, they lived in demon-infested country, and they couldn't do anything about it! They couldn't cast out the demons, or bind them or chain them, and they could do nothing to save this man who had been one of them! In fact, it seems likely that this man functioned as their scapegoat: he had a whole regions' worth of demons in him, and lived as an exile outside of town among the tombs. He was their storage container for demons. So when they saw him clothed and in his right mind, they were afraid, because Jesus had taken the lid off!

But a miracle of mercy had happened: Jesus came, delivered this wretched man and cast the evil spirits into the unclean pigs, and drowns the whole lot of them in the sea! Evil spirits? Gone! Uncleaness? Washed away!

And I want you think about your own life: Are you too sinful and unclean for God? Are your sins legion? Have you tried to bind your sins with chains, but find that sin keeps breaking loose? I have good news for you! Jesus has come to bind the strong man, to set the captives free, and to destroy the works of the devil! No matter what you've done, no matter what condition you are in, Jesus has the power to heal you, to deliver you, to forgive you, to save you!

But if you think that you've actually got things managed, if you've made peace with your uncleaness and found someone more evil than you to cast all your blame onto – “At least I'm not as bad as *him!*”, then Jesus will seem more like a trouble-maker than a savior, and you'll beg Him to leave you alone. But here's what the hidden part of your life without Jesus looks like: tormented by evil, living alone among the dead, crying out day and night and cutting yourself with stones. It's not a pretty picture.

But if you behold the power of Jesus and learn the fear of the Lord, then He will speak the Word and quiet that great storm and replace it with a great calm. Yes, it will seem fearful – your life will be turned upside down, and it will cost you. But Jesus will use His power to deliver you from the evil that lives inside you. He will take away your uncleaness and cast it into the depths of the sea! Jesus' supernatural power is saving power, and He wants to save you.

I read from Psalm 107 earlier; now I want to close with Psalm 65:5-8: “By awesome deeds you answer us with righteousness, O God of our salvation, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas; ...who stills the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples, so that those who dwell at the ends of the earth are in awe at your signs.”

I hope that you are in awe of Jesus, and what He did in the Word we heard today. And I hope that the fear of the Lord will lead you to salvation.

- *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.*