

What is Salvation?

Sermon 6– Healing of our Anxiety and Fear

Passages: Psalm 37:1–11

Romans 10:5–17

Matthew 14:22–33

The Bible talks a lot about salvation. In fact, it tells us that we all need to be ‘saved’. And it tells us that there is only one name given under heaven by which we can be saved...the name of Jesus. He is ‘our Saviour’!

But what does He save us from? What is the object of His salvation?

Most of us tend to think of salvation as something in the future. We speak of Jesus one day saving us from hell, from God’s wrath and judgment. Salvation is about ‘getting into heaven when we die’. But what about ‘now’? Isn’t there anything that Jesus saves us from in the present?

It’s interesting, when you start examining the NT Scriptures, just how much the Biblical focus of salvation involves the present! This is borne out by the fact that the Greek word for ‘salvation’ (sozo) is the exact same word used for healing! In the ancient mind, salvation and healing were strongly connected to each other. And so, **the early church was not only aware** that Jesus would perfectly heal them from the brokenness of sin when they were finally with Him in heaven; **they also knew** that, even now, Christ’s salvation was working in them, healing them from the brokenness of sin in their present life.

That’s why we are currently undertaking a series of sermons entitled, “**What is salvation?**” I want to show you how much Jesus’ salvation is meant to be worked out and experienced in the present.

Today, we are going to look at the present work of God in the salvation (or healing) of our **anxiety and fear**.

Let's pray.

There's an immediate problem whenever Christians talk about fear and anxiety. You see, some Christians will tell you that fear is a sin. They will quote from 1 John 4 which says, "**Perfect love casts out fear**".

But let's be realistic. Not only is that a mis-translation of that verse, it also takes no account of the fact that, when God created us, He gave us the natural instinct called **fear**. We were designed by God to fear the things that pose a threat to our security, our health, and the well-being of us and our family.

Last Tuesday, a man wearing a balaclava broke into a home in Mossman, took a young teenage girl hostage and attached a bomb to her neck. Tell me— Was it a sin for her to be afraid? Was it a sin for those who were trying to rescue her to be afraid? If you talked to the policewoman who sat with the teenager for three hours whether or not she was ever afraid for her own life, I'm sure she would have said 'yes', despite her bravery! Was her fear a sin? Of course not! Fear is a God-given gift. This 'fight of flight' instinct is for our self-protection, and must not ever be labelled as evil.

You know, when you **Google** the words "Christians" and "Fear" some of the first articles you come up with are about Christians who live as a persecuted minority in countries like Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Pakistan and Nigeria.

Syria's Christians fear for their religious freedom (MAY 18, 2011)

Syria's minority Christians are watching the protests sweeping their country with trepidation, **fearing** that their religious freedom could be threatened if President Bashar al-Assad's autocratic but secular rule is overthrown... For many Syrian Christians, the flight of their brethren from sectarian conflict in neighbouring Iraq and recent attacks on Christians in Egypt have highlighted the dangers they fear they will face if Assad succumbs to the wave of uprisings sweeping the Arab world.

IRAQI CHRISTIANS FEAR FOR MISSING PASTOR (7/26/2011)

Iraqi Christians fear for the safety of a house church leader who has been kidnapped – apparently because he has led Muslims to Christ...The Voice of the Martyrs (VOM) Australia reports that one of the people whom Pastor Jamal has led to Christ had his home sprayed with machine-gun fire a few weeks ago.

Nigeria: Christians Fear Attack (July 28, 2011)

Many Christians have fled the city of Maiduguri in northern Nigeria, fearing large-scale attacks by Islamic extremists after months of escalating violence. In the past few weeks, church attendance has dropped drastically and police have boarded up many churches and placed them under police or military guard, according to Compass Direct News.

Now, tell me—is it right for these Christians to be afraid? Of course!

Fear is a God-given gift! That is, unless it grips you in ways that immobilise you from living as you were intended by God to live. You see, there's a fine line between 'good fear' and 'bad fear'.

Good fear, for example, includes things like the natural fears of heights, or a fear of drowning, or a fear of predators in dark alleys. Good fear leads us to install alarms on our houses and to carry a mobile phone when we go into the city at night. Good fear makes us a bit more cautious. (Every time that I go off to play soccer on Saturday afternoons, my wife always says, "Be careful—don't get hurt!" I think that's a good fear...even though I really can't control what the other players on the pitch do to me.)

Bad fear, on the other hand, is when our 'good fears' get exaggerated... blown out of proportion to reality... and begin to take us over—they immobilise us. We call these fears '**phobias**':

Ablutophobia– Fear of washing or bathing.

Acarophobia– Fear of itching.

Achluophobia– Fear of darkness.

Acousticophobia– Fear of noise.
Acrophobia– Fear of heights.
Aerophobia– Fear of airbourne noxious substances.
Agateophobia– Fear of insanity.
Agliophobia– Fear of pain.
Agoraphobia– Fear of open spaces
Agraphobia– Fear of sexual abuse.
Agrizoophobia– Fear of wild animals.
Agyrophobia– Fear of streets or crossing the street.
Aichmophobia– Fear of needles or pointed objects.
Ailurophobia– Fear of cats.
Anablephobia– Fear of looking up.

Do you realise that there are around 530 phobias listed (alphabetically) in the ‘phobia-list’ website? As I said, phobias start as ‘good fears’...but they turn into bad fears when they begin to control our lives.

