

The Root Cause of Our Anxiety

In this series of articles from John 6:16-21, we've been seeking to gain answers to the question: "Why does God allow suffering in the lives of his people?" I've noted that one of the reasons that God brings suffering into our lives is to mature our faith (Romans 5:3-5). And yet, it's often the case that when times of suffering come, we find ourselves experiencing unhealthy fear and anxiety. In the last two articles we've uncovered, from the text, the fact that unhealthy fear and anxiety can come when we place a *priority* focus on the *problem* rather than focusing on the *solution to the problem*. Although this information is helpful, there's more that Jesus wants to teach his disciples, and us, from this text. What is the *root cause* behind our fears and anxieties? Last time we began our look from the passage at the Savior's Love. I've broken this section of our narrative into three smaller sections beginning with Watching. Today I want to pick up with our second smaller section that I'm calling:

—Warning

It's at this point in the chronology of our narrative that Matthew gives us an account of this event connected to Peter that the other gospel writers don't record. I want to briefly set this in place because it will help us as we ponder the *root cause* of our own fears and anxieties when suffering and trials come. As Jesus is walking on the water coming toward the boat he says to the terrified disciples: "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." It's at this point that impetuous Peter says to Jesus: "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." And Jesus said, "Come." Peter gets out of the boat and begins walking on the water to Jesus. But notice what happens next: Peter becomes increasingly aware of the violent wind (Mt. 14:30) swirling around him and, rather than keeping his eyes on Jesus, he becomes *distracted*. It's at this time that he begins to sink and he cries out, "Lord, save me." As the Lord reaches out and takes Peter by the hand he says these provocative words: "O you of little faith. Why did you doubt?" This is a warning that takes the form of rebuke. Now this phrase translated "O you of little faith" is very instructive for us. This phrase is used, almost exclusively, by Matthew in the gospels with the only exception being Luke 12:28, which is a parallel passage to Matthew 6:30. Each time that Jesus uses the phrase he speaks of those who *fail to trust in him* in their time of need.

This phrase is at the heart of what Jesus is seeking to teach his disciples and us. The *root cause* of our unhealthy fear and anxiety is our *failure to fully trust in Jesus* no matter the difficulties that arise in our lives. The fact that the disciples failed to fully trust Jesus is supported by Mark when he tells us that their "hearts were hardened." (Mk. 6:52) Why were their hearts

hardened? Mark tells us that it was because “they didn’t understand about the loaves.” I take this to mean that the disciples had not pondered deeply enough the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 (John 6:1-15). Clearly, our hearts can become hardened to the things of God because we haven’t thought deeply enough about what the Scriptures teach us about him. We see this same thing in Mark 8:17. Like Peter, when difficult things happen, we often take our eyes off of Jesus which, for us, is taking our eyes and hearts off of the teaching of Holy Scripture. When we fail to focus on the teaching of Scripture, *our hearts* can become “hardened” as well, if only in the moment. This is meant to teach us that the cure for our unhealthy fear and anxiety is found in seeking, by grace, to *always fully trust our Master, Jesus Christ*. 19th century pastor and author, J.C. Ryle writes, “The plain duty of the true Christian is to live provided with an antidote against all fears of the great unseen world. The antidote is *faith in an unseen Savior and constant communion with him*.” It’s always healthy and right to stay in communion with Jesus, even embracing the warning passages. When scripture warns us of things that can cause a weak faith, we need to pay attention to the warnings. Christ’s warnings are not given to us as if they’re disconnected from his love. *They’re an important aspect of his love*. Since it’s true that Jesus is always watching and, when it’s needed, he’s warning us, what should our response to him be? We’ll seek to answer this question next time.

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