

“Peter’s Fear”
Various Texts
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We will start our study by looking at Luke 5. Luke 5:4–8 says [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.”*

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of our God stands forever.

In this study we will be looking at Peter from a couple of different texts. Specifically I want us to think about the main sin in Peter’s life. What was the sin that seemed to repeat itself the most often in Peter’s life? Perhaps I have given it away due to the title I picked for this study but if someone had asked you this before you had seen this title what do you think you would have said? Before I started preparing for this study I would have said something along the lines of pride, self-confidence, arrogance or his self-righteousness. Peter is so quick to speak up. He is so quick to write checks with his mouth that his body can’t cash. One might say to me ‘well look in the mirror’ and maybe that’s one of the reasons I like Peter.

The more I began to study the life of Peter the more I began to see the sin that the Bible mentions most often is the sin of fear. The meaning of fear in the Greek is the idea of panic, distress, seeing some impending danger or pain coming into your life and you’re worried about it. It’s intense concern. Where do we see this in Peter’s life and more importantly where do we see it in our lives? How can we fight against it? So let’s take a little closer look at this miracle in Luke 5.

This is a miracle that takes place near the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. He is about to call Peter to be an Apostle. This is a favorite passage of mine. I have read it for many years and taught on it several times. For years when I read this I had come to think that this was a good picture of fear and that this is what the Bible refers to as the fear of the Lord. It’s exemplary and we ought to follow Peter in this but the more I studied it I began to see that is not true and you don’t have to be an expert in Greek to figure it out. Let’s look at the next two verses and see why I would now say this is not the good kind of fear. It’s not the fear of the Lord. Look at how Jesus responds to Peter.

Luke 5:9–10 says [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.”*

So why is this not the righteous kind of fear but the sinful kind of fear? Think about the idea of the fear of the Lord. I will talk more about this toward the end of this study. Probably the most famous verse on the fear of the Lord is in Proverbs 9:10 which says [10] ***The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.*** This is good thing and this is talked often about in the Old Testament. It is talked about in the New

Testament as well. If that is what Peter was experiencing in that moment then it doesn't make any sense that Jesus would say 'stop having wisdom Peter, quit doing the fear of the Lord.' That is not what He is saying because Peter had a sinful form of fear.

So the first point in this study is that fear is sin. Many know that the Bible talks a lot about the fear of the Lord and it's to be commended for we're to have the fear of the Lord, but set that aside for a while. Let's look at I John 4 and so you know, the Apostle John likes to paint in broad strokes in his epistles. He likes to get his point across and doesn't often nuance his points. I John 4:18 says *[18] There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. **For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.*** What is John saying here? We need to look at it in its context.

There is one type of fear in life that is appropriate and godly and that is the fear of the Lord, but every other kind of fear that there is sinful. So my first point is that all fear, other than the fear of the Lord is sin. Now let's go to Matthew 14 and look at another incident in Peter's life. I think this will be a passage that most of us are very familiar with. It is when the Disciples are in the boat and Jesus comes walking to them on the water.

Before we read this I want to make clear that everything I say about Peter in this study is really true of the other Disciples and it's true of us to let's not judge Peter too harshly. Try to put yourself in his shoes. Picture yourself in this scenario in Matthew with Peter and the other Disciples. You might freak out as well if you saw a human being walking toward you on the water. You might think it's a ghost or spirit like they did as well.

Matthew 14:26–33 says *[26] But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear. [27] But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. **Do not be afraid.**"*

*[28] And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." [29] He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. [30] But when he saw the wind, **he was afraid**, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." [31] Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "**O you of little faith, why did you doubt?**" [32] And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. [33] And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."*

Here Peter at first was walking on the water, not afraid to come and then his fear comes back. It's like being on a roller coaster with one day being really spiritual and then the next day not so much. Or one hour you're pretty Godly and then the next hour not so much. Or one minute pretty confident and the next minute pretty terrified. Elijah stared down all the prophets of Baal chopping all their heads off having a pretty victorious day and then a queen said 'I'll get you' and Elijah said 'forget it, I'm outta here.' God just killed him. The best of us are up and down even on our best days.

