



Fearless faith

Jonathan Stephen





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When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake ...

Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him.

Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him, saying, 'Lord, save us! We're going to drown!'

He replied, 'You of little faith, why are you so afraid?' Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.

The men were amazed and asked, 'What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!'

MATTHEW 8:18, 23-27







The battle we all face

1

According to the New Testament, there are three great motivators in the Christian life – faith, hope and love. For instance, the Apostle Paul begins his first letter to the young church plant in Thessalonica by saying, ‘We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ’ (1 Thes. 1:3).

What we ultimately trust in, where our hope really lies and what we love most of all not only reveal our true selves but also determine the direction of our lives. I remember as a boy being highly impressed by the picture of a ship worker totally dwarfed by the massive marine propellers of an enormous ocean liner about to be launched. Though quite unseen when the vessel was afloat, these beautifully





sculptured steel creations would be the means of its propulsion. In the same way, think of faith, hope and love as the three huge propellers that drive the church of Jesus (and you as a member of that church) safely through the perilous seas of life. This is why we must take care to nurture and strengthen these greatest of all spiritual gifts. We need to make the best use we can of what are commonly called ‘the means of grace’ – such as biblical preaching that

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is applied to our lives, and genuine prayer. However, we must also remember that we are in a spiritual battle, and all of us get wounded and weakened at times. For this reason, Paul says it’s vital that we don’t let Satan ‘outwit us’ and that we simply can’t afford to be naively ‘unaware of his schemes’ (2 Cor. 2:11).

Knowing he must target our cardinal graces of faith, hope and love if he is to cripple our Christian lives, Satan deploys a weapon that has always proved to be immensely effective against all three – FEAR!





The truth is that fear cannot coexist peacefully alongside faith, hope or love. There is a constant battle between them until one or other takes control. Countless Bible passages reflect this reality. For example, Psalm 42:11 reflects the conflict between fear and hope: 'Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.'

And in 1 John 4:18 the battle between fear and love is depicted: 'There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.'

In this little book, though, we are going to concentrate upon the conflict as it rages between fear and faith, perhaps the commonest battle of all in the lives of most believers. We're going to see how the battle can be won – and how, in fact, we might emerge from the spiritual paralysis that fear brings and instead enjoy the spiritual progress that comes from fearless faith. To help us do this, we are going to look at one of the best-known and most dramatic incidents in the Gospels: the stilling of a terrible storm upon the Sea of Galilee. And what





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we need to realise from the start is that this whole event was orchestrated by Christ entirely as a faith-training exercise for his future apostles.

In days to come, Jesus' disciples would require exceptional bravery as they proclaimed the gospel of salvation to an unbelieving and often hostile world.

They needed to learn how natural fear could be dispelled. Thus the essential question Christ puts to them on this famous occasion is, 'You of little faith, why are you so afraid?' (Mt. 8:26).

As we have already seen, the antidote to great fear is a strong faith in the true Person of Christ. That's something we all need to understand as we are buffeted, and often frightened, by the storms and challenges of life. But how can we develop such a fearless faith? Well, let's prepare to join the disciples on this sensational training exercise and find out! In doing so, we shall be guided





throughout by a vital biblical principle.

Hebrews 12 urges us to 'run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith' (vv. 1–2). In other words, in order to grow our faith, we shall be fixing our eyes exclusively on Jesus as we explore this amazing event.





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