Back in November of 1932, Franklin Delanor Roosevelt became the 32nd President of the United States. His Inaugural Address was given the following year, on March 4, 1933, at a time when the depression had reached its depth. His speech outlined in broad terms how he hoped to govern and reminded Americans that the nation’s “common difficulties” concerned “only material things.”

“I am certain that my fellow Americans expect that on my induction into the Presidency I will address them with a candor and a decision which the present situation of our people impel. This is preeminently the time to speak the truth, the whole truth, frankly and boldly. Nor need we shrink from honestly facing conditions in our country today. This great Nation will endure as it has endured, will revive and will prosper. So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that **the only thing we have to fear is fear itself**—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.”

This fear that Roosevelt was talking about is called **peniaphobia**—the fear of Poverty. So, how was Roosevelt going to cure this phobia working overtime in the minds of so many Americans?

Through a concerted campaign of positive thinking! You see, phobias (unlike genuine fear) are the product of an over active imagination. Our thoughts have gone beyond the rational level of fear, to a place of exaggerated fear, or phobia. Roosevelt saw his main task as President was to restore confidence in America by doing two things:

1. He looked back at the history of America— how hard work and thrift made America a prosperous nation.
2. He looked at the present fears and debunked them— he proved that they were based on false assumptions and irrational thoughts.

With that in mind, let's reflect on the story from Matthew 14, entitled "**Jesus Walks on Water**". Tell me, what is this story really about? It's not just another 'party trick' that Jesus does to impress His disciples. The story is essentially a lesson in faith. Jesus wanted his disciples to look at Him walking across the lake and do two things:

1. They were to remember the past—They were meant to be encouraged by recalling how he fed the 5000, cast out demons, healed the sick, etc...
2. Thoughts of His faithfulness in the past were then meant to debunk their present fears. If you remember, it was the 4th watch of the night (between 3 and 6am) —it was dark, and they were cold and tired. As He walked to them on the water, the disciples were meant to realise that He was there as their faithful Saviour and friend, and that nothing was going to separate from God's love.

But, you know, this lesson in faith went 'pear-shaped'. In the disciples minds, all they could see was the menacing figure of a ghost coming across the waves—someone to haunt them, not to

help them. Their minds went beyond rational fear by latching onto this very ancient phobia, called **Spectrophobia** – the fear of ghosts. (Note: This will not be the last time they exhibit this phobia! It will attack them again on the day of Jesus’ resurrection.)

Now, Jesus’ response is instructive. (Verse 27) ***“But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”*** The Greek word Jesus uses here is ‘phobeisei’ -- from the Greek word ‘phobos’ (from which we get the English word ‘phobia’). What Jesus is doing, here, is cutting through their phobia of ghosts by using **truth**—the truth of who He is and the truth that He really is with them.

This is so important: Faith in Jesus (faith in His relationship with God and His unbreakable promise to always be with us) has the power to reduce our phobias back to the level of normal, rational fear. And once they become ‘normal fears’ again, our minds can rationally work through the implications of what we are experiencing and we can overcome them to willingly follow Jesus. When you understand this part of the story, then the rest of it makes a lot more sense. In verse 28, Peter says, ***“Lord, if it’s you, tell me to come to you on the water.”*** Peter was simply testing this theory that faith can reduce our phobias into rational fears...fears that can, then, be overcome by the will. So, when Jesus said to Peter, **“Come,”** the text tells us that **“Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.”** Now, surely, Peter still had fear—I can only imagine that his heart was pounding as he took those first steps. After all, each step was still a step of the will. He still had to decide to move his feet forward. And yet, each step was encouraged by faith in the One to whom he was walking!

In 1988, we took our three little children back to Africa with us. (Andrew was 6, Christina was 4 and Steph was 3.) A lot of people said things to us before we went; like, “Aren’t you worried? Don’t

you fear what might happen to your children?” As more and more people said these things, I started to wonder—Were we being bad parents? Were we insensitive to their needs? I guess, if we had worried about it too long, we could have developed **‘decidophobia’**-- fear of making a decision. But, in the end, we went. Why? Simply because we knew that Jesus was calling us, and that He would go with us. Of course, we still went with a certain degree of fear—all the natural fears that normal parents have. But because we also had faith in Jesus, **these genuine fears never became phobias**. That meant that we were able to manage them through prayer, regular medical checkups, rational decisions about where our kids went to school and who they hung out with—all the same rational decisions that any parent will make concerning their children.

Now, notice what happens next in the story from Matthew 14:
Mt 14:30-31 **But when (Peter) saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!” Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?”**

When Peter looks away from Jesus, all his normal (God-given) fears become exaggerated in his mind once again. He freezes; he panics; he sinks; he cries out for salvation. Fear has turned to phobia.

It happens to us all, doesn’t it?

Wordsworth got it right when he penned this little ditty:

"What are fears but voices airy?
 Whispering harm where harm is not.
 And deluding the unwary
 Till the fatal bolt is shot!"

Friends, there are around 530 phobias. Faith in Jesus Christ has the power to take those phobias and reduce them back to normal, manageable fears.

As we read in Romans 10, **“Anyone who trusts in Him will never be put to shame.” ...and ... “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”**

One last verse is worth mentioning here: In the beginning of this sermon I said that some people misuse 1 John 4, telling us that it's a sin to fear. But that's not what the verse actually says. In the Greek, it goes, **“There is no phobos in love. But perfect love casts out phobos!”** Of course, the perfect love that John is talking about here is the perfect love of Jesus seen in His death and resurrection. It is this perfect love of God for us that saves us...heals us... from the extreme fears that become phobias.

Jesus, the One who saves us from phobos and anxiety.

Let's pray.