Point two is that fear is doubt. We see here that fear is a form of doubt just by what Jesus said to Peter in verse 31. I was talking to a friend the other day who said they could see something coming on the horizon and was very fearful of it. They were venting with me and said 'I feel like everything I can see with my five senses (touch, taste, feel, etc) is confirming my worst fears are coming true.' I know enough about this person to confirm his assessment but what I wanted to say but I didn't say in that moment, was 'don't look at the circumstances (the wind and the rain) but look at God. Get your eyes off the evidence you can see and don't live by sight but by faith.' To the degree that we live by sight we are going to live in fear, doubt, and worry, but to the degree we can live by faith in the risen Savior we can live in confidence. We can live in fearlessness.

This is from a commentator named R. T. France; ‘this is not theological uncertainty or unbelief as much as a practical hesitation, wavering, being in two minds. Peter’s problem was not so much a lack of intellectual conviction as the conflict between the evidence of his senses and the invitation of Jesus.’ Basically he is saying Peter jumps out of the boat and he is literally walking on the water so it’s not like Peter just stopped and thought ‘I’ll just pull over here and do an intellectual academic Bible study because I’m having some second thoughts about whether this whole Jesus Messiah thing is real.’ That is not what happened. It was more in the heat of the moment and in the depth of his emotion he was overwhelmed by the fact there were waves all around him that were taller than he was. It distracted him from that undistracted focus that he and we are supposed to have on Christ. This describes us often times doesn’t it?

Another commentator, William Hendriksen said ‘Jesus had the power and could have said ‘Peter rise up out of the water’ but He didn’t. He walked over and grabbed him by his hand because He wanted Peter to feel His love, to sense His love, to know how near He was and how compassionate He is.’ It’s clear from the passage in Luke and in Matthew that fear is sin and doubt and Jesus says both times, ‘Don’t do it, stop it, do not fear.’ How are you doing in obeying that command? Notice that it is a command and not a suggestion. And this is for everybody. Now let’s look at Luke 22.

Before we look at Luke 22, Romans 14:23 says [23] *But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.* Technically if you dig down on anything in your life, however common however obscure, there will be some form of doubt underneath it. We don’t typically articulate those fears or doubts out loud and that doesn’t mean they’re not there stewing in the subterranean basement of our heart. Now let’s look at the night of Jesus’ betrayal in Luke 22.

Luke 22:31–32 says [31] *“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, [32] but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”* Jesus warns Peter. It’s almost like Jesus is reminding Peter about the book of Job and how Satan went before God saying he wanted a shot at Job because he thinks he can mess up Job’s faith. God gave him a couple of shots, pretty big, bad, hard shots. Jesus says that Satan is asking for Peter in the exact same way. Satan wants to terrorize Peter’s life.

Peter responds in Luke 22:33 saying [33] *Peter said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.”* Basically Peter is saying thanks for the warning but I don’t need it, perhaps You should give it to these other guys for I’ve had questions about them since day one. You have no concerns with me Lord for I’ll die with you. Let’s see how this works out for good ole Peter.

Luke 22:56–60 says [56] *Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, “This man also was with him.” [57] But he denied it, saying, “Woman, I do not know him.” [58] And a little later someone else saw him and said, “You also are one of them.” But Peter said, “Man, I am not.” [59] And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, “Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean.” [60] But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about.” And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed.*

Now this passage doesn’t use the word fear or afraid but it’s obvious that Peter was afraid people would know who he was. His Lord and Savior had been arrested on trumped up charges, He’s not fighting back, and if they arrest Peter he will probably be in the same situation as He is. He is terrified – fear. We have seen that fear is sin, fear is doubt and thirdly fear is a tactic of

Satan. Jesus tells Peter that Satan has asked to sift him like wheat and here comes the sifting. What was the tool Satan used to sift Peter like wheat? It is fear.

I think most of us tend to think of fear like a white collar domesticated sin as if it's not that big of a deal or not that bad. If you show up to your accountability group and say 'I didn't really struggle with anything big this week but perhaps a little bit of fear' then you'll probably be looked at like a hero. If when you're praying when you come to church to confess your sin and all you think of is fear then you probably think you're a hero. Fear is a root form of sin that can lead to the worst types of sin.

What did fear lead to in Peter's life? It led to an outright denial of the Lord Jesus Christ where he said 'I don't even know Him.' Doesn't get any worse than that when Jesus is actually standing where He can hear Peter say that. Jesus is in one of His greatest moments of weakness and need and only hours earlier He was asking Peter to stay awake and pray with Him. Now Peter is denying that He even knows Him. Fear is a terrible sin so don't take it lightly.

This has been a tactic of Satan's literally since day one, all the way back to the Garden of Eden. Genesis 3:1-6 says *[1] Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" [2] And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, [3] but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" [4] But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. [5] For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." [6] So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.*

Satan is convincing Adam and Eve not to listen to God, telling them He is not trustworthy. Satan is basically telling Adam and Eve they can do whatever they want because God isn't really going to let them die if they eat of that one tree He told them not. Satan is also telling them that they can't really trust God's goodness because He is not really out to bless them but to burden them, for He's trying to keep you down. Satan tells them to break some rules and go their own way in order for them to really get the best things in life. That's when they bought the lie and bit the fruit and ruined the universe for all of us.

I want to look back in Peter's life through these three incidences because it's the same lies coming into his mind and heart as is coming into ours. In the Luke 22 incident when He tells Peter Satan wants to sift him like wheat, He is giving him an exhortation and warning as to what to do after he is restored. With Peter's action and in so many words, he was basically saying he didn't trust God's wisdom or omniscience. Peter didn't really believe Him and thought he knew better what would happen.

Think about the Matthew 14 passage where Peter is walking on water and then cries out in terror, why? It was because at some level Peter began to doubt the power of Jesus. Can Jesus really save me when I'm about to drown? He began to doubt at the heart level.

Now think about the Luke 5 passage. What is Peter doubting in Luke 5? Why is that the sinful kind of fear and not the righteous kind of fear? He realized Christ was holy and he was sinful and Peter's response was 'get away from Lord.' Peter believed in the holiness of Christ in that moment but what he didn't believe in was the love of Christ, the goodness of Christ. If we really understand the love and goodness of Christ and we're His children we never say to Him 'get away from me.'

The proper kind of fear of the Lord is an awe, an amazement and an astonishment. Yes it is holiness, righteousness but it's also love. It is the two of those things coming together and we both of those things together and it puts us in a place of awe and wonder but we don't want to run away, we want to run to Him. We want Him to run to us. That's the fear of the Lord. Psalm 130:4 says *[4] But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.* The fear of the Lord is when you see His mercy and you want to worship.

What thing do you tend to fear the most? For a lot of Americans our knee jerk reaction is to say 'I'm not afraid of anything.' It's almost part of our national identity, especially if you're the generation who was raised on Clint Eastwood and John Wayne where the idea is 'I'm not scared of anything.' Fear has two cousins – worry and obsession. Let me give you an example of these.

Have you ever said to someone 'You seem angry' and they respond 'I'm not angry, I'm frustrated.' Frustration is just baby anger, domesticated anger, anger in seed form. It's anger that you feel more open to talk about because it's not as bad. Well, worry and obsession are just fear in seed form. Where do you tend to worry the most or get obsessed with the things of life the most?

Here's a little bit of homework I'll give you that will be just between you and the Lord. Try to have some honest time with the Lord and ask yourself 'what's the main thing I fear in life or worry about the most or tend to get obsessed about?' If you think you really don't know then ask your spouse, best friend or roommate. We all have blind spots in our lives and those closest to us or around us the most are generally not blind to our blind spots. They usually feel like they are getting hit in the face with our blind spots. When you do ask them, this is the hard part, be quiet and listen to what they have to say.

John Calvin said 'The fear of God could have protected Peter.' Edmund Clowney said 'A praising heart is immune to the fear of other people.' If Peter in his heart would have been consumed with the attitude of worship – Christ is holy, Christ is all powerful, Christ is all knowing, Christ is all loving to me – he wouldn't have fallen and given into fear but we get our eyes off Christ and onto the circumstances and quickly fall in a matter of seconds.

I'd like to look at one more passage in this study in Psalm 34. I think that Psalm 34 was an important passage in Peter's life because in I Peter, Psalm 34 is the Old Testament passage that Peter quotes the most. He quotes it at least twice and there might be several other times he refers to it. The longest quote in I Peter is from Psalm 34 and he specifically uses it when he is exhorting the believers not to be afraid of the coming persecution and to give them some ballast for their soul.

In this little bit of homework I'm suggesting spend enough time about the main fear and worry in your life and then spend some time reading Psalm 34 asking the Lord to give you one verse or phrase you could use on yourself to personally preach the Gospel to yourself, to personally remind yourself of truth and the glory of Christ and how He does have all wisdom, power, goodness and love for you, if you're one of His children. This should eradicate the fear. Let's say you tend to worry about the future and you don't like your job so you're looking for a new one and you don't know if you'll ever find one. Perhaps you're worried about money or retirement.

Let's look at Psalm 34:4–22 which says *[4] I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. [5] Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed. [6] This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him and saved him out of all his troubles. [7] The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.*

[8] Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! [9] Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack! [10] The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

[11] Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. [12] What man is there who desires life and loves many days, that he may see good? [13] Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. [14] Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

[15] The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry. [16] The face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth. [17] When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. [18] The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

[19] Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all. [20] He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken. [21] Affliction will slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned. [22] The LORD redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

Perhaps at the earthly level you feel like you're overwhelmed with all these problems. How am I going to get out? You pray. God You have all wisdom to change situations. You know the future. I'm not going to look at the circumstances. I'm going to look at Your wisdom. Let's say you tend to struggle with more sins in the flesh – sexual sins, gluttony, drinking – under most of those sins if you dig deep enough there is a type of fear. The millennials call it FOMO – fear of missing out. There might be some fun out there in the world that I'm going to miss out so I'll break some of God's laws because I'm so desperate to have fun with my friends.

We see how God answers that in Psalm 34:8–9. If you're One of his you have everything that is best for you right now. If there is some good thing that you want that you think is better for you, you just have to trust that God is more wise, more good and He has given you just what you need, nothing more nothing less. There is real faith.

Maybe there are people in your life that are trying to hurt you. Perhaps a boss is trying to hurt you or cause you pain. Maybe you have a physical ailment and wonder if there will ever be any relief in this life. Maybe you have a loved one suffering and you're beginning to doubt the power of God to really make changes. Psalm 34:15–18 addresses this.

Some of you are probably thinking you have lived a long enough or hard enough life to know that real, godly, mature Christians suffer terribly in this life where things don't always get better but do get worse. One of the reasons I love the Bible is because it's real. It's honest and it gets into the nitty gritty and the weeds with us. It's not a fairy tale or some cute, encouraging statements. It goes to the deepest, darkest places with us and still encourages us.

Look at Psalm 34:19–22. It may get worse in this life but if you're in Christ it gets a lot better in the next one. None of us are going to get to heaven and looked at the way God mapped out our life and say 'I guess it worked out ok God but there could have been a better way.' Every one of us when we get there will be dumbfounded, struck with awe and the fear of the Lord at how good, perfect and wise His plan was for us in every single way. Even the pain you are having now that you cannot fathom you will understand when you get to heaven.

Some maybe thinking that Psalm 34:20 which says *[20] He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken*, is not technically true. I know Christians that have broken bones. I have had broken bones. That is not a promise made but a prophecy of the Lord Jesus Christ. When He came to live the perfect life that all of us are supposed to live but can't live, and hung on the cross to die as He was experiencing the wrath and anger of God that was due us that in that

moment none of His bones were broken. God planned it that way. Part of the reason for that is to say that even literally when Someone was going through hell on earth that's how wise, powerful and good God is for even in that moment He can preserve them so that not even one of their bones get broken if He didn't want it to. That's how meticulous, involved and near unto to the broken hearted our God is.

The only one hundred percent promise we have in life is if you take refuge in Him you will never be ashamed or condemned because Christ already took that condemnation for us. You will never be cast out ultimately from His presence. You will never be cut off ultimately from His goodness because Christ was cast out and cut off in our place.

I will close with this. If you don't think you have time to meditate on Psalm 34 then I would ask that you spend a few minutes thinking about the cross because nowhere else in all Scripture or history will the love, goodness, power and the wisdom of God be clearly manifested and if God did it in that moment He certainly can do it in whatever you're going through in life right now. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus we do love You. We don't love You as much as we should but we want to love You more. Would You use Your Word, Your Spirit, Your people to stir up the affections of our hearts to not be bored with Scripture or the things of You. Make us more passionate about You and Your Word than we are about anything else in life so that when life is hard or seems overwhelming or seems to terrorize us, may it in one sense be almost easy to keep our mind and our eyes fixated on You because we are so deeply tasting and seeing that You are good and You are near to the brokenhearted. We pray this all in the name of Christ, Amen.

Power Point

I. Luke 5:8-10

II. Matthew 14:26-31

III. Luke 22:31-32, 56-60

APPLICATION—Genesis 3:1-6

CONCLUSION—Psalm 34:4-22